“We are just normal women” Narratives of far-right women members of the AfD and FPÖ

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December 2022

Abstract

Over the last two decades, far-right parties have gained more influence in Europe and routinely disregard and/or misuse gender equality for a racist agenda. From a feminist viewpoint, it seems illogical that a diverse range of women support these parties. I shed light on women's active support for the far-right parties *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ). My main aim is to explore how women narrate their support/membership of the far right in Austria and Germany. My work is socially and politically motivated because the AfD and FPÖ present a major obstacle to antiracism and feminism. I address my topic with three research questions: How do women narrate their paths to active support/membership in both parties? What are far-right women's narratives about feminism/gender? How do far-right women make sense of their roles and spaces in what are male-dominated parties? In analysing narratives of active women members my research addresses a scholarly lacunae. So far, research on women in the far right in Austria and Germany mainly draws attention to individual women leaders and to anti-gender/antifeminist ideologies. I conducted 25 interviews with women members (local members/career politicians) and collected data from social media accounts (career politicians). Using narrative research, I investigate how participants construct their understandings of their party membership. I discovered a diversity of individual membership stories. My outcomes show that women's participation in the far right is not illogical but part of the parties' success. Far-right women are not acting against their interests because the far right is not against *all* women. Most participants presented themselves as 'normal' women following their common sense. Finally, using Puwar's (2004) concept of 'space invaders', I illustrate that because women are not the norm in these parties, they are required to navigate different roles to fit into male-dominated spaces.

Key words: far-right women, AfD, FPÖ, research with 'unloved groups', (anti)feminism, anti-gender, 'common sense', postfeminism, 'space invaders'

Table of contents

Abstract 1
Acknowledgements 5
Author's declaration 6
List of abbreviations 7
Incomplete translations 9
Introduction 12
Why am I researching far-right women's narratives? 12
The far right (parties) in Austria and Germany 16
The emergence of the FPÖ and AfD 18
The FPÖ and AfD's negative impact on gender equality 21
Structure of the thesis 23
Chapter 1: A wealth of literature: A missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle 27
The European (populist and extremist) right 28
Introducing the overused puzzle piece: Defining the far right 28
Racism: An integral part of the far right 33
Accounting for the success of the AfD and FPÖ 35
The far right and its discourse on gender and (anti)feminism 41
Opposition to gender: The 'ideal' topic for the far right 42
Getting to grips with terms: Antifeminism versus antigenderism 46
Femonationalism and 'sexual exceptionalism' 50
The final jigsaw pieces: Research about far-right women 53
The paradox? Men's parties, but… 54
The origins of research on far-right women in Austria and Germany 57
Three approaches to research on far-right women 59
One missing jigsaw piece 68
Chapter 2: Researching an 'unloved group': Methodological and ethical considerations 69
Interviewing far-right women 70
Talking to the far right as a feminist 70
Learning from feminist research about 'unloved groups' 73
Interview journey 79
After the interviews: Transcription and translation 89
Social media research 92
Feminist narrative research and analysis 94
Narrative research 94
Analysing thematic narratives 97
Chapter 3: Paths to membership 100
Communication framework: Everyday 'common sense' 100
'Othering' perpetrators of sexual violence 105

Taking the red pill 111
Turning points 112
From non-involvement to involvement 116
Something went wrong: Other cultures and communism 118
No need for the red pill? The stable self 120
The urge to act 121
The deprivation of agency: “I cannot just stay in the living room” 122
Self-sacrifices 124
(Beyond) the urge to act: Acting in a community 126
Motherhood and the future of ‘our’ children 128
Conclusion 133
Chapter 4: ‘Equality is the only reason I am politically active.’ Narratives about gender and feminism(s) 136
Situating the narratives about gender and feminism 136
Feminist approaches to postfeminism 136
A brief elaboration of feminisms in Austria and Germany 138
Women’s individualisation: Strong women and their choice(s) 142
Individual experiences: ‘I have never been disadvantaged’ 142
Fostering individual strength 146
‘I am not a quota woman’ 151
Freedom-of-choice: ‘Modern’ and ‘traditional’ narratives 153
‘Feminism is going too far’ 159
Women are already equal: “Let the things develop in their normal course” 159
Beyond postfeminism: ‘Gender madness’ versus ‘common sense’ 163
A narrative of superiority: The threat of ‘others’ 172
Conclusion 177
Chapter 5: Many spaces and roles for ‘normal’ women in the parties 180
Far-right women as ‘space invaders’ 181
“All spaces are open to us except the men’s toilet.” 182
‘Access to space is equal’ 184
“Space invaders” in male-dominated spaces 188
“We have a very important role”: Women’s different roles in the parties 197
The nurturer: Mediators and caring women/mothers 198
The dutiful and hardworking woman 201
The Vorzeigefrau 204
The (masculine/unmarked) politician 208
Conclusion 212
Conclusion 214
Contributions to feminist research on far-right women 215

Far-right women's stories 215
Overarching findings 218
Methodological approach 222
Limitations of this research 225
Final thoughts and notes on counterstrategies 226
Appendix 1: Information sheet 229
Appendix 2: Consent form 233
Appendix 3: Interview guide 235
Appendix 4: Social media profiles 237
Reference list 239
Sources 263

Acknowledgements

The support I received from friends and supervisors during my PhD has been crucial for the completion of this project. First, I wish to thank my supervisors Dr. Clare Bielby and Dr. Rachel Alsop for their continuous support, advice and encouragement during the last three years. Their comments and insights have played an important role in shaping this thesis. I am grateful that the Centre for Women's Studies (CWS) offered me a feminist community/home in a time where people were only able to meet online, and we all had to 'cope' with a global pandemic while continuing our in part strenuous PhD work. I am deeply grateful to all my friends at CWS. Jaye Cook and Dr. Lauren Cowling have been there for me throughout my PhD and have offered friendship and academic support. The online writing retreats we had every day during lockdowns and weekly PhD exchange meetings helped me to stay focused and our joined love for bouldering supported me to refresh my energy through our morning climbing sessions. I want to thank Xiao Ge and Sanna Eriksson, with whom I shared the office space and friendship. Your presence and compassion have been invaluable to me. I am also grateful to Dr. Kai Tsao and Aurèlia Puigdomènech, who showed me what 'Sisterhood in Action' means. I finally wish to thank my partner Matthew, who has been there for me during all of my PhD time and who shared all the difficult moments but also excitement with me. Thank you all!

Author’s declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

List of abbreviations

AfD – *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany)

CDU – *Christliche Demokratische Union* (Christian Democratic Union of Germany)

CSU – *Christlich Soziale Union* (Christian Social Union)

CWS – Centre for Women's Studies

EIGE – European Institute for Gender Equality

EU – European Union

FAZ – *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (a German newspaper)

FIPU – *Forschungsgruppe Ideologien und Politiken der Ungleichheit* (research group ideologies and politics of inequality)

FPÖ – *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Freedom Party for Austria)

FN – *Front National* (National Front) now: RN

FRE – Far-right extremist

FRG – Federal Republic of Germany

FridA – *Frauen in der Alternative e.V.* (Women in the Alternative)

GDR – German Democratic Republic

IFF – *Initiative Freiheitliche Frauen* (Initiative of FPÖ women)

JA – *Junge Alternative* (Young Alternative)

LGBTQI* – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, * = people of other genders and sexual identities

LN – Lega Nord

NF – National Front (UK)

NPD – *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (National Democratic Party of Germany)

NSDAP – *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (Nazi Party)

NSU - *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (National Socialist Underground)

ÖVP – *Österreichische Volkspartei* (Austrian People's Party)

Pegida – *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident)

REP – *Die Republikaner* (The Republicans)

RN – *Rassemblement National* (National Rally) former: FN

SD – *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats)

SPD – *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany)

SS – *Schutzstaffel* (Protection Squadron)

TA – Thematic analysis

UKIP – United Kingdom Independence Party

UN – United Nations

US – United States

VdU – *Verband der Unabhängigen* (Association of Independents)

Incomplete[1] translations

Alltagswissen – everyday knowledge

Antigenderismus – antigenderism

Aufschrei – outcry

Ausnahmslos – without exceptions

Binnen-I - the *binnen-I* is an instrument to include women and men into the written language instead of having the male form as default.

Bunte – direct translation: colourful / context: diverse

Burschenschaften – student fraternities

Demografiedebatte – a debate about demographic change in Germany

Demokratische Grundordnung – democratic order

Deutscher Bundestag – German federal parliament

Emanze – 'women's libber'

Erfahrungsraum – spaces of experiences

Falsch verstandener Feminismus – 'misguided feminism' (AfD framing)

Forschungsnetzwerk Frauen und Rechtsextremismus – research network women and right-wing extremism

FrauenLesben – women/lesbian

Frauenpolitik – women's politics or women's policies

Fremdkörper – 'foreign body'

Friedfertig – pacifistic/peaceful

Gebährunwillig – unwilling to give birth

Gelebte Gleichberechtigung – lived equality

Geschlecht – gender or sex

Geschlechterkampf - the battle between the sexes

Gesunder Menschenverstand – common sense

Gleichartigkeit – sameness or of the same kind

Gleichmacherei – turning everyone into the same

Gleichwertig aber nicht gleichartig – 'of the same value but not the same kind'

Heimat – home or homeland

Historikerinnenstreit – women historian's quarerel

[1] Some of the German words used do not have one English translation, I discuss translation in Chapter 2.

Hofiert – courted

Homo-Ehe – demeaning word for gay marriage

Irre – mad

Irrweg – false track

Kampffeministinnen – demeaning word for fighting-feminists

Kanaken – demeaning word for migrants

Kauffrau – businesswoman

Kranke Blüten der Emanzipation – direct translation: ‘sick blossoms’ of emancipation

Linke Utopien – ‘left-wing utopias’

Mädel – girl (sometimes used to patronise women)

Männerparteien – men’s parties

Migrationsgeschichte – migration history

Mitmacher – active participant

Mut zur eigenen Weiblichkeit – ‘courage to your own femininity’

Mut zur Wahrheit – ‘courage to truth’

Neue F-Klasse – a new avant-garde of successful women

Neue Frauenbewegung – new women’s movement

Opfermythos – victim myth

Parteimutti – political party mother

Pervertiert – perverted

Pflichtbewusst – dutiful

Politikverdrossen – politically disenchanted

Professorenpartei – party of professors

Raum – space

Schärfe – sharpness

Schützenfest – traditional festival of the shooting club

Stammtisch – there is no accurate English translation for *Stammtisch*, the word refers to meeting regularly in the pub with the same people.

Südländisch – Mediterranean

Tiefster Orient – ‘deepest orient’

Triebkräfte – seductive driving forces

Unternehmerin – businesswoman

Verbotskultur – culture of prohibition or ‘cancel culture’

Verdachtsfall – direct translation: suspected case / context: suspected case of right-wing extremism

Verständnis – (in context:) To have empathy for or agree with someone’s views

Verstehen – (in context:) To understand someone’s views

Vogelschiss – ‘bird shit’

Volk – people

Völkisch – the word völkisch was part of the National Socialist racist ideology, in which the people of a nation supposedly belong to a race and the German nation was propagated as superior

Volksgemeinschaft – national community

Vorzeigefrau – token woman

Wahlfreiheit – freedom of choice

Wehrmacht – German armed forces between 1935-45

Zwang – coercion

Introduction

Why am I researching far-right women's narratives?

> Imagine this: A world where […] we are liberated from the gender binary's strangling grip and the demands it places on our bodies […]. [A world where] no person has to navigate sexism, racism, disablism or homophobia to survive. […] Now imagine this vision not as utopian, but as something well within our reach. (Olufemi, 2020, pp.8-9)

My thesis is about Austrian and German far-right women's narratives of their membership in the parties *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternative for Germany) and *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ, Freedom Party of Austria) and includes many views and stories I strongly oppose. I therefore decided to start on a hopeful note and chose an extract from the vision of Black feminist writer Lola Olufemi,[2] as it encapsulates my own vision for the future. This vision can only be achieved with a feminism, which does not promise 'easy answers' but requires hard work, for example engaging with our faults and oversights (p.142). While I have to believe that this vision is possible, I also know that there are many forces in the world which work hard to prevent it from becoming reality. Far-right parties and their supporters are part of those forces.[3] This is what brought me to my research project: I decided that I need to understand those far-right parties that have gained increasing support in many European countries in the last two decades. During that time Europe's political landscape has been subject to profound changes that include increasing racism and the questioning of past achievements towards gender equality. Especially with regard to the latter, two contradictory lines of argumentation can be observed on the part of far-right parties. On the one hand, they use essentialist ideas about gender and encourage a return to conventional gender roles, which includes women's 'natural' role as mothers (Mayer et al., 2014, pp.255-258). On the other hand, they instrumentalise women's rights and gender equality in a discourse against immigrants, whereby the Muslim 'other' is depicted as allegedly endangering the 'modern' values of European societies (Akkerman, 2015; Farris, 2017).

I grew up in Germany in the 1990s and early 2000s and while far-right groups and ideologies were never absent from Germany, far-right parties remained marginal. It was only in 2013 that the AfD was founded and managed to successfully establish itself at the

[2] The first time I refer to authors I will use their full names, and then only their surnames.
[3] For readability reasons, I use the term 'far right' to refer to the parties in this thesis. I will discuss in Chapter 1 that the term includes a right-wing populist and extremist spectrum.

far right of the German political spectrum. With an election result of 12.6 percent in the 2017 federal election, the party became the biggest opposition party in the German *Bundestag* (Federal Parliament) (2017-2021), which was led by the conservative *Christliche Demokratische Union* (CDU, Christian Democratic Union of Germany), its Bavarian equivalent the *Christlich Soziale Union* (CSU, Christian Social Union) and the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD, Social Democratic Party of Germany).[4] In 2021, the AfD then re-entered the newly elected parliament with 10.3 percent of votes. While the AfD is a latecomer on the European landscape of far-right parties, the FPÖ is a long-established far-right party (founded in 1956) and is often characterised as a pioneer of the European far right due to its longer history, electoral successes and government participation in the periods 1983-1987, 2000-2007 and 2017-2019 (Sauer and Ajanovic, 2016; Ajanovic et al., 2015, p.76). Scholars studying the far right argue that the AfD has been learning a great deal from the FPÖ and maintaining that there is significant overlap in their discourses (including nationalism, racism, sexism, homo- and transphobia) and actions (for example, Gritschmeier, 2021; Grigat, 2017).

The founding of the AfD prompted me to question myself (my faults and oversights) and my engagement (or, more honestly, non-engagement) in feminist and anti-racist politics in Germany. My inactivity in the context of pre-existing far-right attitudes in Germany prior to the AfD shocked me and was only possible because I have the privileges of being a white heterosexual cis[5] woman and therefore experience less discrimination than, for instance, trans women or women of colour (Feinberg, 2006). With this in mind, I started to explore ideas of how to address my fear of the far right's increasing support and the racism and sexism that this support has brought further to the forefront. Since I see the world through a feminist lens, I started to read about the far right's antifeminism and sexism as well as its entanglement with racism (for example, Hark and Villa, 2017), which raised questions about women's support for those parties.[6] The AfD and FPÖ are both dominated by men, but women occupy certain leadership positions, like Alice Weidel (current co-leader of the AfD) and Marlene Svazek (leader

[4] Historically the CDU/CSU and SPD have been the largest parties in most state and federal elections since 1949. A government coalition between both parties is therefore called grand coalition.

[5] 'Cis' is shorthand for cisgendered. It means that I identify with the gender I was assigned at birth.

[6] By using 'women' as shorthand for my thesis/doctoral purposes, I am not intending to gloss over the further complications of this terminology, but do not have the physical space/word count to demonstrate my wider engagement with this more fully at this time. My research most likely only included cis women as they all agreed with the parties' narratives on gender, which are based on essentialist ideas about binary genders.

of the FPÖ in Salzburg). Furthermore, in 2019, 17.8 percent of all AfD members were women (Statista, 2022).

While women are not inherently more peaceful than men and many studies show that a similar percentage of women have far-right (especially racist) attitudes (for example, Rommelspacher, 2011, p.44), I was baffled that women would support parties which are sexist and antifeminist. From a feminist standpoint, it seemed illogical that women would support parties like the AfD and FPÖ, which strive to limit their freedom (Elies and Gutsche, 2018, p.8). However, as I dived further into the topic it became clear that, as Juliane Lang (2017) argues, the participation of women in far-right parties is not a clear-cut contradiction but part of those parties' success. Women tend to be perceived by the dominant public view as peaceful and therefore radical women often stay invisible. The AfD and FPÖ can therefore argue that they cannot be far-right, misogynist parties if they are supported by women (pp.72-74).

After the election success of the AfD in 2017, I quickly realised that I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the far right and women's support of it; the obvious solution seemed to be to return to university and pursue a PhD. Early on I selected the AfD and FPÖ as the parties of my interest, due to being German, the AfD's negative impact on Germany's political landscape and the FPÖ's long history in Austria as well as its influence on the AfD. I knew that conducting the PhD would not be an easy task, but I agree with Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power (2002), who state:

> Feminist scholars have preferred, understandably, to prioritize research on women, whose perspectives they share because these have been silenced. However, we feel that feminist projects will benefit from understanding right-wing women precisely because in many cases they constitute major obstacles to feminism. (p.1)

In this sense, my aim is socially and politically motivated, as I argue that the rise of far-right parties leads to a further strengthening of traditional gender roles and misogynistic policies which "constitute a major obstacle to feminism" (Bacchetta and Power, 2002, p.1). The AfD and FPÖ both depend on active women members in order to be perceived as more acceptable in the Austrian and German political landscape (for example, Sauer, 2020; Lang, 2017). However, academic studies on 'the right' have not tended to consider women (Köttig et al., 2017, p.2) or to depict them as family-oriented passive followers (as daughters or wives of active men), which has masked their actual active involvement

(Bitzan, 2017, p.68). While research on women and gender in the far right has increased significantly in the last few years (for example, Dietze, 2020; Köttig et al., 2017), researchers have barely engaged with the narratives of women members of the AfD and FPÖ.

My main aim is to explore how women narrate their active support of the AfD and FPÖ and how they negotiate their roles in party spaces which are dominated by men. For this purpose, I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with active women members of the AfD and FPÖ.[7] This included members at the local level with or without official positions as well as regional and national politicians. The vast majority of the women were not in higher leadership positions within the parties.

In this thesis, I have been inspired by two research projects: first, by the work of feminist researcher Kathleen Blee, who has conducted interview research with far-right women in organised racism in the US (2018; 1998; 1991, for example) and has been a pioneer in the field of feminist research on the far right. She argues that it is crucial to investigate why women participate in racist, misogynistic and antifeminist groups in order to work against their sensationalisation and how they are depicted as out of the ordinary (Blee, 2002b, p.113). Second, Diana Mulinari and Anders Neergaard (2014) research far-right women's narratives in the Swedish context and aim to explore those women's inspirations for supporting a racist party, providing a further great example of research on far-right women. Inspired by these scholars, I set out to find answers to the following questions:

1. How do women narrate their paths to active support of/membership in the AfD or FPÖ?
2. What are far-right women's narratives about feminism and gender?
3. How do far-right women make sense of their roles and spaces in what are male-dominated parties?

Before I discuss the structure of my thesis and my line of argument, I will provide a brief overview of the far right in Austria and Germany, the emergence of the FPÖ and the AfD, and those parties' discourses about gender and women's rights, setting the scene for my research project.

[7] One of my participants was not officially a member but a very active supporter.

The far right (parties) in Austria and Germany

The history of the FPÖ and AfD is embedded in the broader context of the far right in Austria and Germany after World War II.[8] For the context of my research, it is crucial to consider that Austrian, East German[9] and West German politicians and societies dealt in different ways with their Nazi past from the 1960s onwards (Art, 2006, p.5).[10] David Art argues that the divergent ways in which elites in Austria and Germany (East and West) addressed the Nazi past have led to different environments and chances for the far right. The difference between the states, he maintains, is remarkable considering that Germany and Austria are both the successor societies of the Third Reich. While the political far right has been exceptionally successful in Austria, it was unsuccessful in Germany for a long time (p.146) and until the establishment of the AfD in 2013.

It is crucial to mention that:

> Germany is the country with the highest historical responsibility for the crimes of the national-socialist era, including World War II, concentration camps and the murder of millions of Jews, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, political prisoners, so-called asocials and people from neighbouring countries. (Bitzan, 2017, pp.65-66)

Roughly starting with the West German student movement of the late 1960s and on into the 1970s, the West German left "identified remembrance of Nazism's atrocities as an enduring political duty for all Germans" (Art, 2006, p.51). Leftists began a process of significant ideological change and historical reappraisal in politics and society. Art argues that this led to political changes in the 1980s, when political elites started to include the remembrance and condemnation of Nazism's atrocities into their dominant discourses, which, for instance, led to the social condemnation of those who downplayed the historical guilt of Germany and those who used Nazi ideology. This process made it extremely difficult for the far right to establish itself as a political force as other political parties "discredit[ed], and marginalise[ed] the far right as soon as it emerged" (p.146). Far-right parties like the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD, National Democratic Party of Germany), founded in 1964 and *Die Republikaner* (REP, The

[8] Due to space constraints, I cannot discuss this history in-depth, and I am only able to provide a simplified account (for more details, see, for example, Reiter, 2019; Art, 2006).
[9] East Germany was governed by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) until reunification of Germany in 1990.
[10] Before the 1960s, all three states addressed their National Socialist past in very similar ways, presenting it as a historical aberration and portraying their own populations as victims of National Socialism. In Austria and West Germany former National Socialists were integrated into political institutions (Art, 2006, p.9).

Republicans), founded in 1983, had some regional successes in the 1980s and 1990s, but the average vote for the far right between 1986 and 2002 lay at 1.4 percent (p.7). Even though far-right parties were not successful prior to the AfD, "many nationalist, racist, and sexist positions were covered by the conservative CDU/CSU parties" (Belina, 2020, p.2). And as Renate Bitzan (2017) points out "through all the decades, there has been a more or less strong far-right movement including old nazis [sic] and young neo-fascists" (p.66).

Before German reunification in 1990, Western German capitalists were blamed by mainstream political discourse in the GDR for the crimes of the Nazis while the GDR depicted itself as victim of Nazism. Thus, there was a lack of historical remembrance about the atrocities of the Nazis and the involvement of East Germans in National Socialism. The authoritarian regime in the GDR presented itself as anti-capitalist and anti-fascist. However, neo-fascist activities and violent attacks did occur in the GDR although the state denied their existence (Bitzan, 2017, p.66). In some ways, the denial of neo-fascist activities alongside economic upheaval and unemployment created a more fertile environment for the far right in East Germany after German reunification (Art, 2006, p.198). According to Art, the post-reunification success of far-right parties like the NPD in the East German states of Brandenburg and Saxony in 2004, illustrates the divergent climate for the far right in former West and East Germany (p.200). In line with Jonas Rädel (2019), I do not claim that the far right is a specific East German problem, which is absent from West Germany (p.33). The denunciation of East Germans in this debate has to be avoided as it reproduces the marginalisation of East Germany after German reunification (p.38). Nevertheless, the different contexts need to be acknowledged. The AfD has indeed been more successful in former East Germany, but it should be noted that the AfD's roots (as well as those of the NPD and the REP) are in West Germany, where it was founded in 2013 (Yoder, 2020, p.53).

Additionally, far-right violence and the activity of right-wing extremist groups had already massively increased in both parts of Germany after German reunification (1990s). Lierke and Perinelli (2020) point out that a new wave of racist violence started after the unification of both German states, which was based on an extreme nationalism. Many far-right terrorist groups like the *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (NSU, National Socialist Underground), who murdered at least 10 people, were established. Simultaneously, German reunification provided the possibility for many Germans to

develop a renewed positive relationship with Germany, and a sense of German historical guilt moved somewhat into the background (pp.329-330).

For four decades after World War II, Austrian political elites created an *Opfermythos* (victim myth) and presented Austria as Hitler's first victim without being significantly challenged (Art, 2006, p.101). From the 1960s onwards, there were only a few voices on the political left that argued for Austria to recognise its historical guilt and therefore its responsibility for historical remembrance of Austria's role in the crimes of the National Socialist era. In 1986, political voices became polarised due to the controversy of the *Österreichische Volkspartei*'s (ÖVP, Austrian People's Party) presidential candidate Kurt Waldheim, who had omitted his involvement as intelligence officer in the National Socialist *Wehrmacht* (German armed forces between 1935-45) and his military service in the Balkans in World War II. His defenders from the political right argued that, with the focus on Waldheim's biography, international actors wanted to denigrate Austrian history,[11] which clearly did resonate with the wider public as Waldheim then won the election. The political left, however, challenged this discourse and argued for a historical remembrance of the Nazis' crimes and Austria's involvement (p.102). The debate about Waldheim's Nazi past turned into a debate about Austria's Nazi past and challenged the dominant *Opfermythos* (pp.116-117). Nevertheless, according to Art, the political right's defence of Waldheim was more powerful and led to the mainstreaming of far-right political ideas (p.120).

The emergence of the FPÖ and AfD

The FPÖ was established in 1956 by former Nazis and members of the predecessor party *Verband der Unabhängigen* (VdU, Association of Independents). The VdU and FPÖ's history of origin is closely connected to National Socialism and is rooted in German nationalism, which bases the country's identity on belonging to the German ethnic group. Directly after World War II, as part of the de-Nazification process, many former Austrian Nazis were banned from participating in politics and were imprisoned (Reiter, 2019, p.38). However, they were either pardoned early on or not charged at all, and most of them had been politically and socially rehabilitated by 1949 (p.10). In the same year, the VdU was founded with the aim to represent former members of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP, Nazi party) (p.71). Due to personal and political conflicts in the VdU, some of its members broke away and established the FPÖ. The first

[11] German and US newspapers and the World Jewish Congress uncovered Waldheim's lies about his past (Art, 2006, pp.115-116).

leader of the FPÖ was Anton Reinthaller, a former member of the NSDAP and Nazi minister (p.161). His right hand and successor as FPÖ party leader (1958-1978) was former SS member Friedrich Peter (p.12).[12] Despite the party's Nazi roots, the FPÖ is well established in parts of Austrian society which is unique for a direct fascist successor party in the context of Europe (Gritschmeier, 2021, p.6; Moreau, 2021, p.94; Wodak, 2021, p.105).

Xenophobic, German nationalist and anti-foreigner sentiments have been consistently present throughout the FPÖ's history (Schiedel, 2017), but the party has displayed a strategic flexibility in being able to adopt a modern form of right-wing populism for electoral benefit. For example, in the late 1990s, the party toned down its focus on German nationalism and addressed topics like family-friendly social politics and the Christian roots of the country, which led to the FPÖ's second government participation since the ÖVP deemed the party as more electorally acceptable (Heinisch, 2022, p.156). The party was able to enter coalition governments with a variety of coalition partners in the 1980s, 2000s and again in 2017 following the so called 'refugee crisis'. However, all three of these governments were undermined by the FPÖ's increased extremism and latterly its corruption (Heinisch, 2022).[13]

The FPÖ is highly centralised and recruits its members directly from nationalist *Burschenschaften* (student fraternities), which are highly masculine institutions. According to Carina Klammer and Judith Goetz *Burschenschaften* create the direct link:

> between organised neo-Nazism and the right-wing extremist parties in parliament, especially the FPÖ. Even though different types such as national-liberal, German nationalist and openly right-wing fraternities exist, they share the same ideological background. (Klammer and Goetz, 2017, p.83)

To conclude, Jim Wolfrey (2013) posed the highly relevant question of when "an organisation formed by fascists becomes something other than fascist" (p.20). The FPÖ was established by former Nazis and remains deeply intertwined with right-wing extremist forces.

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[12] The SS (Schutzstaffel) was an elite paramilitary group in Nazi Germany.

[13] After one and a half years in government with the ÖVP, the coalition was dissolved in 2019 due to a political scandal, in which then-leader of the FPÖ Christian Strache was filmed on the holiday island of Ibiza making statements which indicate political corruption and possible criminal offenses (Heinisch, 2022, p.164). Since then, Strache has been excluded from the party.

As mentioned earlier, the AfD was not founded until 2013 and narrowly missed the five percent entry threshold for parliamentary representation in that same year.[14] It did, however, meet that threshold in 2017 and repeated its success in 2021 (Jäger, 2021). The electoral campaign in 2013 was based on a rejection of the bailout measures during the Euro crisis, reform of the Euro zone and a market liberal orientation, which was also the basis for its foundation. Nevertheless, anti-immigration stances and conservative ideas about families and gender roles were already present in the party at that point (Decker, 2022b, p.135). It is crucial for my research to note that the success of the AfD has been entangled with the resurgence of antifeminist attacks on gender and feminism in Germany (Lang, 2017 p.62), which I will discuss further below and within Chapter 1.

While the AfD's history is short, the party has already experienced several internal conflicts and divisions and its leaders have never stayed in power for long. Jäger (2021) argues that from its beginning, different factions have been competing over its programmatic orientations. These range from a 'moderate' wing seeking respectability by distancing itself from well-known extremists and far-right street movements like the *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Pegida, Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident) (Gritschmeier, 2021, p.141) to a 'harder' right wing which openly associates itself with these aforementioned extremists (Bauer and Fiedler, 2021).[15] These factional conflicts have largely resulted in the victory of the hardliners and the AfD has slid further to the right with each internal conflict (Decker, 2022b; Ulrich et al., 2022). In Germany (unlike in Austria) right-wing extremism is officially considered to be a criminal offence against the *Demokratische Grundordnung* (democratic order) (Klammer and Goetz, 2017, p.80). Since 2022, the AfD is officially classified as a *Verdachtsfall* (suspected case of right-wing extremism) which means it can be observed by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (regional branches of the AfD were already in this category before 2022). Moreover, the AfD in the state of Thuringia is hereby not just a *Verdachtsfall* but officially categorised as right-wing extremist. This means, for example that intelligence investigators can intercept members' communication channels (Cremer, 2022, p.23).

[14] In order to enter the German parliament, parties need to reach a threshold of 5 percent of the popular vote.

[15] In 2014, Pegida was founded in Dresden (former East Germany). It is a far-right street movement, which organises Europe-wide protests but is particularly strong in former East Germany, where it engages in German nationalism. The movement is associated with anti-Muslim racism and anti-immigration stances.

The development of the AfD, the first far-right party to enter the *Bundestag*, represents the greatest success for the far right to date in post-war Germany. Where once Germany and Austria were on the opposite ends of the continuum of far-right political representation (Art, 2006), the AfD has learned much from the FPÖ and many of the parties' discourses and strategies are identical (Moreau, 2021, p.82; p.94). The significant resemblance between the AfD and FPÖ, despite their enormous gap in years of experiences, provides – next to both countries shared history and language/culture – a good starting point for combining research on both parties.

The FPÖ and AfD's negative impact on gender equality

The AfD and FPÖ view gender equality as one of the roots of societal conflict, while they at the same time stress that women are welcome as party members (Glaser et al., 2018, p.27; Klammer and Goetz, 2017, p.85). The parties depict women as being 'naturally' different from men and identify those differences as needing to be preserved, which the AfD and FPÖ see as being endangered by feminism and gender equality policy instruments (Glaser et al., 2018, pp.27-28; Klammer and Goetz, 2017, p.85). At the same time, the AfD and FPÖ also use narratives about the supposedly achieved equality between women and men in Austria and Germany, in contrast to the Muslim 'other's' alleged backwardness (for example, Goetz, 2021a, p.132; Sauer, 2021, p.72; Dietze, 2020; Berg, 2019, p.79). In this section, I briefly discuss the AfD and FPÖ's discourses on gender to set the scene for my thesis.[16]

The FPÖ's gender discourses include the claim that the party 'protects' the people from a fluid meaning of gender, because for its members the gender binary is 'natural' (Falter and Stern, 2019, p.186). The FPÖ uses a pseudo-emancipatory narrative alongside their support for a traditional (hierarchical) gendered order, which is based on the slogan 'gleichwertig aber nicht gleichartig' (of the same value but not the same kind). Women are hereby offered *Wahlfreiheit* (freedom of choice) to be stay-at-home mothers or to be in paid employment, but the FPÖ clearly supports the traditional nuclear family as the ideal. The call for a so-called *gelebte Gleichberechtigung* (lived equality) between women and men is still based on the idea that women and men are complementary and therefore 'naturally' choose and are suited to different paths (pp.187-190). There is no clear definition of 'lived equality'; it is a vague concept which allows the FPÖ to state that they are for equality, as long as women and men are still fulfilling different roles.

[16] In Chapter 1, I will provide a more detailed account of the far right's (mainly in a European context) anti-gender and anti-Muslim discourses, which the AfD and FPÖ are participating in.

In government (2017-2019), the FPÖ supported the traditional roles of men and women as well as the ideal of the traditional family (Goetz, 2020, p.7). For example, the ÖVP/FPÖ government abolished the possibility to offset public childcare expenses against tax liability which further increases the incentive for parental (mainly maternal) childcare (Rathgeb and Wiss, 2020, p.8). Birgit Sauer (2021) points to how the FPÖ states that the traditional gender specific division of labour saves women from exploitation. In the FPÖ's handbook (2013), which is addressed to FPÖ members and leaders, natural differences between men and women are stressed, which plays into the hands of angry men, who fear more gender equality (Sauer, 2021, pp.70-71). However, the endorsement of natural differences can also be attractive to cis women who, for example, can give up responsibility (such as full-time paid employment) through choosing their traditional gender role (Sanders et al., 2019, p.29). Karin Stögner (2017) argues that the FPÖ uses people's desires for simplicity and alleged 'naturalness' of 'gender' and 'race' in today's complicated world (p.139).[17] The FPÖ's antifeminism also attacks alternative lifestyles, for example a family is defined as cis man, cis woman and their children, which shows the party's anti-LGBTQI positions (Goetz, 2021, pp.129-131).

The AfD's gender discourses are very similar. Maximilian Sprengholz (2021) argues that it is a strategic and defining feature of AfD delegates' speeches and the party's programme to agree that men and women should be equal while preserving 'natural' differences between them, which they say has long been achieved (p.487). He argues further that the AfD sees itself as antifeminist but does not want to be openly regarded as such (p.490). For example, AfD member of parliament Nicole Höchst stated in a parliamentary speech in 2018 that feminism in the past had its merits, and she thanked her grandmothers, mother and other women for women's rights, but feminism is not needed anymore because women's rights have been achieved and there is no structural discrimination as the remaining differences are 'natural' (p.491). Everything beyond achieved women's rights is allegedly going too far, which is reflected in the rejection of any current forms of feminism or institutional measures to decrease inequality (for example, via equal opportunity agencies) (Dietze, 2020, p.155). In their quantitative study about antifeminist attitudes in Germany, Charlotte Höcker et al. (2020) identify that the AfD reaches voters through their antifeminist politics, for example with their claim to

[17] It is important to note that "since 1945, use of the term 'race' in the German-language countries of Germany and Austria has been strictly taboo for politicians, for academics, and even for the general public" (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p.5). In English-speaking scholarship, however, 'race' is used as an analytical category. When I use the term 'race', I am not referring to supposedly distinct biological 'races' but to the historical constructed category of 'race' and the racialisation of the 'other'.

abolish gender studies or their rejection of gender inclusive language (p.272). Another theme of the AfD's broader antifeminist strategy is trans*humiliation,[18] which includes the portrayal of trans persons as 'crazy', 'stupid' and not worthy of protection (Schuster-Craig, 2021, p.142). Johanna Schuster-Craig explains the AfD's reasons for trans*humiliation by stating that "transfolk disrupt the gender essentialism required for maintaining gender roles" (p.148).

As with the FPÖ, one of the AfD's strategies is to argue that women are 'coerced' into labour and therefore do not have the choice to stay-at-home as mothers. They blame the neoliberal commodification of women which, allegedly, is the fault of feminists (Sprengholz, 2021, p.492). Gabriele Dietze (2020) argues that this line of argumentation shows a pro-woman[19] but anti-feminist stance on the part of the far right, which contemporary feminism needs to understand in order to develop its own strategies for including (cis) women, who blame feminism for their feelings of being exploited (p.162). Those feelings are connected to some (cis) men's fears that women will become too 'masculine' because of feminism. The AfD states that traditional masculinity is under threat and therefore it tolerates a culture of abuse and harassment of women (Daddow and Hertner, 2021).

The far right's history in Austria and Germany, the propagated return to traditional gender roles, and the AfD and FPÖ's misogynist stances, provide the context for my thesis and in particular for my questioning of why women would want to actively support such parties.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is comprised of five main chapters. Chapter 1 is divided in three main sections and I examine the wealth of academic literature that provides further critical context for my thesis. Firstly, I discuss literature on the far right, associated terminology (right-wing populism and right-wing extremism), definitions of racism (an integral feature of the far right), and different explanations for the successes of the AfD and FPÖ, including, for example, socio-economic reasons. Secondly, I explore research on the so-called transnational anti-gender movement, as well as the entanglement of anti-Muslim propaganda with women's rights discourses. Thirdly, I focus in on previous research on women members of far-right parties and movements in diverse contexts. Here, I make a

[18] The term trans*humiliation is used by Schuster-Craig to define the AfD's anti-trans stances. The * is used in German language to be gender inclusive.
[19] I note that Dietze seems to only refer to cis women.

case for the existing research gap that my project addresses. The narratives of women members (especially those without leadership positions) of the AfD and FPÖ have not been explored to date, even though scholarship shows that women's participation is crucial for the parties' successes.

In Chapter 2, I give a detailed account of my methodology. For this project, I actively engaged with far-right women, and I had to be prepared for the challenges arising through this research with an 'unloved group' (see Blee, 2018, for example). I first engage with the debate on whether researchers should in fact conduct interview research with the far right and argue that interviews are necessary for answering my research questions as well as providing a unique insight on women's membership. Nevertheless, interviewing far-right women is not an easy task, and I recount how I took a reflexive approach to my research process as I navigated this emotional journey. I briefly outline the understanding of feminist knowledge that informs my methodological approach. Furthermore, I discuss my methods: semi-structured interviews (my main data) and social media research (my supporting data). I provide details on my sampling strategy, the 25 participants and the process of interviewing and social media data collection. Finally, I discuss why I am conducting socially oriented narrative research, what I mean by narrative research, what the limits of narrative research are, and how I conducted my narrative analysis.

Chapter 3, my first of three analysis chapters, explores the women's narratives on their paths to membership. I argue that they communicate/d their narratives in a language of everyday 'common sense', for example by presenting their paths as the 'obvious result' of their experiences. My emphasis is on the participants' stories about their experiences and not the parties' ideologies. I identify three main narratives, which are all interconnected. The first are narratives of violence whereby participants argue that their own or their daughters' experiences of sexual harassment by immigrants led them to join the parties, which for them was the only logical step. The second main narrative centres on experiences, which the women described as the reasons for finally grasping reality, which provided them with the tools to act against this reality. The final narrative is of what I term the 'urge to act', based on the women's belief that their activism in the party is the only way to secure their children's and the next generation's future/s. I argue that the women's narratives show that they make sense of their membership through depicting themselves as acting in their own, their children's and the 'people's' interest, and that they see the AfD or FPÖ as the only party fulfilling their interests. This finding contradicts many scholars' questioning of why far-right women act 'against their own interests'

(Miller-Idriss, 2020, p.3, for example). The parties do not act against *all* women and my participants depicted their membership as common sense and those who do not support their parties as acting against the interests of the nation.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the women's narratives on feminism and gender. Since the AfD and FPÖ are part of a broader antifeminist movement, this is of particular interest. Interestingly, nine participants defined women's equality as one of their main reasons for joining the parties. The narratives show many contradictions and contain both antifeminist and feminist ideas, thus illustrating the ambivalence that inhere in AfD and FPÖ discourses on (anti)feminist topics. My data clearly shows that feminist themes can be easily co-opted by the far right. I argue that feminist approaches to postfeminism provide a useful theoretical lens for understanding some of the participants' narratives. One example of this is the narrative of women's individualism, which includes the ideas that strong women can achieve anything: there are no structural barriers; all women have freedom of choice; and equality has long been reached. I also discuss the narratives that 'feminism has gone too far' and that feminism is no longer needed in Austria and Germany while the Muslim 'other' creates a threat to a supposedly progressive European equal society. Finally, I illustrate that those narratives are closely connected to the views of many in wider society, who are anxious for example about the idea that there are more than two genders and that the normative gender roles they grew up with should be questioned.

In Chapter 5, the final analysis chapter, I turn to participants' narratives about their roles in the AfD and FPÖ and how those are performed in the spaces of the parties, which are dominated by men. Women in both parties have crucial functions on a local, but also national level. Even though the participants describe the parties' spaces as equal, I argue that their narratives clearly show that those spaces are highly gendered and accommodate men and normative masculine behaviour. Some participants for example argued that the parties have equal gendered space but that women need to be particularly strong and assert themselves. Here, I use Nirmal Puwar's (2004a) theory of 'space invaders', which conceptualises how women and racialised minorities enter spaces that are historically inhabited by white men. Some of my participants support women's networks, which I argue are counter-spaces, where women can communicate outside of masculine dominated spaces. Furthermore, participants clearly tried to navigate men's fear of women's networks and their own need for this counter space. With these narratives on space in mind, I explore how the women discuss their roles in the parties. I argue that

their narratives show that they have to navigate the masculine norm in the parties as well as the different forms of femininity they are expected to fulfil. Their roles are not homogeneous and can take many forms, which can leave space for their own agency. Stereotypically feminine roles can therefore be combined with stereotypically masculine roles, showing that there is room for manoeuvre within the given norms.

Finally, in my conclusion, I discuss the key findings of this thesis. I revisit my research questions and discuss the answers that my data and subsequent analyses provide. One of the common threats, which shapes all three analysis chapters, has been the women's self-representation as normal/ordinary women. I also explore the lessons learned on research with 'unloved groups' and how I addressed arising challenges. To conclude, I examine the limitations of my research, investigate opportunities for future research and discuss possible counterstrategies against the rise of the far right.

Chapter 1: A wealth of literature: A missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle

When I started my research project in 2019, I continuously read that there was a great deal of scholarly literature about the far right, but little that considered women and/or gender (for example, in Köttig et al., 2017, p.2). Though an ample amount of research on the far right may still ignore or only marginally touch on questions of gender (for example, Decker et al., 2022; Moreau, 2021; Kaltwasser et al., 2017; Braun et al., 2016; Mammone et al., 2013),[20] research on women and gender has grown considerably in the last few years (for example, Dietze, 2020; Goetz et al., 2019).

In this chapter, I discuss this still increasing wealth of literature on the far right and on women and gender in the far right and demonstrate that there are still some gaps, which my research seeks to address. While reviewing the contextual literature, I always felt like I was attempting to do a jigsaw with thousands of pieces, including some that were (or became) unnecessary, duplicates and some that I would have designed differently. More pieces were continuously thrown at me as more research was published in 2021/22 and others got lost for a while under the mountain of pieces or did not seem to fit. It is a very messy and frustrating process to decide which pieces fit together and which need to be left out due to space constraints and/or because they are not as important to my overall work. This jigsaw, as I imagine it, is not rectangular and neat and has some bumps and corners sticking out. Nevertheless, I decided to start with the non-rectangular frame to reach the middle, where I identify one of the pieces still missing: research on *women's narratives* about their active support for, and engagement within the AfD and FPÖ.

The jigsaw's frame includes an exploration of the terminology used to categorise parties like the AfD and FPÖ (referring to literature on the wider European context), and discussions of the messiness of this categorisation. It also necessarily includes discussion of definitions of racism, crucial to identifying the far right. Additionally, this section includes an overview of literature exploring reasons for the success of the AfD and FPÖ. The next part of the jigsaw's frame are far right views on feminism and gender in Austria

[20] In their introduction to their edited book on populism, Decker et al. (2022) mention that the editors are all men. Most of them use generic masculine nouns as default and therefore do not use gender-inclusive language.
On the 678 pages of *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* only one chapter discusses the interplay of populism and gender (Abi-Hassan, 2017), while most of the other chapters do not touch upon or even mention the topic of gender.

and Germany, in a wider transnational context and their embeddedness in wider society's views. I discuss research about the so-called anti-gender movements, which includes the AfD and FPÖ as actors. Finally, I move into the jigsaw's centre and explore previous research about women members of far-right parties and movements, mainly though not exclusively in a European context (including the AfD and FPÖ). I conclude with an outline of how my research is one of the missing pieces and fits into the jigsaw.

The European (populist and extremist) right

Introducing the overused puzzle piece: Defining the far right

The two main labels used for parties like the AfD and FPÖ are right-wing populist (Gritschmeier, 2021; Sauer and Ajanovic, 2016; Mudde, 2004, p.541, for example) or right-wing extremist (Cremer, 2022; Pfahl-Traughber, 2020; Klammer and Goetz, 2017; Schiedel, 2017, for example). In this section, based on previous scholarship, I argue that both parties are part of the right-wing populist *and* extremist spectrum, and fulfil certain criteria of both definitions. For readability reasons, I use the term *far right* to refer to the AfD and FPÖ in this thesis. My research is not about classifying the AfD and FPÖ and it is not necessary for me to discuss in depth the whole field of research on definitions of the far right.

Reading through the academic literature from the last thirty years that discusses parties on the European far right feels like going around in circles, where some authors argue for one definition over the other and vice versa. Frank Decker (2022a) argues that the research boom on the far right started in the 1990s due to the rise of many right-wing populist parties in Europe – the AfD is hereby a latecomer (p.35).[21] He furthermore states that the main task today should be empirical research, of the sort I am conducting, and not to reinvent the wheel with new definitions (p.36). While there is a flexibility to the definitions of the far right depending on context (Lazaridis et al., 2016), and I firmly agree that empirical research is important, definitions are crucial, especially in a field that is highly politicised (Mudde, 1996, p.226). Moreover, as Andrea Mammone et al. (2013) argue, the extreme right is very complex and scholars therefore need to be cautious with definitions (p.1).

Defining the far right as right-wing populist

Cas Mudde (2004) set himself the task of "defining the undefinable" (pp.541-542) and defines populism as:

[21] In this section, I use the terms which the authors I refer to use.

> [an] ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" vs. "the corrupt elite" and which argues that politics should be the expression of the general will of the people. (p.543)

Additionally, he maintains, populists (both on the left and the right) claim that the consciousness or so-called common sense of 'the people' is the foundation of all good (politics) (p.547). He also calls populism a "thin-centred ideology" as it can be combined with many other ideologies (p.544). Building on this with reference to the European context, Decker et al. (2022) state that in political science there is a broad agreement that populism has ideational elements but that those are not a full-fledged ideology (p.14). For example, if populism is combined with exclusionary right-wing ideologies, there is not just a vertical division between 'the pure people' vs. 'the corrupt elite', but also a horizontal division between 'the pure people' vs. 'the others', who are, for example, immigrants (Decker et al., 2022, p.14; Gritschmeier, 2021, p.6).

Mudde's (2004) definition of populism is the piece of the puzzle that is used most often in research about the far right (for example, Sauer, 2019a, p.170; Voigt, 2018, p.12). But that definition is also contested (for example, Decker, 2022a, p.36; Gritschmeier, 2021). Raphael Gritschmeier (2021), who empirically analyses the programmes and actions of the AfD and FPÖ and defines both parties as populist, argues that Mudde's definition only encapsulates part of what right-wing populism is and lacks some further clarification. He adds two further dimensions to the concept. First, right-wing populism is also a strategy which is used to increase and keep power. Second, right-wing populism is a style which includes certain ways to communicate, for example using common-sense arguments, provocations and biological metaphors (pp.26-28).

Several scholars illustrate that using the term right-wing populism can trivialise both the AfD and FPÖ. For example, in his book on the German New Right (including the AfD), Jay Julian Rosellini (2019) argues that right-wing populism also has positive implications as it fosters political participation (p.119). However, how he depicts political participation as value in itself ignores that this participation is driven by exclusionary attitudes including racism. Rosellini's trivialisation of racist discourses disguised as populism is most visible in his argument that reactions to Thilo Sarrazin's (2010) book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany does away with itself) are exaggerated and that only in Germany would a book like this be labelled as "extremely dangerous" (Rosellini,

2019, p.121).[22] With this argument, Rosellini normalises Sarrazin's racist discourses, which are marked by, for instance, a masculinist biopolitical call for 'native' women to bear children to support a 'healthy' and 'pure' *Volk* ("people") (Sauer, 2019b, p.349). The political scientist Ralf Havertz (2019) argues that Sarrazin's book, which was also popular in Austria (Opratko, 2019, p.9), was the model for the AfD's populist discourses and was the start of a new wave of right-wing populism in Germany as it opened up 'discursive space' to the right (Havertz, 2019, p.397).

Defining the far right as right-wing extremist

Trivialising usage of right-wing populism by certain authors, discussed above, shows how the term populism can be employed to legitimise exclusionary far-right actors and discourses. Similar to my stance, Mammone et al. (2013) state that they are sceptical of the term populism as it legitimises right-wing extremism. Through its description of the dichotomy between 'the people' and 'the corrupt elite', the usage of the term often ignores the question of who 'the people' are, thus referring back to the horizontal dichotomy between 'the people' and the excluded 'others' (p.4).

Right-wing extremism is the other term used in scholarship on both parties. I mainly base my understanding of right-wing extremism on Klammer and Goetz's (2017) usage of the term. In their analysis of the representation of gender in the FPÖ's discourse, they criticise the definitions of extremism which are prevalent in the hegemonic discourse dominated by men in research on the far right. In this discourse, extremism is located outside of society and left-wing and right-wing extremism are situated next to each other while the 'centre' of society is allegedly neutral; this is called the 'horseshoe theory' as the two ends of a horseshoe almost meet again.[23] The supporters of this discourse do not just ignore the fundamental differences between left and right (see also Gritschmeier, 2021, p.37) but also situate all extremist attitudes outside of society (Klammer and Goetz, 2017, p.80).

[22] In 2010, the so-called Sarrazin debate started, which was one of the most significant debates about the integration of immigrants in Germany (Piwoni, 2020, p.391). In his book, Sarrazin claims that immigrants from Muslim majority countries endanger Germany's cultural identity. While many German politicians and journalists stated that Sarrazin violated the idea of a German pluralistic society, his book was one of the bestselling non-fiction books in Germany and stirred emotions among a significant part of society and opened up discourses to the right (pp.391-193). Rosellini claims that the stigmatisation of the book is a specific German reaction, he refers to the discourse of 'political correctness' in Germany connected to the historical reappraisal of the Nazi period (discussed in the introduction), which he defines as exaggerated (p.124).

[23] The metaphor of the horseshoe was first used by the philosopher Jean-Pierre Faye to illustrate the alleged closeness of the Nazis and Communists in 1932 in Germany (Mayer, 2011, p.101).

As Oliver Decker and Elmar Brähler (2020) argue, right-wing extremist attitudes are also part of the so-called 'centre' of society, and the idea that the 'centre' of society is the protector of democracy threatened by two extreme ends ignores right-wing extremist attitudes in the 'centre' (p.15). The 'centre' of society is hereby only a diffuse concept of an allegedly moderate majority,[24] and Decker and Brähler demonstrate that less than three percent of society would position themselves outside (left or right) of the 'centre' of society (p.20). Their study is one example of how the 'horseshoe theory' has come increasingly criticised within German research on right-wing extremism. Their argument that there is no clear distinction between the 'centre' of society and the far right is crucial for my research as I show in my research how the women's narratives overlap with the views of wider society.

Avoiding a clear differentiation between the 'centre' and the far right, Klammer and Goetz base their usage of the term right-wing extremism on Willibald Holzer's (1993) definition and his criticism of the 'horseshoe theory'. According to Holzer, characteristics of right-wing extremism include:

> the idea of the *Volk* and *Volksgemeinschaft* [harmonised representation of the 'national community'], ethnocentrisms, ethnic pluralism, the exclusion of the so-called 'other', anti-liberalism, anti-pluralism, anti-democratic opinions, constructions of the enemy, theories of scapegoats and a nationalising view of history (Holzer, 1993, as cited in Klammer and Goetz, 2017, p.81).

Holzer uses the term right-wing extremism as an instrument for the academic analysis of political and social phenomena. His usage of the term neither vilifies the parties or actors nor is it an accusation of criminal acts. The term classifies ideological positions but avoids legitimising those. Klammer and Goetz argue that the above characteristics apply to the FPÖ (p.81), while Hendrik Cremer (2022) identifies similar characteristics for the AfD, including their calls for a cultural homogeneity that needs to be defended from 'imported' cultures, and the denial of equal human dignity for the 'other' (pp.29-30).

In Holzer's definition of right-wing extremism the main focus lies on so-called natural inequalities between 'races', 'ethnicities' and 'nations' (as cited in Klammer and Goetz, 2017, p.81). Klammer and Goetz criticise that Holzer's definition like the 'horseshoe theory' is failing to include gender as a crucial category for defining right-

[24] For a detailed discussion of the term 'centre' see Decker et al. (2020).

wing extremism (p.80). They extend Holzer's definition to include the crucial role of the binary gender model in right-wing extremism, because:

> the construction of binary gender, separating "man" and "woman" into naturally opposing entities with certain essentials, which corresponds to the essentialist construction of "race", hardly finds mention in Holzer's considerations or in the works of other theorists of right-wing extremism. (p.82)

They elaborate that the:

> strictly binary gender model fulfils certain functions within right-wing extremism, such as keeping the supposed influence of "femininity" out of the sphere of politics, male bonding or society, and because the prevalence of the gender binary at the "centre" of society should be regarded as a common ground between it and the extreme right. (p.82)

In other words, the insistence on a binary gender model is an additional characteristic of right-wing extremism, which is applicable to the AfD and FPÖ and key for my research.

Some scholars argue that political actors can only be defined as right-wing extremist if they are involved in acts of criminalised violence (including terrorist attacks) to change the democratic system (for example, in Gritschmeier, 2021, p.42), while others argue that there are different degrees of extremism (Decker, 2022a, p.43). Right-wing extremist ideologies are part of the conceptual dissemination of ideas, which can lead to far-right terrorist attacks as in Hanau in 2020 (Decker et al., 2020, p.80).[25] Manuela Freiheit et al. (2022) argue that there is a fluid transition between five levels of escalation, which show that right-wing extremist attacks are not independent and outside of the rest of society. The first level is right-wing extremist attitudes in society, which lead to success at the second level: the representation of those attitudes by parties and movements (like the AfD) and the destabilising of liberal democracy. The third level are actors whose overt aim it is to destroy the democratic system. The fourth level is supporting and planning terrorist attacks, which are then executed by the fifth level, who are, for example, individual terrorists like in Hanau. In other words, levels one to three are a source of legitimisation for violent attacks, which are than executed by stages four and five (pp.64-

[25] Gökhan Gültekin, Sedat Gürbüz, Said Nesar Hashemi, Mercedes Kierpacz, Hamza Kurtović, Vili Viorel Păun, Fatih Saraçoğlu, Ferhat Unvar and Kaloyan Velkov were murdered by a right-wing extremist before he killed his mother and himself on February 19th, 2020 in Hanau, Germany. He published his racist and antisemitic views online before the attack.

66). I argue that both parties are, at their core, right-wing extremist, which does not mean that all their members (including my participants) share the same ideology or support violence, but that they, nevertheless, accept the right-wing extremist character of their parties (compare Goetz, 2021a, p.127).

Both parties are part of the right-wing populist and extremist spectrum, and fulfil certain criteria of both terms as models and definitions are always only an approximation towards reality (Gritschmeier, 2021, p.36). In using the term *far right* throughout this thesis, I do *not* suggest that the parties' views are far away from the 'centre' right or the 'centre' of society as there is a fluidity between centre and periphery.

Racism: An integral part of the far right

Definitions of the far right identify racism as an integral part of its exclusionary discourses and practices. Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak (2001) argued over 20 years ago that "the phenomenon of racism is even more threatening today as one follows the development of populist parties throughout Western Europe" (p.267). As stated in the introduction, far-right parties have strengthened and with this their racism have become even more threatening and 'normalised' over the last 20 years. As racism is integral to far-right parties, it is crucial to discuss what literature I draw on to understand racism and with this to clarify what I mean when I describe participants and their narratives as racist.[26]

As Achille Mbembe (2017) shows, racism has a long and complex history and it is only possible to speak of racism in imperfect language (p.10). He argues that the Western world has always needed myth and self-fictionalisation through the construction of the 'other' as threatening object to justify its power (pp.10-11). The desire to divide and classify through racism and with this to create hierarchies was a crucial part of the colonial project; a desire which is still present in today's world (p.8). While Europe's rank in the world has diminished, racism has not been extinguished but has reconstituted itself (p.6). The concept of race was used for several centuries to name and dehumanise non-European human groups (p.17). Even though today the hierarchical racial typology of colonial times is barely used anymore (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, p.7), Mbembe (2017) argues "racism without races" is surfacing in many countries. "Race is expressed

[26] There is a vast amount of literature on racism, which I cannot discuss here. I focus solely on the literature which informs my understanding of racism and with this my understanding of my participants as racist. On a more detailed account of literature on racism see, for example Reisigl and Wodak (2001) and Solomos (2022). Additionally, it is important to note that there is "a great repertoire of forms of racism", which can be intersubjective, ideological and/or systemic (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, p.11).

through the sign of religion or culture" (p.35), which creates new patterns of racism and reconstructs the figure of the 'enemy' (p.21), which ultimately is still presented as less human (Hark and Villa, 2020, p.25).

For Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1992) racism consists of "modes of exclusion, inferiorization, subordination and exploitation", which change in different social and historical contexts (p.2). The construction of 'otherness', for example through skin colour, ethnic categories, culture and religion, is hereby used to exclude and exploit the allegedly immutable 'other' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p.49), which creates a hegemony, in which the 'deviant other' has no access to important power resources (p.11). For example, migrant ethnic groups and refugees are constructed as inferior, not with "racial categorization, but as cultural, political or national outsiders and undesirables" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, p.8.). Like Mbembe, Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that 'culture' becomes essentialised into notions of genealogical differences (p.32), and that "racism cannot be reduced to constructions of 'race'", but "every racist construction has at least some dimension of a mythical embodiment of the 'other'" (p.49).

Reisigl and Wodak (2001) argue that the focus on culture in racism today is not new, as the classical pseudoscientific racism of the nineteenth and twentieth century also always referred to cultural character. They state that "cultural racism seems tautological, because every racism is undeniably a cultural phenomenon, whereas the suffix 'ist' in the qualification as 'culturalist' more exactly names the explicit ideologizing orientation towards and reference to culture" (p.9). Mulinari and Neergaard (2015) define cultural(ist) racism as being based on "two key assumptions: first, that culture (or religion) is a feature that is essentially similar to biology, an essence; secondly, that there is a 'natural' connection between place (nation) and culture, and that 'our' culture is claimed to be superior" (p.508). Liz Fekete (2009) also argues that in today's racism cultural justifications have taken the place of racial justifications and that, for example, 'the Muslim culture', which is, despite its diversity, presented as monolithic, is constructed as 'alien' and incompatible with European values. One dominant racist narrative is, for example, that European Muslims cling to their culture and are therefore unable to 'integrate' (p.85); this narrative is also prevalent in my interviews.

The above shows that there is a close relationship between racism and nationalism, as nationalism is often built on racist criteria for the membership in the national

community (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, p.15; Yuval-Davis, 1997, p.11),[27] which is based on a strong 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric as well as a nativist conceptualisation of society (Hark and Villa, 2020, p.27). Culturalist racism facilitates the discourse that 'cultural' groups should stay in their countries of 'origin' in order to preserve the nationalist myth of a common 'origin' and 'culture' of the 'own' national people (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, pp.40-41). Sociologist Sara Farris (2017) argues that nationalism based on the myth of a 'common' culture "promotes an idea of the nation as an organic whole supposedly homogenous in religious, cultural, and racial/ethnic dimensions" (p.68). Through racism certain groups of people are constructed as inferior and are excluded, for example the fabricated 'common' culture excludes immigrants, who are perceived as culturally alien (p.68) – a discourse inherent to the nationalism of Europe's far-right parties (p.73).

Finally, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) argue that ethnic, gender and class divisions are interlinked. All three divisions involve different access to resources and processes of exclusion and inclusion (p.12). In line with this argument, Hark and Villa (2020) state that "prime among the relations of inequality culture reproduces […] are: sexism and heteronormativity, racism, and class. These, however, are not to be understood as social divisions operating independently, but rather analyzed as a complex intersectional constellation" (p.19). In other words, racism is interlinked with other sources of inequality including class and gender. In the section on femonationalism and 'sexual exceptionalism', I further discuss how different gendered stereotypes are used to construct racist narratives about the 'other men' as oppressor and sexual threat, which is part of the sexualisation of racism (Farris, 2017, p.73).

Accounting for the success of the AfD and FPÖ

Scholarly explanations for the success of the two parties are wide-ranging. Gritschmeier (2021), Stephan Grigat (2017) and Patrick Moreau (2021), among others, take a comparative approach to the parties, arguing that there are many parallels in their discourses and political strategies. Moreau also draws attention to the parties' central focus on "patriotism, *Heimat* [homeland], identity, security, and the fight against immigration and political Islam" (p.98).[28] Indeed, one of the dominant scholarly explanations for the success of both parties is the way in which they capitalise on what

[27] For a detailed account on theories of nationalism see Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) and Farris (2017).

[28] I disagree that their programmes are only against political Islam, they are clearly against cultural Islam as well, for example, with their rejection of the hijab.

might be termed cultural backlash (including culturalist racism); that is, resistance to multiculturalism and to an increasing pluralisation of life models, as well as support for an alleged return to a simple and homogeneous culture (nationalist discourse) (Gritschmeier, 2021, p.54).

A key aspect of cultural backlash is how migration functions as a symbol of cultural diversity and is therefore perceived as a threat to the above-mentioned national culture (Gritschmeier, 2021, p.70). Gert Pickel and Alexander Yendell (2022) draw attention to the pervasiveness of anti-Muslim perspectives in contemporary German popular discourse, and how these are co-opted by the AfD. Anti-Muslim views are also a central focus for the FPÖ and these are closely connected to their anti-immigration stances. The increase of support for the FPÖ during the so-called refugee crisis in 2015/16 illustrates the importance of this topic for the party with opinion polls showing 30 percent support (Heinisch, 2022, p.157; p.161). The cultural backlash explanation of the parties' success is partly attributed to the privileged white middle-classes' sense of entitlement, which can turn into culturalist racism against the 'other' and the fear of losing 'traditional' values (Celik et al., 2020, p.152; Becker and Dörre, 2019, p.153). As I show in Chapter 3, many of my participants, who are largely middle-class women, use narratives of the fear of losing one's culture to explain their support for the parties; indeed, they tap into culturalist racism as they define culture as a feature that is essentially 'natural' and draw a 'natural' connection between the nation and culture (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2015, p.508). Another key aspect of the cultural backlash discourse is a rejection of changing gender regimes (Gritschmeier, 2021, p.55), which I discuss at length in the next section.

A further explanation for the growing strength of the far right is based on socio-economic factors (Gritschmeier, 2021, pp.51-53). According to Decker (2022b) the international financial crisis of 2008 and the crisis of the Euro (starting in 2010) were the preconditions for the establishment of the AfD (p.133). Additionally, the FPÖ presents itself as the real representative of the "kleine Mann auf der Straße" (the average man in the street) (Sauer, 2021, p.59) and addresses many men's experiences or fears of loss. These fears and experiences are based on neoliberal transformations (for example, decline of welfare states and the deregulation of labour) and the concomitant disintegration of the traditional male-breadwinner model (where men are solely responsible for their families' income) (Sauer, 2021, pp.66-67). These experiences and fears are instrumentalised by the far right, transformed into anger against the 'other' (for example, immigrants), which offers the possibility for far-right supporters to reclaim agency and control over their lives

(Sauer, 2020, p.32). Mikko Salmela and Christian von Scheve (2017) identify negative feelings (including fear) arising from neoliberal politics as one important root for the success of far-right parties in Europe. They state that feelings play a crucial role "in perceptions and judgements of belonging to a group that is 'winning' or 'losing' in processes of modernisation and globalisation" (p.571).

The AfD and FPÖ exploit people's feelings of fear of being or becoming the losers of modernisation and address those feelings with welfare chauvinism, which privileges nationals in their welfare policies (Sauer, 2021, p.80). Havertz (2020) argues that the AfD's electoral success is facilitated by the party's new ambivalent strategy of social populism, where the AfD advocates for welfare policies for German nationals but excludes immigrants without citizenship and refugees, as well as following a neoliberal programme (p.549). Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik's (2020) study of the FPÖ's social policy proposals between 2006-2019 also clearly shows a preference for Austrian nationals in social policies (p.9). The parties' welfare chauvinism is one explanation for the above-average support from the blue-collar working class and unemployed electorate for the AfD and FPÖ (Gritschmeier, 2021, p.51; Moreau, 2021, p.100; Becker and Dörre, 2019, p.152). Finally, a quantitative study of the electoral share for the FPÖ in Salzburgian municipalities illustrates that support for the FPÖ is strongest in areas of socio-economic polarisation, where losers and winners of globalisation live next to each other (Jansesberger et al., 2021).

The third explanation for the AfD and FPÖ's support, put forward by, for instance, Gritschmeier (2021, p.14) and Sauer (2021), is their instrumentalisation of political dissatisfaction. In the last three decades, the political system in Austria and Germany, they argue, has degraded citizens to consumers of politics, providing an unattractive political system which made political involvement undesirable. The AfD and FPÖ managed to mobilise many politically dissatisfied people who previously did not vote or had stopped voting (Sauer, 2021, pp.62-63; Yoder, 2020). Austria and Germany have been governed by the same parties (in changing constellations) for decades.[29] The AfD and FPÖ can therefore claim that they are an alternative to the political status quo (Heinisch, 2022, p.153; Yoder, 2020, p.49). For example, the AfD states that the positions of the other parties in parliament are all very close to each other and do not allow opposition (Yoder, 2020, p.49). Grigat (2017) argues that voters for both parties believe

[29] In the case of Austria, this was except for the short periods when the FPÖ was in government.

that they are deceived by all other parties and that the AfD and FPÖ are the only parties listening to them (p.12). This explanation will be supported by my own analysis because many of my participants complained about the other parties' failure to address citizens' concerns, stating that they previously were politically dissatisfied.[30]

However certain researchers who address political dissatisfaction (for example, Kamenova, 2021; Patzelt, 2018) overlook the fact that political dissatisfaction alone cannot explain why people join far-right parties. I argue that political dissatisfaction has to be accompanied by a general agreement with far-right ideologies, in order to lead to far-right support. Valeriya Kamenova (2021), who conducted ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews with AfD members,[31] examines the organisational dynamics of the AfD but she barely discusses the party's racism, sexism, antifeminism and antisemitism. While she argues that scholars cite the rejection of immigration and Islamic fundamentalism as main demand factors associated with the far right,[32] she states that those two issues would not explain the party's rise sufficiently (p.27). She pins down political disenchantment as the driving force for people to join the AfD (p.81) because the party does not use many hierarchical and centralised decision-making structures, which means that all members are involved in decision-making processes. For example, 12 of the 16 state branches of the AfD allow all members to vote on party candidates (p.98), and Kamenova's participants stated that they are proud that the AfD's party conventions are the largest party conventions in Germany since World War II[33] (p.129) and complained about the hierarchies in other parties (especially CDU/CSU) (p.27). Kamenova explains further that the members' involvement in decision-making "may add to the party's credibility as a potential government participant, and in the case of the AfD fight off Nazi stigmatisation and social exclusion" (p.1). I disagree with this statement because intra-party participation alone does not erase the exclusionary and racist politics of the AfD and therefore does not improve the party's credibility. Kamenova is one of the few scholars to – like me – conduct interviews with ordinary members of the party, but her research lacks a critical lens. For example, she hopes that her study will contribute to

[30] The scholars mentioned in this paragraph all combine this explanation with other explanations, including the previous discussed ones.
[31] I will problematise her uncritical usage of those methods in my methodology chapter.
[32] Kamenova uses the term Islamic fundamentalism instead of anti-Muslim attitudes, which clearly shows a misrepresentation of the core anti-Muslim sentiments of the party, which are not just directed against Islamic fundamentalism but against Muslim culture.
[33] I criticise that Kamenova is not critically discussing this statement. For example, does that mean the AfD's party conventions are the biggest since NSDAP party conventions?

an increase of democratic participatory mechanisms and meaningful political experiences, and uses the AfD's internal mechanisms as a positive example of that (p.5).

The fourth explanation for the success of both parties concerns the local dynamics that influence the development of the far right. Daniel Mullis and Judith Miggelbrink (2022) argue that a great deal must happen locally before the extreme right is able to organise nationally (p.9). The AfD's success, they claim, is built upon local work and their predecessors' local normalisation of right-wing extremism (p.13). For example, the AfD is successful in places (mainly in East Germany) in which the REP and NPD were successful in the past along with other right-wing extremist groups (Schulte-Cloos, 2022; Zuschocke, 2022). Those local dynamics explain why the AfD has greater electoral success in East Germany (Yoder, 2020, p.38).[34] Scholars have identified numerous other explanations for the distribution of support, from socio-economic explanations focused on the character of deprivation in given areas (Deppisch, 2022; Geilen and Mullis, 2021; Jansesberger et al., 2021; Berg and Üblacker, 2020) to explanations which focus on the political marginalisation of regions and locales (Decker et al., 2020; Yoder, 2020).

The parties' ambivalent communication strategies are a fifth reason for the parties' success according to scholarship. Moreau (2021) argues that both the AfD and FPÖ participate in a "war of words", aiming to be acceptable to a wide range of voters, while clearly remaining open to support from the right-wing extremist spectrum (p.92). This strategy represents a 'doublespeak' (Reiter, 2019, pp.14-15), in which party statements are intentionally vague, allowing flexibility of interpretation and denial of 'dog whistle' appeals to extremists (Gritschmeier, 2021). This ambivalent style of communication appeals to different people. For example, the AfD attracts Christian fundamentalists, German nationalists, national conservatives and national liberals (Moreau, 2021, p.82), even though those groups have partly different views. While national conservatives support the traditional heterosexual family, national liberals would argue that the family model is people's private choice.

Reinhard Heinisch and Kristina Hauser (2016) analyse the FPÖ's shift in strategy throughout periods of government participation and opposition, finding that it repeatedly shifted its orientations when convenient (p.73) and toned down its style and tone during government participation but not its far-right substance (p.82). For example, after an initial loss of votes in 2006 (after government participation), the FPÖ won more popular

[34] To read more on the beneficial circumstances for the far right in East Germany see, for example, Yoder (2020) and Rädel (2019).

support again with their political demands against immigration. However, their statements about immigration excluded them as a potential coalition partner at that time (p.81). The AfD learned from the FPÖ to communicate in a way in which it can attract media attention. For instance, leaders of the party make a controversial statement and then react to public outrage through denial before arguing that they were intentionally misunderstood (Rosellini, 2019, p.105). In 2018 at a congress of the *Junge Alternative* (JA - AfD Youth organisation), former AfD leader Alexander Gauland stated that the Nazi period was only a *Vogelschiss* (bird shit) in Germany's history, meaning that it was only a small, insignificant period. With this statement he clearly searched for support from right-wing extremists, whose nationalist view of history relativises the crimes of National Socialists. This is not just a political slip in Gauland's communication – as one of my participants argued – but a calculated strategy to include people with this nationalist view of history (Bauer and Fiedler, 2021, p.12).

Multicausality of the parties' success

There is no monocausal explanation for the success of the far right in rallying support (Ruhose, 2019, p.1) and most scholars discuss several of the above reasons for far-right parties' successes (for example, Decker et al., 2022; Gritschmeier, 2021, Kleinert, 2021; Moreau, 2021; Sauer, 2021). There is, however, disagreement about the dominance of certain explanations over others. While most scholars agree that cultural explanations, including racism and xenophobia, play a role in the success of the AfD and FPÖ, there is a debate over the extent of their role.

Karina Becker and Klaus Dörre (2019), two of very few scholars conducting qualitative interviews with AfD members, analysed members' subjective views on their own life situations (p.154). Their argument is that the AfD recruits from all social classes but has a high level of working-class members (p.152) and most of the reasons to join are covered by several of the above explanations, as the analysis shows:

> The claim of state protection from inequality, the awareness of injustices in the world of work, the criticism of a loss of community, the feeling of being politically underrepresented and not having one's own interests represented in the public sphere and the lack of material

> and social recognition as workers are bound with racial resentment and are channelled in a nationalist, *völkisch* movement.[35] (p.164)

Becker and Dörre's research illustrates how qualitative interview research can provide a detailed account of the reasons for the parties' success, including people's reasons for supporting the parties. Their research shows how the five reasons outlined above are entangled with further factors, for example, a loss of community. Quantitative empirical studies often cannot grasp the complicated entanglement of all these different dimensions. Silke Baer et al. (2017) argue that there are context- and case-specific factors for far-right support, which include socio-structural, cultural and individual causes (p.354). In particular, the individual causes are best explored through listening to far-right members' narratives about their reasons, but there is a lack of research about members' narratives, as noted above, I have discussed two important exceptions: Becker and Dörre's (2019) research and Kamenova's (2021) dissertation. My research sheds further light on context specific reasons for women supporting the far right.

The far right and its discourse on gender and (anti)feminism

In this section of the chapter, I discuss the context of, and scholarship on, far-right discourses on feminism and gender. These play an important role in the AfD and FPÖ's ideologies and are, for some members, crucial reasons for joining the parties. Some of the above-discussed reasons for the parties' success in gaining the support of a diverse range of people ignore or only slightly touch upon gender-specific explanations. As discussed in the introduction, the far right's views on gender and their antifeminism have been one of my main catalysts, as a feminist, to conduct this research. Scholarship on gender and the far right is growing and more scholars are aware of the significance of conducting research with a gender perspective (for example, Goetz and Mayer, 2022; Goetz et al., 2019; Köttig et al., 2017).

In 2020, Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth published an edited volume titled *Right-wing populism and gender: European perspectives and beyond*. In their introduction, they argue that a research approach that includes gender as a social construction and social practice "is indispensable for understanding the political shift to the right" (p.8), because far-right actors everywhere are "obsessed" with gender and sexuality (p.7). Blee (2020) poses the question: "whether there is an inherent gender logic in the far right or whether

[35] The word *völkisch* was part of the National Socialist racist ideology, in which the people of a nation supposedly belong to a race and the German nation was propagated as superior.

far right politics simply absorb – and generally exacerbate – the gendered logics of the surrounding society" (p.426). In what follows I explore how far-right discourses are entangled with wider societal gender logics in Austria and Germany.

Opposition to gender: The 'ideal' topic for the far right

In my introduction, I discussed the AfD and FPÖ's views on gender and feminism and demonstrated that they endorse gender essentialism and the naturalisation of binary gender differences,[36] which they see as endangered by feminism(s). Both parties claim to be the defenders of 'normal' people against a fluid meaning of gender. Many scholars in the field of feminist far-right studies ask why gender is such a controversial concept (for example, Hark and Villa, 2015, p.7). For those, who endorse gender essentialism, gender denies the existence of a gender binary which, for them, is a biological fact (Umrath, 2018, p.873).

Judith Goetz and Stefanie Mayer (2022) argue that the biological determinism of gender is deeply embedded in an alleged everyday 'common sense', which makes gender essentialist discourses plausible for many people (p.93). They state:

> While an open legitimation of racist structures via 'nature' would cause some disconcertment in most settings, no such taboo exists concerning gender/sex and sexuality. Quite to the contrary, 'common sense' as well as the cultural industry insist on the alleged 'natural' complementary of the sexes. (p.99)

The belief that women and men are naturally different is in line with most people's everyday experiences, in which the differences between sexes as well as heteronormativity are daily realities. Goetz and Mayer argue further that in Austria (and beyond) the modernisation of gender roles is unfinished (p.104). The belief that there are two biological genders has been difficult to dismantle in that context (Thurner, 2019, p.11), which makes gender the ideal topic for the far right and the FPÖ in Austria. The far right's discourses and the constant reference to 'nature' and the claim of a normality of binary gender relations also lead to aggression against other ways of life, including the lives of queer, non-binary and trans people (FIPU, 2019, p.13).[37]

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[36] Gender essentialism means that gender is used as a category for defining women as fundamentally/naturally different to men (Lee et al., 2020, p.685).

[37] See Goetz (2019b) for a detailed account of transphobia as an integral part of far-right ideologies and Hechler, (2019) for a discussion about the discrimination of intersex people in the Austrian context.

Paula-Irene Villa (2017) argues that there is a 'German angst' connected to the topic of gender. In the last three decades, use of the English word 'gender' has become part of German-speaking political and academic discourse (Umrath, 2018, p.873). The academic concept of 'gender' seeks to de-essentialise everyday knowledge about binary gender norms and to deconstruct the myths about their 'naturalness' (Hark and Villa, 2015, pp.32-33). Myra Marx Ferree (2012) states that, in Germany, the feminist focus on gender started in the 1990s with the "Butler boom" among younger (mainly academic) German feminists who were enthusiastic about Butler's gender theories and gender performativity (p.176). Feminist discourses, which question traditional gender norms, play into a wider fear because "in our gendered societies, everyone is subject to gender norms, and gender is highly fundamental to one's self-identification and identifying with others" (Spierings, 2020, p.50).

As a response to academic discourses,[38] a public discourse arose in the 2000s, which has rejected the de-essentialising/deconstruction of gender. The journalist Volker Zastrow (2006) published an article in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), in which he argued that non-binary models of gender are 'anti-natural', that they are sexist against men, and that people who support those models are allegedly rebuilding society against the will of the people (Villa, 2017, p.103). Villa argues that the "assumption that 'gender' forces women (and men) out of their traditional roles and destructs the 'natural' family" is a "common belief shared by an important share of German society" (p.104). The publishing of Zastrow's article in a highly regarded German newspaper not only reflects but also perpetuates the mainstream everyday understanding of binary genders, which until today has been the basis of politics, culture and society (Hark and Villa, 2015, p.29). Zastrow's narrative has become an integral part of the far right's rhetoric (including the AfD and FPÖ) about gender (Hechler, 2019, p.100).

Indebted to Zastrow (Goetz and Mayer, 2022, p.98), former FPÖ politician and Austrian presidential candidate (in 2010) Barbara Rosenkranz published her book *MenschInnen. Gender Mainstreaming – Auf dem Weg zum geschlechtslosen Menschen* (Gender mainstreaming[39] – the way towards a genderless human) in 2008, further laying the groundwork for the FPÖ's current anti-gender discourse (Mayer and Sauer, 2017,

[38] The public rejection of the fluidity of gender was a response to the academic concept but also to EU gender equality policies, which I discuss further below.
[39] I discuss the meaning of gender mainstreaming in the next section.

p.25) which is clearly also present in the AfD's rhetoric (En et al., 2017). The book is embedded in German-speaking far-right discourses on gender (p.238). One of Rosenkranz's arguments is that there is a conspiracy to abolish the gender binary (p.236) which, according to Rosenkranz, is fundamental to humanity (p.238).[40] Rosenkranz (2008), for example, states that women need to be equally valued than men in society but that it is a fact that women need to be mothers if people want a future (p.9), as the low birth rate of Austrians without a *Migrationsgeschichte* (migration history) is a threat to the nation (p.11). Her framing of the genderless human plays into the fear and myth that the deconstruction of the gender binary means that humans cannot be women and men anymore.

Rosenkranz also mocks gender-inclusive language. *Mensch* (found in the book's title) is the German word for human (non-gendered) and Rosenkranz added the ending -*Innen* (indicating the female grammatical plural form) to ridicule the feminist call for gender-inclusive language (En et al., 2017, p.238). In West Germany and Austria, the usage of gender-inclusive language and the reproduction of gender biases due to exclusive male linguistic constructions have been the subject of many debates since the 1970s and 1980s (Günthner, 2019; Krondorfer, 2018). Several actors have been involved in these debates: far-right actors (including the AfD and FPÖ) and popular media have argued against gender-inclusive language. For them, changing language is a form of oppression of free speech and opinions (Günthner, 2019; Mayer and Goetz, 2019). Those actors appear to fear change and disregard studies illustrating how women and non-binary people are made invisible through the overrepresentation of men in language (Günthner, 2019, pp.573-574; Krondorfer, 2018, p.238).

Neoliberalism and the EU: The impacts on gender relations

Next to the academic deconstruction of the gender binary, Sauer (2021) argues that the neoliberal restructuring of Austrian and German societies from the 1980/90s onwards led to the disintegration of the so-called male-breadwinner model,[41] where women have been primarily caretakers while men have been in paid employment (p.68). Crucially, in the GDR, in average 90 percent of women worked outside of the home, but even though society was not built on the male-breadwinner model, women were often responsible for

[40] Stögner (2017) argues that the claim that there is a feminist conspiracy shows the entanglement of antifeminist and antisemitic thinking (p.138).
[41] Welfare state scholar Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990) characterised Austria and West Germany as an example for a conservative welfare state, which among others is defined as a traditional male-breadwinner system.

most of the care work, leading to a double burden (Scharff, 2012, pp.18-19). The part dismantling of the male-breadwinner model in Austria and West Germany led to transformations of gender relations, especially in middle class families in which women would no longer be mainly stay-at-home mothers (Sauer, 2021, p.67).[42] This reorientation to a dual earner family has not been fully implemented and puts a double burden on women (Hinrichs, 2010, pp.62-64). For example, in the early 2000s, the number of public childcare facilities in former West Germany was far below the EU average (Hajek and Dombrowski, 2022, p.2). Sauer (2020) argues that as a result of neoliberal transformations, the far right instrumentalises women's exhaustion and the fear of men that they cannot solely provide for their families anymore and therefore lose control and power (p.23).

In the wider European context, Dietze and Roth (2020) identify that with neoliberalism, which includes the "economisation and commodification of many areas of life, the erosion of the welfare state [and] the shift from solidarity to individual responsibility for oneself", the binary gender order has been immensely impacted (p.11). The EU and UN as supranational institutions have played a major role in transforming the political practices around politics for women and gender policies since their establishments.[43] Bianka Vida (2022) argues that gender equality was one of the EU's foundational norms. However, the EU's rhetoric differs from its practice, whereby gender equality policies are often not implemented by member states due to the privileging of the "neoliberal project" (p.4). Vida states that the EU's gender equality policies are embedded in the EU's neoliberal social model, "which disregards the social causes of gender inequality" (p.5). Liberal feminist strategies which ignore structural inequalities are hereby the only approaches to gender justice compatible with the economic model of the EU (Humniski, 2022, p.48). Interestingly, these are also the only approaches that some of my participants would support, while nevertheless, rejecting the EU's gender policies as they have allegedly gone too far.

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[42] Despite significant changes and modernisation in the last 30 years, Austria and West Germany are still built on the traditional male-breadwinner (female-homemaker) model, which often discourages women to work through financial incentives and lack of childcare possibilities (Rathgeb and Wiss, 2020, p.2; Obinger and Tálos, 2010).

[43] To include a detailed account of the EU's role is not in the scope of my work. For a good overview of the EU and its connection to gender equality projects or its poor implementation of those, see the edited volume by Vida (2022).

One of the EU's main gender policy instruments is gender mainstreaming.[44] The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) provides the following definition:

> Gender mainstreaming has been embraced internationally as a strategy towards realising gender equality. It involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination. (EIGE, as of 2022)

This definition clearly illustrates that gender mainstreaming is not about deconstructing the gender binary because it only states that equality between women and men is promoted, hence endorsing the gender binary and ignoring non-binary concerns. Additionally, Akaysha Humniski (2022) argues that the supposed transformative impact of the EU's gender mainstreaming is a myth (p.58). She illustrates that, especially after the economic crisis of 2008, the EU has prioritised its economic mandate (p.56) and even though gender mainstreaming is part of the EU's rhetoric its implementation is lacking or missing (p.58).

Despite the lack of gender mainstreaming in practice, for the far right in Austria and Germany (including the AfD and FPÖ), gender mainstreaming is depicted as one of the main enemies (Kováts, 2017, p.175). For example, Rosenkranz claims that gender mainstreaming attempts to 'mainstream' and institutionalise a fluid understanding of gender and force non-traditional roles upon everyone (En et al., 2017, p.239). Zastrow calls gender mainstreaming a lesbian conspiracy to change society (Hark and Villa, 2015, p.26). Here, gender mainstreaming is portrayed as having completely different aims to those named in the above definition. The myth-like quality and misunderstandings of gender mainstreaming provide the ideal target for the far right as they play into people's fears, as discussed above.

Getting to grips with terms: Antifeminism versus antigenderism

Within academic scholarship, different terms are used for the rejection of de-essentialising gender discussed above. In the following, I briefly define the terms

[44] The instrument of gender mainstreaming was advanced by the UN in the 1990s (Marx Ferree, 2012, p.178).

antifeminism and antigenderism, explaining why I use the term antifeminism to describe the phenomenon.[45]

Antifeminism tends not to be clearly defined when it is mentioned in academia or public debates and is used synonymously with sexism and misogyny,[46] which are often closely connected to antifeminism but are not the same (Goetz and Mayer, 2022, p.96). Antifeminism has a long tradition and is as old as feminism. Höcker et al. (2020) define antifeminism as a movement which organises against feminist emancipation attempts and which is therefore a direct counterreaction to feminisms (p.251; p.254). As such, there are many different forms of antifeminism, for example neoliberal antifeminism and conservative antifeminism. Supporters of neoliberal antifeminism would argue against feminism because women, who are not successful, are allegedly responsible for their own 'failure'. Supporters of conservative antifeminism would argue that feminism is a threat against the 'natural' traditional gender order (pp.255-56). Those conservative arguments are either based on a Christian point of view, where the gender order is given by God, or on a secular view, where the gender order is based on nature/biology (Goetz and Mayer, 2022, p.97).

Goetz and Mayer (2022) state that as part of far-right ideologies antifeminism is able "to adapt to changing circumstances, such as the increasing disavowal of open misogyny" (p.96). In other words, while the far right does not use the misogynist argument that women are worth less than men anymore, they maintain that women and men are complementary. For Goetz and Mayer, antifeminism is a:

> discursive ideology that is directed against feminism as a political project in general and that is often articulated with reference to specific gender equality policies (i.e., gender-sensitive language, anti-discrimination policies, LGBTQI-equality policies, etc.) (p.96).

Critical deconstructive analyses of gender relations "are reinterpreted as normative requirements that impose a 'free choice' of one's gender/sex and/or the

[45] For a more detailed account of the manifold facets of antifeminism see Eike Sanders et al. (2019) and Juliane Lang and Ulrich Peters (2018). Both books provide a good overview of antifeminism in Austria and Germany and show how antifeminism reaches from the 'centre' of society to the far right. For a detailed discussion of antigenderism in the far right and beyond see edited volume by Sabine Hark and Paula-Irene Villa (2015) (mainly German speaking context) and Roman Kuhar and David Patternotte (2017) (European context and transnational connections).

[46] Sexism: "Practices designed to (re-)construct a patriarchal gender order and to discriminate against women" (Goetz and Mayer, 2022, p.96). Misogyny: "The idea that women are worth less than men" (Goetz and Mayer, 2022, p.96).

‘genderless/sexless’ human.” In this way, feminism is blamed for being a dictatorial power (p.101).

Crucially, antifeminism is very much part of the ‘centre’ of society in Austria and Germany (for example, Schnabel et al., 2022). Today, antifeminism is mainly based on heteronormative arguments against the pluralisation of gender, sexuality and family life (Höcker et al., 2020, p.252). Based on this, antifeminism is not necessarily against ‘all women’, but it is against those who are not fulfilling heteronormative ideals (Sanders et al., 2019, p.23). Höcker et al.’s (2020) study on antifeminism in Germany shows that every fourth man and every tenth woman have a fully-fledged antifeminist worldview (p.264).[47] For cis women, this worldview is attractive as it offers a scapegoat for the difficulties which came with modern (neoliberal) gender transformations, and it offers a stable identity (p.267).

In the last decade, scholars have started to use the term *Antigenderismus* (antigenderism) in a German-speaking context (for example, Hark and Villa, 2015) or anti-gender movements in an international context (for example, Kováts, 2017) to analyse the vigorous rejection of gender as a concept. Hark and Villa (2015) argue that antigenderism is different to historical forms of antifeminism as antigenderism is not against the political idea of equality since the main argument is that women and men should have the same rights, but they are still naturally different. Instead, they argue, antigenderism is against the academic concept of gender (p.26) and against a so-called gender ideology (p.17).

Gender ideology is a vague notion of both the far right and the Catholic church, which both, for example, denounce policies of gender equality, sexual education, gender-inclusive language and public references to homosexuality. It was first deployed in the mid-1990s by the Vatican after the UN included gender in its declarations. However, it is also used by secular groups (Goetz and Mayer, 2022, p.97). Gender ideology is allegedly spread by elites (which, within their perspective, includes feminists) against the will of the people with the aim to abolish the ‘natural’ gender binary (Mayer et al., 2020, p.106). The Austrian and German discourses (which includes the AfD and FPÖ as actors) are part of the wider European discourse but essentially mirror each other and use a fluidity of meanings for gender ideology. These meanings cover the above discussed reasons for the rejection of the de-essentialising of gender (Mayer and Sauer, 2017, p.24). Interestingly,

[47] 47.3 percent of men and 28.7 percent of women agree at least to one antifeminist statement (p.262).

trans-exclusionary feminists started to use the term gender ideology, in their campaigns against trans people. They put "an emphasis on claiming 'biologically defined' notions of femaleness and womanhood over gender identity and social concepts of gender" (Pearce et al., 2020, p.681).

Internationally, research about anti-gender movements has grown since the mid-2010s and many scholars have discussed national contexts as well as transnational connections. Roman Kuhar and David Patternotte (2017) edited a volume on anti-gender campaigns in Europe, which are connected to the Church and the far right.[48] They illustrate that the rejection of gender is a symbolic glue between several actors (far right, church, conservative right wing etc.) internationally (p.13). Eszter Kováts (2017) investigates the emergence of anti-gender movements in Europe, their differences, and connections. She argues that anti-gender actors in all European contexts use the narrative that a gender ideology is imposed by supranational institutions (for example, the EU and UN) (p.176). Furthermore, anti-gender discourse is strengthened by a reluctance to translate the word gender into national languages (p.177), which makes it easier for anti-gender actors. Indeed, the term gender is known in many languages but often not understood (Strube, 2019, p.25).

While the scholarship on antigenderism/anti-gender movements provides a valuable insight into the above-discussed views, I argue that resistance to the concept of gender should be defined as a new form of antifeminism, which is still embedded in older antifeminist discourses. Several scholars (for example Goetz and Mayer, 2022; Blum and Rahner, 2020; Schmincke, 2020; Sauer, 2019b) argue that antigenderism is just a contemporary version of antifeminism and reveals the flexibility of antifeminism (Goetz and Mayer, 2022, p.96). As Blum and Rahner (2020) argue in their work on German antifeminism, antifeminism is always a counter reaction against feminist achievements. Many feminisms today focus on the vision that in a feminist future "we are liberated from the gender binary's strangling grip" (Olufemi, 2020, p.9). With this in mind, rejecting the deconstruction of gender is not just rejecting an academic concept but a feminist vision.

The core beliefs and connected fears of antifeminism are persistent in history. Though today the focus lies on the gender binary as alleged natural fact, antifeminism still counteracts feminist emancipation. While most antifeminists do not openly disagree with legal rights for women anymore, they still argue that women are complementary to

[48] Further work on the involvement of the church and the far right includes Corredor (2019) and Strube et al. (2021).

men and therefore are 'naturally' less able to fulfil certain roles, which leads to inequalities. Furthermore, antifeminism also acts against the feminist emancipation of queer, non-binary and trans people. Antifeminist actors therefore have simply re-oriented their communication claiming to represent 'real' women's interest (Goetz and Mayer, 2022, p.96). For them, this means they solely represent the interests of cis women because they adhere to their arbitrarily-stated gender norms.

While research on gender, antifeminism, and antigenderism and the far right has grown immensely in the last decade, the focus of this scholarship has been primarily on the official discourses of far-right parties and other organisations that are part of antifeminist movements, which reject the de-essentialising of gender. By contrast, the views of 'common' members of those parties and organisation have barely been explored. My research thus adds to the jigsaw by depicting the views of 'common' members.

Femonationalism and 'sexual exceptionalism'

Despite their own traditional views on gender roles and their antifeminism, there is a long-persistent racist narrative in the far right (and wider society), in which the 'other' (Muslims and immigrants) is presented as a threat to European women and Europe is presented as superior to other cultures because of its alleged achievements in gender equality. The far right uses this apparent contradiction to present itself "as emancipated against a racialized other, characterized as backward. At the same time, it makes further feminist policies, such as equal opportunity and equality polices, seem obsolete or even destructive" (Hajek and Dombrowski, 2022, p.2). I first discuss the theoretical frameworks that address those discourses before illustrating how they apply to the AfD and FPÖ.

With reference to France, Italy and Netherlands, Farris (2017) developed the concept of *femonationalism,*[49] which provides a theoretical framework for positioning the claim to act for women's rights in racist discourses. The core of the concept is that three different groups (the far right, certain outspoken feminists and neoliberal advocates) all "invoke women's rights to stigmatise Muslim men in order to advance their own political objectives" (p.3). They present European gender relations as superior and sexism and patriarchal structures as the sole problem of Muslim cultures (p.2). This is a discourse which is deeply embedded in the history of colonialism (see for example, Dietze, 2019, p.32). While other scholars rely on concepts such as instrumentalisation, 'collusion' or

[49] The concept of femonationalism is based on Jasbir Puar's (2007) concept of *homonationalism*. For more context, see edited volume by Angeliki Sifaki et al. (2022).

‘alliance’ to describe the relationship between all three actors, Farris argues that their encounter is a convergence (p.6). Convergence implies that the actors are not solely instrumentalising women’s rights, they are not (necessarily) in a conscious alliance with each other, and they do not share a broader political agenda. However, they agree on one topic: the promotion of racist and nationalist policies in ‘the name of women’s rights’ (Calderaro, 2022, p.88). Nationalist, xenophobic and racist themes are therefore entangled with themes of gender and sexual equality (p.86). The entanglement and involvement of feminism in those discourses is not new and the role of Western feminism in these gendered/racialised frames has been discussed, for example, in postcolonial studies (p.89).

The far right, feminists and neoliberals have different overall agendas, which raises the question of “what interest [they] might […] have in endorsing a type of politics that is (or appears to be) at odds with at least certain aspects of their political agendas?” (Farris, 2017, p.7) The far right opportunistically uses “a vague mainstream idea of gender equality” to “contribute to the consolidation of the nationalist project” (p.8). Anti-Muslim feminist actors fight sexism and patriarchy but define those as almost exclusively an issue of the Muslim ‘other’ (p.2). Finally, neoliberal actors are part of a political-economic formation that institutionalises the femonationalist ideology in politics and society. According to Farris, the driving force for those actors is to lobby for the ‘emancipation’ of Muslim and migrant women while those women are then pushed into domestic care work and low paid jobs, which are jobs feminists wanted to ‘liberate’ women from (p.15). The last actor (neoliberal advocates) is irrelevant for my work, but the convergence of the other two actors can be spotted within my analyses. My participants use feminist language which is entangled with their anti-Muslim stances while at the same time referring to feminists like Alice Schwarzer, who in the German-speaking context is widely considered to be the most well-known feminist with anti-Muslim views. The core of the convergence between the far right and feminists is deeply contradictory as it combines non-emancipatory ideologies like anti-Muslim stances and racism with emancipatory driving factors like fighting sexism and patriarchy (p.9).

While Gabriele Dietze (2019) agrees that the concept of femonationalism is useful in describing the transformation of some feminists to anti-Muslim advocates, for example Schwarzer (p.118), she criticises other aspects of the concept. First, she argues that the convergence would imply that all far-right actors necessarily would include neoliberal policies to amplify their anti-Muslim stances, which is not the case for the AfD in former

East German states, where the party supports a welfare chauvinism (p.106). I disagree with Dietze's critique because Farris states that this convergence is not necessarily conscious and does not mean that the actors work together. Second, Dietze also criticises the fact that at least in Germany the idea that Muslim women are less targeted by the discourses and are claimed to be protected is not prevalent (p.107). Most of my participants, who used anti-Muslim narratives entangled with calls for women's rights, did not refer to Muslim women but to an endangered Austrian/German society, which will allegedly lose all the 'already achieved' women's rights due to Islam. In other words, their narratives include the idea of a 'sexual exceptionalism' of the Global North. Dietze uses the terms *sexual exceptionalism* and *ethnosexism* to define those discourses, which are based on the idea that one's 'own' culture is superior, and this is illustrated through the supposed 'progressiveness' of sexual freedom and gender equality (p.20). The discourse of an alleged superiority is part of a 'deep defence' mechanism, in which the sexist and patriarchal structures of the allegedly superior society can be denied through being projected onto the Muslim culture (p.39). Again, my interviews clearly show narratives of sexual exceptionalism, which I discuss further in my second analysis chapter.

In Germany and Austria, the AfD and FPÖ are both actors in the production of anti-Muslim racist propaganda, which is entangled with discourses on supposedly achieved gender equality (for example, Bulla, 2021; Goetz, 2021a, p.132; Sauer, 2021, p.72; Dietze, 2020; Berg, 2019, p.79). While those discourses have a long tradition in both countries, New Year's Eve (NYE) in Cologne 2015/16 has become a persistent reference point for those discourses in Germany, Austria and beyond (Hajek and Dombrowski, 2022, p.2). *Cologne* refers to the sexual assaults of hundreds of women on NYE by men who were mainly asylum seekers or had an unclear legal status (p.5). The far right's interpretation of the assaults led to a racist instrumentalisation of women's rights. It is crucial that all sexual violence be condemned, but if it is racialised and assigned to one group which is depicted as inherently violent, that needs to be critiqued as well. Sexual violence did not begin only when refugees arrived (Sanders et al., 2019, p.125) and "misogynist and often sexualized violence is part of German normality – not only against women, but also against queers, gays and lesbians, trans and intersex individuals, children and adolescents of all sexes" (Hark and Villa, 2020, pp.ix-x). Eike Sanders et al. (2019) state that the FPÖ's racist discourses *before* Cologne illustrate that the discourses *after* Cologne built on an existing frame and a long tradition (p.119). The

AfD has been mobilising similar discourses, at least since Cologne (Sanders et al., 2019, p.121), and became a key site for the reproduction of anti-Muslim propaganda in Germany (Berg, 2019, p.79).

Cologne can be described as a turning point in public support for as well as public discourses towards the right; many women were mobilised by the right afterwards (Sanders et al., 2019, pp.121-124). Support for anti-Muslim discourses and the denigration of Muslim culture is prevalent in wider society in Austria and Germany; as Benjamin Opratko (2019) illustrates, many journalists in Austria who describe themselves as liberal, progressive, and who distance themselves from the far right, also reproduce those discourses (p.14). Hannah Voegele (2019) argues that far-right actors used the media coverage of Cologne to 'suddenly' engage in issues regarding women's rights and present themselves as defenders of sexual freedom (p.125). In Germany, mainstream newspapers used pre-existing images to frame the own culture as advanced in comparison to the 'other' culture (p.128; also see Schuster, 2021, p.21). Political and media discussions suddenly included feminist topics and, for example, the sexual criminal law, which was long proposed by feminists, was passed and received mainstream support in Germany (Voegele, 2019, p.127). Hark and Villa (2020) state that "'Cologne' signifies even more […]. It marks the revival of a morally, virulent 'us' and 'them' distinction and the (re)activation of a racially charged every day 'common sense'" (p.25). Cologne became the synonym for violence by Arab and North African men (p.38) and the alleged proof that multiculturalism does not work (p.vii), which played into the AfD and FPÖ's discourse.

The AfD and FPÖ's femonationalist discourses have been researched in-depth (for example Hajek and Dombrowski, 2022; Goetz, 2021a), but the perspectives of 'common' members are missing yet again in scholarship. Some of my participants were mobilised by those same discourses and their narratives provide new insights into the topic.

The final jigsaw pieces: Research about far-right women

There is a vast amount of research about women in politics in Austria/Germany and beyond (for example, Krimmer and Simpson, 2019; Krook and Childs, 2010). Pamela Paxton and Melanie Hughes (2014), for example, discuss why women's representation in politics matters, even though women might not act for women. In general, studies show, they argue, that women tend more towards the left, which is more likely to substantively

represent women. However, women's tendency to the left should not lead to the invisibility of far-right women. Anna Gwiazda (2021) states:

> While much of the existing literature on women and politics shows a positive correlation between feminist representation and the presence of leftist parties, more research is needed on the parties of the right. [...] Conservative female representatives claim to represent conservative women better than feminists do. (p.1)

In research on women and politics it is, of course, important to be aware that women are not a homogeneous group who always act in the interest of *all* women (p.4). While far right women are often believed to act against women's interests, they do not act against *all* women's interests, and researching their narratives is crucial for gaining knowledge about their reasons for joining the far right and their experiences within it.

In the following, I discuss existing scholarship on far-right women in Austria, Germany and beyond. I start by examining research that identifies far-right parties (including the AfD and FPÖ) as men's parties with a growing number of women supporters, which is often depicted as a paradox. I then discuss the development of research on far-right women in Austria and Germany. With reference to different contexts, I finally investigate several different approaches for researching far-right women (for example, social media analysis and interviews).

The paradox? Men's parties, but…

Far-right parties including the AfD and FPÖ are often called *Männerparteien* (men's parties), because they are supported by more men and their policies seem to be directed towards men (Goetz, 2021a, p.127). As a result, the participation of women in the far right is often defined as a paradox. Judith Goetz argues that the higher the level in the FPÖ's hierarchy the lower the number of women. Around 20 percent of FPÖ's parliamentary seats are occupied by women, while in 2019, 40 percent of the FPÖ seats were occupied by members of the all-male German nationalist *Burschenschaften*, which illustrates the dominance of men's alliances in the party (p.128). Klammer and Goetz (2017) state that "even in the FPÖ, women consistently occupy important political functions" (p.82), but despite the increase of women in the FPÖ within the last two decades, the party is still dominated by men and entangled with the German nationalist *Burschenschaften* (p.83).

Birgit Sauer (2020) considers the far right as *Männerparteien* (mainly in the Austrian and German context) and argues that its parties are based on masculinist identity politics. Far-right parties use the alleged endangering of masculinity due to neoliberal transformations to rally for men's support. The heroic masculinity,[50] which is supported by the far right, is not just attractive for men but also some women who are tired of the neoliberal double burden, which, Sauer suggests, shows how women's involvement is not necessarily contradictory (p.25).

Sauer argues that the common assumption that the far right is a men's domain has changed over the last decade due to a growing number of women in leadership positions. For example, because of Marie Le Pen's leadership of the French far-right party *Rassemblement National* (RN) (former Front National, FN), more women vote for her party (p.25). Sauer states:

> This 'feminisation' strategy or strategy of 'de-demonization' allows right-wing parties to counter or relativize the image of being men's parties and to attract female voters. Nevertheless, these female leaders struggle with a masculinist party structure and thus have to perform their own form of political masculinity. (p.26)

Sauer's argument that far-right parties have masculinist party structures means that the parties and their spaces are dominated by traditional masculine behaviour, which complicates the access for women and lowers their substantive representation (p.27). The usage of political masculinity by far-right women leaders allows them nevertheless to occupy important functions in the far right.[51] They adopt masculine behaviour, which is associated with politics, to fit into the political spaces (Starck and Sauer, 2014, p.6; Worth, 2021) which in turn allows them to follow their own aims in those spaces (Sanders et al., 2019, p.144).

Women also face gender-specific barriers in other political parties in Austria and Germany as political culture is still based on collective historical traditions that were established by men (Dubslaff, 2021, p.18; Schöler-Macher, 1994, p.36). Elisabeth Krimmer and Patricia Simpson (2019) describe this as follows: "Western civilization is deeply marked by a long history of misogynist prejudices against women in positions of

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[50] Based on protecting allegedly weak/vulnerable women, who are important for the reproduction of the nation (Sauer, 2020, p.25)

[51] Starck and Sauer (2014) define political masculinity as "any kind of masculinity that is constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by 'political players'." (p.6)

power" (p.1). Meanwhile Puwar (2004a), who criticises feminist political theorists for excluding questions of 'race', has developed the concept of 'space invaders' to describe the positions of women and people from racialised minorities in the British parliament. 'Politics' is still based on norms of 'whiteness' and masculinity. Women and racialised minorities must negotiate their own contradictory role/s; women must hereby legitimate themselves as politicians and as women, while certain white men easily adopt the role of the politician. My third analysis chapter sheds light on this topic and following a critical assessment of the applicability of Puwar's 'space invaders' concept for a group of far-right women, I apply the concept to my interview data. The AfD and FPÖ are still based on masculine traditions and have fewer active women than other parties. The struggle of women leaders in these parties has been discussed in research (see further below), but how women members on lower hierarchical levels negotiate their roles in the masculine dominated AfD and FPÖ has not been discussed in research before and is part of my last analysis chapter.

While the AfD and FPÖ are both *Männerparteien*, both parties have a women's organisation. The AfD's women's organisation *Frauen in der Alternative e.V.* (women in the alternative, FridA; founded in 2018) has so far received very marginal attention in the AfD and in scholarship and none of my participants mentioned FridA. Most of the women who have joined FridA are not in leadership positions. However, individual women in higher positions in the AfD lobby for women's issues in the party (Sanders et al., 2019, pp.139-141). While the influence of the FPÖ's women's organisation *Initiative Freiheitliche Frauen* (IFF; Initiative of FPÖ women, established in 1994[52]) is also limited, it is very strong in some regional areas (p.143). Both organisations state clearly that they are not against the men of the party, thereby expressing some anxiety at being seen as potential 'man-haters' because they are establishing a women's organisation. While most far-right women argue that they are equal partners in their parties or organisations, Sanders et al. state that it would be interesting to know if some of those women are frustrated because of the masculinist party structures (p.177). My research sheds some light on this question (Chapter 5).

[52] The IFF was only established in 1994 under Jörg Haider's leadership. He was known for his misogynist statements about women's ineligibility for politics (Rösslhumer, 1999, p.8), but he understood the strategic value of including more women into the party. After women's activism in the 1970/80s women's political involvement seemed to be inescapable even for the male-dominated far right (p.9).

The origins of research on far-right women in Austria and Germany

Research on the far right was exclusively focused on men as ungendered political actors until the end of the 1980s, when research on far-right women started to become more popular (Blee and McGee Deutsch, 2012, p.1). Dietze (2020) points out that it was feminist researchers who put research with far-right women on the agenda. This included Blee's (1991) research on women in the KuKluxKlan of the 1920s and Bacchetta and Power's (2002) edited volume on far-right women from a global perspective.

In the German-speaking context, research on women, gender and the far right started in the late 1980s (simultaneously with global research in the field) and chronologically followed the *Historikerinnenstreit* (women historians' quarrel), in which feminist historians argued about women's role in Nazi crimes (Dubslaff, 2021, p.5).[53] Feminist historian Claudia Koonz (1987) brought forward the argument that women should also be seen as perpetrators who participated in Nazi crimes, while feminists like Gisela Bock claimed that women are *friedfertig* (pacifistic/peaceful) and therefore only victims of Nazi crimes (Dubslaff, 2021, p.5). The idea that women are *friedfertig* is barely used in feminist research anymore as it is based on an essentialist understanding of gender. However, in wider society and media women are still often portrayed as *friedfertig* (Lang, 2017, p.72). The *Historikerinnenstreit* was followed by feminist activists' demands that women's involvement in the far right should be taken seriously, which was accompanied by feminist research that aimed to make far-right women visible. Koonz (1987) herself conducted archival research on National Socialist women and illustrated their active involvement in horrific Nazi crimes.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, empirical research on women in the far right was conducted in Germany, which investigated women's voting behaviour, attitudes and far-right membership (Goetz, 2019a, p.27; Bitzan, 2017, p.68).[54] According to Valérie Dubslaff (2021),[55] this can be attributed to the rise of far-right activities and violence after German reunification in the 1990s. Research included empirical studies on reasons for women's far-right attitudes (for example, Siller, 1997; Birsl, 1994) or life history stories of far-right girls and women (for example, Köttig, 2004). In Austria, there were fewer studies on women in the far right in the 1990s and they were based on the German

[53] For a more detailed overview on the chronological development of research on gender and the far right in Austria and Germany, see Dubslaff (2021), Goetz (2019a) and Bitzan (2017).
[54] I discuss some examples for this research in the next section.
[55] Through archival research, Dubslaff (2021) investigates women in the NPD between 1964 and 2020 and explores why, when and how women have supported the NPD.

examples, for instance Maria Rösslhumer's (1999) study on women in the FPÖ (discussed in a later section). According to Goetz (2019a), Rösslhumer's study did not provide new outcomes and only confirmed previous assumptions about far-right women's attitudes. In contrast, I argue that empirical research confirming previous assumptions provides new outcomes because it empirically supports those assumptions (p.34).

In the early 2000s, feminist scholarly attention on the far right shifted from women to gender studies.[56] The focus on women as actors remained an important topic but a sole focus on women was called into question. Goetz (2019a) states that feminist researchers in the field agreed that it is crucial to not just consider women but rather overall gender relations (p.36). The *Forschungsnetzwerk Frauen und Rechtsextremismus* (research network women and right-wing extremism), established in 2000 by Austrian and German feminist researchers and which still exists today (Dubslaff, 2021, p.8), discussed challenges posed by research about far-right women. They argued, for instance that it is crucial not to overstate gender differences between women and men in the far right or to ignore the heterogeneity of far-right women themselves (Goetz, 2019a, p.36).

Birgit Rommelspacher's (2011) discussion of gender-specific attitudes and motives of women and men in the German far right is a good example of research that does not overstate gender differences. Based on previous studies (for example, Bitzan, 2000), she argues that women, even though they are less active in far-right activities (especially in violence), have far-right attitudes as often as men and are not more *friedfertig* (Rommelspacher, 2011, p.45). Rommelspacher considers cultural factors and argues that far-right women and men tend to discriminate against migrants to assert their own dominance, but due to gendered structures women and men assert their dominance in different areas – in the case of women in their everyday life, while men assert their own dominance in public life (p.53). Her conclusion is that women and men's tendency towards the far right depends on their own interests in increasing their hierarchical position and dominance, which leads to exclusions of the 'other' and racist attitudes. Gender-specific explanations alone cannot explain these attitudes as individual social positions and life situations define which interests and 'problems' are addressed, and also which resources are used to approach those (p.66).

Overall there is less research on women in the far right in Austria than in Germany (Goetz, 2019a) and since the mid-2000s research overall has been patchy in Austria and

[56] This followed an earlier shift in academia from women to gender studies.

Germany. The media interest in far-right women in Austria has flared up occasionally and sensationalised the topic in newspaper articles or other media platforms, but only in recent years (mid-2010s) academic publication increased again about women and gender relations and discourses in the FPÖ (p.40). Additionally, there has been a recent increase in research in the German context especially about the AfD's views on gender, sexuality, and antifeminism (Dubslaff, 2021, p.8). I discuss the current research approaches in the following section.

Three approaches to research on far-right women

Far-right women's public narratives: From print media to social media

Many researchers in the German context and beyond explore women's narratives through publicly available material. Renate Bitzan's (2000) study on far-right women's self-images in Germany (1985-1993) is a ground-breaking study in the field and influences many studies today. She discusses far-right women's own narratives about their worldviews, which includes their views on women's roles and gender roles but also on topics that are not gender specific. Bitzan decided against conducting interviews as she wanted to include the qualitative narratives of many women and not just a few. Therefore, she investigates articles published by women in far-right print media (p.13). Bitzan's empirical study shows that women who write for the far right do not necessarily write about 'women's topics' (p.95); their national consciousness is often stronger than their awareness of 'being a woman' (p.101). The topics Bitzan discussed from three decades ago are still, in part, relevant and overlap with the topics I discovered in my analysis: stories about violent migrants (p.102) and the rejection of feminism (p.195) for example. The term 'equality' seems to be important for many of Bitzan's far-right women authors (p.214), but Bitzan argues that far-right women cannot be feminists as their ideologies contradict feminist claims; however, she identified many far-right women as anti-sexist racists (p.313).

Based on Bitzan's study and also within the German context, Julia Haas (2022) investigates Identitarian[57] women's self-images and analyses the differences and similarities between the women's images (p.18). She argues that Identitarian women are often 'influencers' and produce a great deal of social media material. Therefore, their profiles and accounts provide a good data source to understand their ways of thinking and acting and they present the women's own words verbatim. She argues further that

[57] The Identitarian movement is a far-right group in Austria, Germany and beyond, which especially attracts younger members.

interviews would not have provided any additional results (p.19). Whilst I do agree that the profiles and accounts are valuable data sources, I argue that interviews do indeed provide some additional outcomes. Haas herself argues that social media posts are well-constructed self-presentations, which are supposed to appear as a deep insight into their personal lives, and yet only show what the account holder permits to be public (p.64) and are directed towards a particular audience. My analysis shows that there are several overlaps between Haas's work and my participants' narratives, which includes the rejection of feminisms (p.116), which are allegedly going too far (p.117), and reference to the violence of migrant men (p.158).

Haas identifies three different forms of femininity which are used by different Identitarian women, including a conservative femininity, a rebellious femininity and a modern femininity (conforming) (pp.197-199). The diversity of self-images is not a new phenomenon and was already visible in Bitzan's research but there are some new elements in Haas's study (p.209). For example, social media as a medium offers women new ways to present themselves, and to cultivate new self-images. One of the Identitarian woman posts pictures of herself with tattoos and short hair and defyingly argues that her fellow group members should not judge her solely by her physical appearance (p.93). In this way, she uses feminist arguments. However, at the same time, she refers to her femininity and asserts that her self-image does not question the heteronormative values of the far right (p.88).

AfD women's public discourses are discussed in several studies, but I am not aware of any similar studies in the Austrian context.[58] Sprengholz (2021), for instance, explores AfD women delegates' speeches, in which they use what he defines as 'post-feminist common sense' narratives, including the idea that equality between 'naturally' different women and men has been achieved (p.487). One of Sprengholz's main arguments overlaps with my line of argument in Chapter 4. He states that most of the AfD women delegates do not claim that they are feminists, but they use their own form of postfeminism to argue for equality and distance themselves from what they call 'pseudofeminism' (p.496).

Juliane Lang (2022) studies far-right women in Germany and investigates the diversity of women's self-presentation and how they position themselves in the far right

[58] There are many more studies discussing far-right women's public discourses in different European contexts (for example, Pettersson, 2017)

(including organisations, grassroots, parties etc.).[59] She explores the performance of femininity of women functionaries of the far right and analyses speeches, blogs, media interviews and articles by women in far-right magazines (between 2013-2018). Lang discovers that far-right women do not question the gender binary but use a diversity of femininities (p.193), which include women who use their womanhood to underline their expertise for so-called women issues (for example, family and social policies), women who mention their roles as mothers in connection to their politics or women who do not discuss their own womanhood at all (pp.194-195). All of them present themselves as self-confident and active women (p.197). In my analysis, I will also demonstrate that my participants use different forms of femininities to balance their roles as women and party members/politicians.

Schuster-Craig (2021) analyses the "politicized form of performative transphobia mobilized in Germany by right-wing women" in the AfD (p.141). She looks at the AfD parliamentarian speeches and argues that those speeches mirror a classical performance of being on a stage but at the same time their speeches are performative as they:

> use their roles as politicians to shore up their identities as right-wing actors, to strengthen the claims they make in public space, and to convince themselves and their audience that their gender does not matter. (p.141)

Schuster-Craig identifies contradictions in the speeches, for example, that they deny the gender difference and discrimination in their party as well as the importance of their own gender in the party, while the binary genders seem to be such an important part of the AfD's ideology (p.143). The AfD women use trans people as scapegoats to defend their gender essentialism (p.148).

I argue that the above studies provide a good insight into women's public narratives, but are less likely to diverge from the far right's official discourses. Interviews provide therefore a good opportunity to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of women's narratives about their experiences in the far right.

Women as leaders of the far right

In her article about the gender politics of the FPÖ, Goetz (2021a) includes a section on important women in the party and argues that society still seems to be surprised that

[59] Some of these are AfD women, however, she also includes other women, who are for example active in the same discursive space as the AfD on social media (Lang, 2022, p.193).

women are important figures in the far right, even though they have been so for a long time (p.132). This feeling of surprise might be the reason why research focuses on those very prominent women. Additionally, Dietze (2020) argues that women in leading positions in the far right "provide a pretty face to radical and racist positions, they perform modernity by their very existence" (p.156). While there is some truth to this argument, women in the far right cannot be reduced to this role and their own perceptions of their role need to be discussed as well.

Birgit Meyer (2019) analyses the roles of women leaders in the AfD and RN, looking at party programmes, elections, and women's public speeches. She identifies different roles that women leaders play in the parties and how they increase the parties' appeal. For example, some women leaders are reconcilers and softeners, which means that they can build bridges between different views in the parties; others are role models for other women; and the attractiveness of some women leaders is used as an asset in election campaigns and other public events (p.80). Niels Spierings (2020) also discusses women leaders' roles (in different European contexts), which overlaps with Meyer's conclusions. Many far-right leaders use images of motherhood and care to explain their activism and present themselves (via social media and speeches) as 'good' women. Others present themselves more as a self-made women and strong leaders, who acknowledge the achievements of earlier feminisms but reject contemporary feminisms. In general, Spierings argues that women leaders often do not fulfil the ideal picture of a woman painted by the far right. Far-right parties use ambivalent messaging about women to attract supporters of traditional gender roles and women who do divert from those roles (p.47).

Other researchers focus on individual far-right women leaders. Lisa Downing (2018) explores the roles of Marine Le Pen in the former FN and Anne Marie Waters in the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) (until 2017). One of her conclusions is that Le Pen "embodies a gendered hybrid of roles or archetypes representing both tradition and reform" (p.372). Le Pen is popular in research about far-right women. For instance, Alexandra Snipes and Cas Mudde (2019) analyse how Le Pen is framed in media outlets and Gudrun Hentges and Kristina Nottbohm (2017) compare the leadership of Marine Le Pen and former AfD leader Frauke Petry. Additionally, Susi Meret et al. (2017) compare the far-right leaders Pia Kjaersgaard (Danish People's Party), Siv Jensen (Progress Party, Norway) and Marine Le Pen. They address the "style, rhetoric, discursive strategies and agenda positions", how gender is constructed by the women leaders and

how they are presented by the mainstream media (p.123). One of their conclusions is that all three women use different strategies: Kjaersgaard presents herself as a loving mother and caring woman, Jensen as a self-made woman, and Le Pen stresses her belonging to a new and younger entrepreneurial generation (p.144). This illustrates that they all address the so-called 'double bind of femininity' differently. The double bind, which I also identify in my research (see Chapter 5), describes the impossible requirement for women in politics to look 'tough enough' as politician but also present the role of being 'caring and loving women' (p.125). Research about women leaders provides valuable insight on women's different roles; however, the sole focus of research on leaders runs in the danger of presenting women in the far right as exceptional and sensational cases, which the example of Le Pen illustrates.

Christina Xydias (2020) discusses AfD women's origin stories (explanations for their membership), which overlaps to some extent with my analysis of paths to membership in Chapter 3. However, Xydias only focuses on women in senior positions and parliamentary seats (state and federal).[60] Her research is based primarily on the women's accounts through media, personal websites, speeches and interviews with journalists, but she also includes four interviews that she conducted with women members as additional data. Xydias's outcomes are, for example, that women were less likely than men to have been party members in other parties previous to their AfD membership and were more likely to jump into office quickly after joining the party, suggesting the party's need for women members (they were 'wooed' into politics). Many of the women emphasise their own motherhood as a way to explain their membership, which several of my participants also mentioned. Xydias argues that AfD women are likely to use stereotypical gendered origin stories. She is aware that "public figures make choices about which details to include or exclude in their accounts, and they may choose to misrepresent details" (p.117). However, her usage of the additional interviews is very limited and a critical reflection of the differences between data that is publicly available and research interviews is missing.

Interview research

Interview research with far-right women is essential for understanding those women's attitudes, motives and experiences (Blee, 2017, p.201). As stated in the introduction, Blee has conducted a great deal of interview research with right-wing women in organised

[60] In February 2020, 13 percent of the AfD's federal and state parliamentary seats were held by women (Xydias, 2020, p.109).

racism in the US (for example, 1991; 1998) and has been a pioneer in the field.[61] She argues that most researchers focus on leaders who are trained to talk to people and repeat slogans, but it is important to look at members at the lower levels (2002a, p.5).

Blee and Annette Linden (2012) compare women members of far-right parties/movements in the Netherlands and the US. Through their interviews, they were able to identify four different 'paths' for women into the far right. The path of the 'revolutionaries' is defined by the wish to change the world to match their far-right ideology. The 'wanderers' are searching for a political home but are less ideologically involved. The 'converts' argue that they wrongly suffered and therefore realised that the far right is the only option to change this 'wrong'. Finally, the 'compliants' mainly join because of their family or friends. In order to maintain those relationships, they comply with their friends/families' ideologies (pp.101-102). Linden identifies the last path as the most likely path in the Netherlands. Interestingly this path was barely mentioned by my participants. Despite all the differences between far-right women in both countries, Blee and Linden identify that they are all disappointed about how women are treated by the men in the far right (p.112), a narrative which only a few of my participants shared.

Interview research with women on the far right in Germany was much more prevalent in the 1990s and early 2000s (for example, Siller, 1997; Brück, 2005).[62] Britta Ruth Büchner (1995) interviewed eight women members of the REP to identify their background and motives for joining the party, which included exploring their family backgrounds, political developments, personal paths, involvement of their partners and their life aims. For most of the women, gender-specific topics are not their main reasons for supporting the far right and some even seem to oppose the party's stance on women's issues (p.16). Büchner interviewed grassroot members of the party and, like me, told her participants that she had a different political opinion. Her research shows that interviews provide the possibility to explore reasons for joining the far right beyond political, socio-

[61] Rebecca E. Klatch's (1987) research about women of the New Right in the US has also been pioneer research in the field. With interview research, she explored the questions how those women look at the world, what their motivations are and how they see themselves and concluded that women in the New Right are not a homogeneous group (p.4).

[62] Gertrud Siller conducted six interviews with young women, who are not part of any political movement. Her aim is to examine the congruence between specific gendered life experiences and far-right attitudes. Her conclusion is that women who fulfil either very stereotypical feminine or masculine roles are more likely to have far-right attitudes (p.247). Brigitte Brück analyses seven interviews with far-right women in leading positions in Germany, France and Italy in the 1990s (p.13). The interviews were conducted for a documentary but she was allowed to use them for her research. The women were asked about their entry into and their position in the far right. The focus of the interviews was their views on family, demographic policies, women and gender equality, far-right parties, migration, National Socialism, the nation state and Europe (pp.52-57).

economic and cultural explanations. While all of those dimensions were part of the interviews, participants also included their key moments which led to their membership (p.45). Their stories illustrate that there are no straightforward explanations for individual membership, as reasons and life paths are permeated with contradictions and crossways (p.67), which are not possible to explore via public discourses and interviews with women leaders. As with my own research, Büchner identifies all of her participants' wishes to be seen as normal people (p.178) and, even though I disagree with my participants' political ideology, I argue that it is important to not describe them as exceptional cases, who are not part of our social normality.

As far as I am aware, one of the only pieces of in-depth interview research with far-right women in Austria (FPÖ members) was conducted by Rösslhumer (1999).[63] Inspired by Büchner's research, she conducted fourteen interviews with women who have or had higher positions in the FPÖ (p.159). Rösslhumer argues that the lifestyles of the interviewed women are very diverse (p.62). Crucially, she points out that FPÖ women profit from the achievements of the women's movement, but their aims are not in line with a real equality between women and men (p.65). Rösslhumer argues that after decades of public discussions about equality, initiated by the women's movement, misogynistic and antifeminist attitudes are not as easily disclosed anymore without a backlash (p.17). In regard to this, she refers to the establishment of the FPÖ's women's organisation IFF in 1994, which she argues was part of the FPÖ election tactic (p.9). There are several similarities between Rösslhumer's and my own research outcomes despite the decades in between and I will pick these parallels up in my analysis chapters. For example, her participants mention their sense of justice as a driving force for their active membership and they present themselves as the 'defenders of the weak' (p.99). One crucial difference between our research is that the FPÖ women interviewed by Rösslhumer mentioned their parents and family as crucial factors in their political upbringing (p.67), which was not a narrative that my interviewees referred to within our conversations.

Interview research on far-right women in Austria and Germany had become rare by the early 2000s, because many Austrian and German feminist researchers in the field started to reject interview research. The *Forschungsnetzwerk Frauen und Rechtsextremismus* made a statement in 2019 about the ethical challenges of research in the field, based on the case of Alice Blum, who conducted field research about the far-

[63] Another example: Christiane Mörth (2012) discussed in her Master thesis the political orientation of FPÖ women on local level (Steiermark).

right Identitarian movement. During her research, Blum started a relationship with a well-known right-wing extremist and participated at far-right events without disclosing her identity as a researcher. The *Forschungsnetzwerk*, which previously had close contact with Blum, distanced itself from her. I discuss the methodological implications of this in the next chapter. Here I only want to explain why there has not been much interview research on far-right women in the German-speaking context. While I agree with some of the *Forschungsnetzwerk*'s arguments, I conducted interview research in a critical and sensitive way and was able to fill a crucial scholarly gap through doing so. The network states that most knowledge gains can be reached via archival research, research of far-right media and social media platforms; however, the research about public narratives discussed above has some gaps, which can only be filled with interviews.

Interview research in other contexts illustrates further the value of this kind of study as long as it is conducted from a critical and ethical perspective. For example, Mulinari and Neergaard (2017) conducted research on women (and specifically migrant women) in the far-right party Sweden Democrats (SD) and were able to analyse how women in the SD present and act on their identities in connection with their membership in a racist party. Their critical perspective allowed them to conduct ethical research, which is built on antiracist and postcolonial feminist scholarship (p.13). Their focus lies on 'ordinary/normal members', who do not necessarily have a leadership function. These are not the members who participate in public discourses and therefore are not trained in communicating their membership to outsiders. The interviews allowed Mulinari and Neergaard to illustrate that there are many differences between women members but that their participation decreased their feeling of disempowerment in one way or another (p.17). Throughout my analysis, I will demonstrate that there are overlaps between the Swedish women's narratives and the narratives presented by my participants. One pressing similarity is that the women presented themselves as 'normal' women and denied their racism (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2014, p.49).

Francesca Scrinzi's research (2014a) is an example of an even closer engagement with participants. She carried out ethnographic research (including 100 interviews and observations) from 2012-2014 on the far right in Europe,[64] and conducted a comparative analysis of gendered dimensions of far-right activism in the *Lega Nord* (LN; now *Lega*)

[64] There is no detailed discussion of how Scrinzi conducted her interviews and observations, therefore it is difficult to evaluate her critical and ethical perspective. Her research will be published as a book in 2024, which might provide more details on the methodological approach.

in Italy and in the FN (now RN) in France.[65] She compares men and women's narratives in the parties and, for example, explores gender-specific motivations and patterns of affiliation (p.4) as well as "how gender is both reproduced and challenged through activism in the two parties, at the interplay with class and age" (p.8). In doing so, she shows how the gendered division of work (public/private divide) is reproduced in the parties based on essentialist assumptions, for instance, women's political role covering family and social issues and men's political role economic issues and immigration (p.9). However, women are also empowered through their activism and gendered patterns change over time, for example, the division of work in the family changes when a women member takes over more roles in the party (dependent on class, age and life cycle) (p.9).

Like myself, Scrinzi identifies close engagement with participants as crucial for answering her research questions which overlap with my own (for example, on women members' sense making of their membership in a male-dominated organisation) (Scrinzi, 2013, p.2). Scrinzi (2017a) argues that – unlike other data – ethnographic data can explore social divisions in parties, including the opposing views and interests of members of the parties, which are normally obscured by the far right in their self-representation as unified (p.875). With her research, Scrinzi illustrates how interview research can uncover contradictions in far-right members' and parties' narratives, which is also central to my own research.

Like with Mulinari and Neergaard's research, there are overlaps between the findings of my research and Scrinzi's, as we can see in the analysis chapters. For example, in all three research projects (Mulinari and Neergaard's, Scrinzi's and mine) 'caring' for the family but also the nation is a central theme. As Scrinzi points out herself, there are similarities between European far-right parties (for example, the LN and FN), which include crucial parts of their ideologies and agendas. However due to distinctive national contexts there are also areas on which they differ, for example, based on the nations different "social strata, immigration and colonial history, immigration policy, social policy and gender regimes" (Scrinzi, 2012, p.86). Furthermore, Italy shares a history of fascism with Austria and Germany and the FN (founded in 1972) in France is, like the FPÖ, one of the long-lasting European far-right parties (Scrinzi, 2017b, p.88). Differences and similarities between Scrinzi's and my own data are discussed in parts of the analysis. Overall, interview research adds to the jigsaw of knowledge about far-right women.

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[65] Previously, she carried out an ethnographic study on gender and activism in the LN (Scrinzi, 2013, p.1).

One missing jigsaw piece

I can finally see the picture of the jigsaw and while it includes many crucial pieces of research on women, gender and the far right, there are still some pieces missing. I have illustrated that there is a wealth of literature on the reasons for the political success of the AfD and FPÖ. Much of this research lacks a gender perspective and/or solely focuses on one reason without acknowledging that there is no simple explanation for the far-right's success/es. I argue that my analysis of women member's reasons for joining the parties adds to these explanations and illustrates the complicated interplay of many different factors. In-depth interviews provide the opportunity to explore in-depth member's reasons for joining the parties, (and those reasons are part of the parties' success).

Official far-right discourses on gender and (anti)feminism have been discussed in scholarship. However, there is a lack of research on the perspectives of members who are not in high profile leadership positions especially in the Austrian and German context. I argue that it is crucial to understand in how far members (in my research, women members) agree or diverge from the parties' discourses on gender and (anti)feminism. This will provide new insights and can illustrate how the parties can use those topics to recruit new members.

Finally, I examined previous research on far-right women. While I understand the criticism levelled at interview research (discussed in Chapter 2), I argue that critically and ethically conducted interview research adds new knowledge. First, many of my participants are members at local level, who so far have not been part of research projects in this field. Second, narratives, which are enclosed in an interview situation, add new narratives and new nuances to existing narratives, which are publicly disseminated by women leaders/politicians. Finally, interviews provide the opportunity to investigate how women members negotiate their roles in a male-dominated party.

Chapter 2: Researching an ‘unloved group’: Methodological and ethical considerations

In this project, I conducted feminist research with far-right women with whom I normally do not interact due to our different worldviews. In actively engaging with these women I had to be prepared for the challenges arising through research with an ‘unloved group’. The term ‘unloved group’ was introduced by Nigel Fielding (1981, p.7) in his research on the British National Front (NF). It refers not only to the researcher’s perspective towards the group but also to society’s broader perspectives (Blee, 2002a, p.13; Fielding, 1993, p.148). In my research, I argue that the term ‘unloved group’ also relates to some of the far-right women’s self-presentations as alleged victims of social stigmatisation due to party membership.[66] Fielding (1981) is another who argues that to counteract a racist party, its members need to be understood. He emphasises that this can only be achieved through direct contact with the members through interviews and observations (p.vii; pp.7-13). Clearly, I agree with his argument and stress the importance of understanding opposite worldviews to one’s own. Here understanding maps onto the German noun *Verstehen* (in this context: understanding of someone’s views) and not *Verständnis* (in this context: empathy for or agree with someone’s views) (Kühn and Lehn, 2019, p.160). Because I aim for *Verstehen*, I set out to conduct interviews despite the difficulty of this task.

In this chapter, I discuss how I conducted my research and which methodological and ethical considerations I had to address to reach my goals. As noted previously, my main aim was to explore how women narrate their active support for the AfD and FPÖ and how they negotiate their roles and spaces in these antifeminist parties. To achieve this aim I conducted 25 interviews with women members of both parties and I used social media data as supporting material. Through the interviews I explored the narratives about women’s paths to membership, women’s perceptions of feminism and gender and women’s (gendered) spaces and roles in the parties. Before explaining my method of conducting semi-structured interviews, I discuss how interview research with the far right is contested and how other feminist research with ‘unloved groups’ prepared me for my own work. After the discussion of the interview process, I continue by elaborating on why I used the data I collected on social media only as supporting material and not as primary

[66] With using the term ‘unloved group’, I do not want to suggest that my participants are victims of unfair social stigmatisation.

data. Finally, I discuss how I used narrative analysis to make sense of and critically engage with my data.

Interviewing far-right women

> Closer-up studies of the far right, using observational, ethnographic, and direct interviewing methods, are […] essential. Many studies of the far right draw exclusively on evidence found in the writing of speeches of these activists, but such information can be distorted for public consumption and highly misleading. (Blee, 2017, p.201)

As I agree with Blee, I decided to conduct interviews despite the methodological and ethical challenges because I did not want to focus only on speeches and other public narratives (for example, on blogs, social media, print media), but instead have one-to-one interview conversations in order to understand further reasons for actively supporting a far-right party beyond the public rhetoric of the parties in question.

Feminist researchers often use interviewing as a method because it offers the opportunity to explore people's views of reality (Reinharz, 1992, p.18). This allows the researcher to conduct research of an exploratory nature, since questions can be added when unexpected narratives emerge (p.21). Shulamit Reinharz states that "feminist researchers have also used open-ended interviewing to study people whose behaviour is abhorrent to them" (p.19). In other words, interviews can be used not only for research with those with whom the researcher shares common worldviews, but also for research with, for example, far-right women.

Talking to the far right as a feminist

Before I discuss my interview process, I reflect on the ongoing scholarly debate in Austria and Germany over whether interviews with far-right members should or should not be conducted. In the previous chapter, I stated that many feminist researchers in the field reject interview research due to ethical challenges and moral considerations. The Austrian *Forschungsgruppe Ideologien und Politiken der Ungleichheit* (FIPU, research group ideologies and politics of inequality) (2021) discusses this question in the context of journalism. However, their arguments are also relevant for scholarship. FIPU argues against talking to the far right, because this might further legitimise their ideologies including racism, antisemitism and antifeminism (p.16). While I agree that those ideologies should not be legitimised, I claim that interviews with far-right members – if conducted and analysed critically – do not provide a platform for racism, antisemitism

and antifeminism. They rather show how members make sense of their personal experiences and their perceptions of reality and how those are embedded in far-right ideologies.

Most scholarly opponents of interview research with the far right use arguments about legitimisation and the reproduction of far-right ideologies to explain their rejection of interviews. For example, Robert Feustel (2019) claims debates about far-right ideologies which are enabled by interviews partially provide a platform to hold those views in the centre of public attention (p.139). Daniel Mullis (2019) argues that researchers should refuse to talk specifically to far-right leaders, not because of moral considerations but due to the political risk of reproducing their views. Nevertheless, he approves of researchers talking to those at the peripheries of the far right (for example, voters of the AfD) so as be able to critically analyse their narratives (p.176). Finally, Lee Hielscher (2019) states that critical research should counteract the far right, not through interviews with its members but interviews with migrants to explore their experiences with far-right exclusionary mechanisms (p.158). I agree with Hielscher that research on migrants' experiences with far-right ideologies is crucial, but it does not make research with the far right itself less important.

Supporters of interview research by contrast argue that interview research with the far right does not aim to solely reproduce the subjective expressions of interviewees but to analyse the expressions' meanings, patterns of communication and interpretations of reality (Kuehn and Lehn, 2019, p.161). In other words, if researchers do not just inquire about political opinions, attitudes and social 'facts' but critically analyse subjective expressions, then legitimisation and reproduction can be avoided (p.162). Interview research explores experiences, perspectives and everyday understandings of far-right members and neither reproduces the interviewees' views nor attempts to change their minds (Ammicht Quinn, 2019, p.148). Regina Ammicht Quinn argues that by means of a feminist academic philosophy, interview research can explore the plurality of identities of the interviewees (p.149). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mulinari and Neergaard's (2017) study on women in the SD is a good example of research, which does not legitimise far-right ideologies. By means of antiracist and postcolonial feminist perspectives (p.13), they were able to critically analyse women's narratives. For example, they analysed how women's subjective expressions of caring for their children situated their racism in the notion of care (2014, p.50). Hence, far from legitimising racism, they

illustrated social patterns of communication and how women make sense of their support for a racist party.

The role of the interviewer in this type of research is also subject of debate. As noted previously, the case of researcher Alice Blum who started a relationship with a far-right man, is used as an argument against interview research (Forschungsnetzwerk Frauen und Rechtsextremismus, 2019). However, I argue that if researchers do not conduct ethically-sound research, they can do a lot of harm in most research fields, this is not just the case in research about the far right. I nevertheless fear being stigmatised for my research topic; a fear Blee (1998) evidently experienced in her research as she worried that the political stigma of those we study rubs off on us (p.388). If we engage in conversations with people with whom we fundamentally disagree, there is always the fear that something in our own core values will change. Feustel (2019) argues that most of the time critical researchers are not likely to become far right themselves. However, he criticises the fact that researchers are likely to include their own political stances into their work, which he calls a moral hubris because it is informed by the attitude that 'academia knows best' (pp.137-139).

In line with feminist scholars, I argue that there is never neutrality in research. Stating the opposite hides how knowledge production is influenced by the researcher, the researched and the context (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.30). This does not mean that there is no reality or that the researcher knows best about everything (moral hubris), but rather that there is a diversity of realities, which are all influenced by social structures and dynamics (Letherby, 2003, p.77). I therefore disagree with Nonna Mayer (2020), who researches the French far right, and states: "The main challenge for political science research is to treat such parties with the kind of politically detached attitude […] applied to other parties" (p.17). As a feminist scholar, I need to make my political identity and ethical position transparent, thus making myself accountable for the knowledge created (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p.10). As Donna Haraway (1988) argues knowledge is situated (p.581). Knowledge itself is political, and, accordingly, I have the responsibility to openly account for my research process to show how I am part of knowledge construction through my research (Letherby, 2003, p.77). There are always value judgements in research and it is crucial that I situate my research "in terms of its

objectives and outcomes, by fully articulating the motivating political intentions" (Gillies and Alldred, 2012, p.6).[67]

In cases where researchers do not situate themselves and their research, interview research with the far right does risk legitimising far-right ideologies and providing a platform for them. As discussed previously, Kamenova (2021), who conducted ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews with AfD members to examine the organisational dynamics of the party, was uncritical of the political ideology of the AfD in her analysis and did not provide a detailed account of her ethical considerations or her own position in the research. In her methodology chapter, she explains that she established rapport with participants by attending several events from official to informal gatherings, which included party members' families and friends (p.24). She does not discuss what it means to build rapport with far-right members and how she interacted with them at social gatherings. In my view, she did not critically analyse the subjective expressions of her participants and instead claimed that her participants' words provide social 'facts'. Since I was worried about providing a platform for the far right myself, I turned to feminist research with 'unloved groups' to pick up tips for conducting ethical and critical research, as discussed below.

Learning from feminist research about 'unloved groups'

Blee (1998), my main inspiration for methodological lessons, argues that modifications of feminist methodologies are needed for research with 'unloved groups', as those methodologies are not based on the assumption that the researcher's worldviews are completely opposed to the participants' worldviews (p.388). I looked at and drew inspiration from multiple research projects with 'unloved groups', including research with far-right women (Blee, 2018; Mulinari and Neergaard, 2017; Sehgal, 2009) and men (Back, 2002) and research with violent and sexist men (O'Neill, 2018; Presser, 2008). It is not in the scope of my work to discuss all of this research. I will give a brief overview of Blee's work, the lessons learnt I drew from her and others' research and examples of how I applied those lessons to my own work.

As noted previously, Blee (2018; 2002a; 1998; 1991) has conducted research with racist women in the United States over three decades. Her main aim has been to understand why women join white supremacist, neo-Nazi, Klan and other racist groups. She is motivated by the aim to understand the racist women's reasons and membership

[67] Feminist researchers criticise male-dominated knowledge production, in which scholars argue that their work is value free (Letherby, 2015, p.78).

because this understanding can support the development of effective strategies against recruitment and against racist ideologies (2002b, p.113). Blee conducted mainly life history interviews and observed gatherings of racist groups (2002a, p.198; 1998, p.386). Her work illustrates how direct contact with the 'unloved group' comes with many challenges, as discussed further below.

Before I started my interviews, I was very nervous about disclosing to the potential interviewees that I oppose the parties. I feared that no one would talk to me, but I also knew that it would not be ethical to lie about my opposition. Blee (1998) disclosed her worldview to participants and promised scholarly fairness through an accurate representation of their life stories, and I set out to follow her example. In the information sheet that I sent to potential participants, I stated:

> I am honest that I am not supporting your party myself, which of course raises the question why you should consider participating in the research anyway? My research is mainly based on interview data, which means that the data are your stories. I will depict your stories as accurately as possible. (Appendix 1)

By stating that I will depict their stories as accurately as possible, I meant that I will use quotations from their interviews, so that it is clear to the reader what was said, but I did not mean that I will not critically engage with their words. Like Blee, I did not spell this out in the information sheet or interview. I do agree with Blee (2009) that it is crucial to listen to those whom we study. However, this seems more challenging when the gulf between our politics is large (p.18). While I represent the women's stories with quotations, I also critically analyse the stories to understand their experiences and reasons, and connecting those, for example, to broader discourses of racism and antifeminism.

The eagerness of some of the women to talk to Blee (2018) presented her with an ethical dilemma: Were the women eager to talk to her because she was providing a platform for their ideologies? She concludes that she does not provide a platform but analyses women's life stories, with which she creates an understanding of their membership. Blee highlights flaws and contradictions within the stories (p.7). As in Blee's research, most of my participants wanted to talk to me because (and not despite) I oppose both parties, and some said that they see it as an opportunity to talk to someone who does not agree with them and is therefore outside their party bubble. Local FPÖ member Gruber stated, for instance:

> It is important for me to talk to you because you insist on distancing yourself from this political direction. Sadly there are mostly no opportunities to talk to people with different political opinions, because they reject the discourse.[68]

AfD member Schmidt informed me that she had decided to participate in my research because:

> I always have hope, because many think that we are all monsters and simply evil people that we are on the dark side and somehow supporters of Darth Vader and we only want to bring evil to the world, but that is simply not true […] hey we are not so different from you, we maybe have different political opinions, but as humans we are not so different.

Both quotations illustrate the participants' hopes that talking to me will decrease what they perceive to be prejudices from wider society and that they can show that they are friendly and strong women, who are not extreme or abnormal.

I did not confirm that my project will decrease any prejudices. Nevertheless, I could not help feeling guilty when they raised this hope. My project does not draw caricatures of them. However, I do define them as 'unloved group' and categorise their parties as far-right parties that are racist and antifeminist. This opens up several ethical issues, which are similar to Blee's challenges (2002a, p.11; 1998, p.386). The participants' eagerness to participate and their hope to reduce prejudices leads to the ethical challenge to not provide a platform for racist beliefs. Therefore, it is important to avoid the repetition of parties' propaganda and instead to focus on understanding the women's stories around their membership (Blee, 1998, pp.386-387). I do not want to provide a platform for the AfD or FPÖ but instead understand the reasons why these women support the parties. In other words, I do not want to fulfil the hope of some of my participants to reduce 'prejudices' but I still want to create a better understanding of their stories.

Like Blee (2002b), I hope that my research will inform anti-racist groups who develop strategies against the far right (p.113). Defining this as an explicit research aim is problematic as I cannot tell my participants that I aim to inform strategies against their parties. However, without this aim I cannot justify my interest in researching far-right

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[68] All interviews were conducted in German and I translated all quotes to English. Further information on translation and participants further below.

women. I want to support feminist and anti-racist agendas with my research. This poses an ethical dilemma because I agree with feminist research standards that participants need to be fully informed about the research aims. I believe this ethical dilemma cannot be resolved but I can try to reduce it. I did not lie to my participants; I was honest about my opposition to their party membership due to the ideologies they support and they did not ask me further questions about my aims or my views.[69]

Research as an emotional rollercoaster

Research with 'unloved groups' is described by Blee (1998) as an emotional rollercoaster (pp.382-383) as she was confronted with many emotions during her research, from fear to feelings of discomfort and even sympathy. Emotions are connected to feminist research in particular ways and feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2014) argues that feminism itself includes a particular emotional response to the world (p.170). I used a reflexive journal during my research to record the emotional responses which arose during the interviews, social media research and analysis. Especially after the interviews I was often emotionally exhausted and had to force myself to write in the journal.[70]

Blee (1998) applied 'feeling rules' to cope with disturbing and uncomfortable feelings and to keep a balance between her feelings and socially appropriate reactions. 'Feeling rules', according to Blee, are used in our daily social interactions in which the expression of our emotions is matched with the expectations our counterparts have. For example, if someone tells us sad news, they also expect us to be sad. The dynamic in field research is similar but less routinised than in daily life negotiation and renegotiation (pp.382-383). During one of her interviews Blee (2002a) had to listen to the glorification of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995; she had to show interest in the stories of hatred and continue to ask questions when she just wanted to scream (p.2). Even though it was possible for her to express her disagreement she could not follow her urgent feeling to scream and run away. Instead, she tried to focus on her curiosity.

I do not think it is possible to fully prepare for situations like this, even though reading about Blee's experiences did help me. During my interviews, I developed strategies to cope with emotions and I learned from interviews that I had already conducted. In my fourth interview, for instance, local AfD member Wolf talked about her reasons for joining the AfD and she called the refugee influx in 2015 a "mass invasion",

[69] If they had asked, I would not have lied but answered as short as possible.

[70] After interviews and social media data collection, I would normally write in German but otherwise I often wrote in English.

which she then linked to the rape of an 85-year-old woman in her city. She used words like *Kanaken* (demeaning word for migrants) to describe refugees and migrants and said "now the *Kanaken* are coming." Due to her offensive language, I decided to pursue other topics instead of this one and did not dig deeper. In other words, my negative emotions influenced how the interview continued. I tried to follow up on personal events, for example she told me that she and her husband had moved states before she joined the AfD. While reading the interview transcript, I realised that I was only able to half-heartedly continue to ask questions and I learned from this interview that I need to frame my follow-up questions around participants' lives and personal events and not their racist attitudes. In other words, I learned how to apply 'feeling rules' and channel my disgust into curiosity about their personal stories to address how they became members.

But Wolf's and similar interviews made me angry. I did not want to avoid anger as it is a crucial answer to racism. In her speech at the National Women's Studies Association conference in Connecticut, Black feminist Audre Lorde (1984) addressed the white women in the audience with the following statement:

> Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist attitudes as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change. To those women here who fear the anger of women of Color more than their own unscrutinised racist attitudes, I ask: Is the anger of women of Color more threatening than the women-hatred that tinges all aspects of our lives? (p.129)

Lorde criticises white women who are not expressing their anger about racism and keep silent because they are afraid and they do not have to live and survive through racism (p.127). I want to use my anger and avoid numbness. Lorde's distinction between anger and hate is important for my research, because the AfD and FPÖ build on hate as racism and sexism are hatred (p.152). I did not express my anger in the interviews because that would have ended the interviews. But my anger, among other emotions, is the reason for this research and the reason why I will continue to work in this field.

Blee (2002a) took part in horrifying racist gatherings which scared her deeply. Only years later was she able to look at some of her field notes, and she noticed that despite horrifying experiences the gatherings also had many ordinary characteristics which are comparable to neighbourhood picnics and church meetings. She argues that this does not make the gatherings less disturbing but shows how the ordinary is mixed

with the terrifying (pp.1-2; p.8) in a manner reminiscent of Hannah Arendt's (1963) "banality of evil." Blee's realisation of this is an important outcome of her research, because it shows the banality of violence in those groups (2018, p.56). The lessons she draws here were crucial for my research. My opposing views towards the ideology of the parties I am researching did not necessarily mean that I did not find some aspects familiar and ordinary, which led to disturbing and uncomfortable feelings. However, I tried not to avoid those feelings as those feelings showed me how the ordinary is part of far-right ideologies. For example, local AfD member Braun, who is in her 50s, told me about her previous involvement in women's rights, stating: "I also read Simone de Beauvoir and I always enjoyed reading those things, I found it amazing, when I was 30." With this statement, Braun could have also described me or my friends, which was disturbing given that the story of her membership was built on racist understandings of reality.

Feelings of familiarity or even sympathy are arguably most uncomfortable in these research contexts. Blee (1998) argues that she was prepared to hate and fear due to the horrifying ideologies of the groups her participants joined, but she was not prepared to meet some women she genuinely liked. She provides an example of such a relationship with a woman she called Linda, who heads a small violent group of white power skinheads. Linda was charming, soft-spoken and concerned for Blee's comfort during the interview. Blee developed 'positive' feelings for Linda despite her horrific attitudes. At a later stage, Blee reflects on this interview and her fieldnotes and says that she is disturbed at how she failed to engage more critically with Linda (p.393). In some of my interviews, I felt like I could like the women if it was not for their political ideologies. On September 17th, 2020, I wrote in my research journal:

> Before each interview, I am afraid of the participants as they are women who have reprehensive views and ideologies which I oppose. However, when the interviews start, this feeling often changes. It is different to talk to someone, instead of just reading about their views and ideologies and imaging the abstract person behind those [views].

That my feelings of anxiousness often changed during the interviews because participants were nice to me, led to further uncomfortable feelings. However, the discomfort I and Blee (2002a) experienced while reflecting on interview relationships can be used as a productive form of knowledge, which points out the uncomfortable emotional complexities of the research and the research subject itself (p.13). Les Back (2002), who conducted research on racism and 'whiteness', argues that research with an 'unloved

group' should be uncomfortable in order to keep one's opposition and ethical and political challenges in mind (p.59). I agree with Back that uncomfortable interactions with participants should not be resolved. Uncomfortable feelings have helped me to keep the reasons for the research at the forefront of my mind. Throughout the interviews, I always felt a little bit uncomfortable (sometimes more, sometimes less), which reminded me that the views of the parties and their members make me uncomfortable.

The emotional and methodological experiences of researchers of 'unloved groups' prepared me for the interviewing process, therefore, after engaging with their work, I felt ready to get the interviews rolling.

Interview journey

Practical preparation

The first step of the interviewing process is to design the interview guide (appendix 3) and information and consent sheets for participants (appendices 1 and 2). In her research, Blee (1998) started her interviews with the question: "Can you tell me how you got where you are now?" (p.387) I started with a similar question: "Can you tell me why you became a member of the AfD/FPÖ?" Depending on the extent of the answer, I followed up with questions on, for example, the detailed process of how they decided to become a member, in which life phase they were and which topics of the party they supported. Some of the participants answered with long stories to the first question, which reduced the follow-up questions and others started slower and the follow-up questions helped to open the participants up to tell me more detailed stories. I designed this first set of questions to answer my first research question about their paths to membership. I then asked some specific questions regarding women in the party – questions designed to explore women members' roles and spaces in the parties. Finally, I asked questions about their perspectives on the party's stances on traditional gender roles and feminism. In most interviews, participants talked about this topic before I asked my specific questions.

I encouraged in-depth answers to the questions and hoped that the interviews would produce detailed narratives that would provide insights into how participants make sense of their membership. My conclusion is that the interviews were mainly successful in this regard. I followed a similar process to Pete Simi et al. (2017) who, in their research with former US white supremacists, also mainly asked in-depth questions. However, they "periodically asked direct questions to focus on specific topic areas, but the interviews relied on an unstructured format intended to generate unsolicited data embedded in their

personal narrative" (p.1773). I did not ask any confrontational questions because I wanted to hear their personal stories and not encourage a defensive usage of party propaganda.

After designing the interview guide, I wrote the information sheet and consent form for participants. I ensured that participants were informed about who I am, what my research is about, whom I include in the research, why they should consider participating, what participation entails, the fact that the interview is recorded, how I would ensure anonymity, how long they could withdraw from participation, what would happen next and who they could contact at the University of York if they had further questions. Through the questions on the consent form, I ensured that they understood what their participation would entail and that they agreed to participate. My ethics application and with this my method, information sheet and consent form, were approved in May 2020 by the University of York. In general, the interview process did not raise new ethical issues, which were not discussed in the ethics application. I was able to follow the interview process as described in the application. All my participants agreed to the consent form and read the information sheet. The anonymity of my participants was ensured, I anonymised the data while transcribing it, I deleted the recording after transcribing and some of my participants asked me to anonymise specific information about them (for example, their occupation).

Sampling, recruitment and participants

I started to recruit participants in June 2020 after I received the ethical approval. One of my biggest practical challenges for conducting interviews was to sample and recruit participants. My original plan was to recruit 32 participants of the overall study population: all active women members of the AfD and the FPÖ. In the end I conducted (only) 25 interviews. My definition of active members includes politicians but also, for example, women members who support the parties at local level, for instance with organising events or running for the district council. One of my participants (Koch, AfD) was not a member but did support the party in many of its local activities. Because of her clear commitment to the party, I decided to include her in the sample. My original plan was that participants would be regionally divided between the federal states in Austria, former East and former West Germany.[71] I hoped to have a mix of members from rural areas and cities, from the youth and women's organisations, of politicians and non-

[71] Austria and Germany are federal countries. Austria consists out of nine federal states and Germany of sixteen (six in former East and eleven in former West Germany).

politicians, of different age groups and of members with and without a migration background.

I contacted possible participants via email. Due to a low response rate, I used convenience sampling and collected data from whom ever presented themselves (Guest et al., 2013, p.12), which meant that I could not reach a balance of all intended groups. For example, I only had two participants, who were migrants or came from families who migrated (East and West Europe) and only four participants from Austria. For the recruitment, I used several strategies. The first strategy was to directly contact members. In Austria, many email addresses of members are online on the FPÖ's, the IFF's, the youth organisation's and other subgroups' webpages. Due to a low response rate to my first emails, I contacted all of them via email and briefly described my project. In Germany, less contact data of members was online, but there was a higher response rate than in Austria. Therefore I did not contact all of the email addresses online. I randomly selected whom I contacted first in different geographical areas and continued until I had enough participants.

The second recruitment strategy was to contact the regional and local branches of the parties and ask them to distribute my call for participation to all women members in their districts. Local branches include – depending on the density of members – one or several municipalities. I reached several participants from the AfD through this strategy, but none from the FPÖ. The third strategy was to contact several subgroups of the parties which have their own membership structure (for example, women's organisations and youth organisations), and ask them to distribute my call for participation to all their women members. From the sub-groups in Germany I only received one interview with a member from the JA. In Austria, the head of the IFF tried to stop me from contacting other women in the party by saying that no one is interested in participating, which might have led one woman, who already agreed to an interview, to ignore my follow up emails. Before my fieldwork, I hoped that I could win over the head of the IFF as a gatekeeper, but as Gurchathen Sanghera and Suruchi Thapar-Björkert (2008) argue, gatekeepers can also withhold access to people (p.544). Despite the much lower number of FPÖ participants, I decided to include the few interviews of FPÖ women as they present unique data, but comparisons between both parties have been difficult due to an imbalance of data density.

The final recruitment strategy was to use snowball sampling. I asked some participants if they could forward my email to other women members they know and I

managed to secure two further participants through this method. In the cases where I asked for further distribution of the call for participation or where I used snowball sampling, I took extra precautions to guarantee anonymity for the participants, because there was a third person involved, who knows to whom the call was distributed.

I wrote 359 emails (165 to FPÖ members or branches and 194 to AfD members or branches). Only seven percent of my recruitment emails led to interviews. My emails were mainly just ignored, which was not unexpected given that I am a student at York's Centre for Women's Studies (CWS) and that the AfD and FPÖ rally against gender and women's studies. Sometimes I also received rejection emails and some of these included negative statements about me and my research. For example, one of the local branches of the AfD started their rejection email with:

> Hello Nick [presumably a man's name] (gender does not play a role for us), regarding your request, we are not interested. We do not provide research objects for superfluous "studies", for which the results are already known beforehand […]

This reply, in which I was addressed as a man, indicates that the respondent wanted to ridicule the usage of gender-inclusive language and gender and women's studies, which allegedly is not 'real' scholarship (see Chapter 1). Additionally, sometimes women agreed to an interview appointment and never showed up and ignored my follow up emails. The first time this happened, I wrote in my research journal: "Did she intentionally accept the interview with the aim to ditch me? Was the goal to lead a PhD student of women's studies by the nose?"

Overall, I was very anxious during the recruitment period and, after I contacted all possible email addresses in Austria, I decided to stop recruitment. While I would have preferred to have more Austrian participants, I had exhausted all channels of recruitment. I could have contacted more AfD members, but in my view 21 AfD participants provided me with enough data for my research.

I list the final sample of participants in table 1. Fifteen participants are from former West German states, six participants from former East German states and four from Austria. I do not mention the states they are from in order to ensure anonymity. Most of my participants are party members at the local level and do not have a high profile in the parties. My research sample most likely only included cis women as they all agreed with the parties' narratives on gender, which are based on essentialist ideas about binary

genders. However, I did not specifically ask them about their gender identity because I assumed that they would probably be offended and immediately end the interview due to their essentialist views.

Finally, the women I interviewed were predominantly from middle-class backgrounds (for example, self-employed businesswomen or housewives) and some were highly educated (for example, as medical doctors and sociologists). This provides a contrast to observations in some of the literature that far-right voting support is predominantly provided by (blue-collar) working-class and to far-right parties' self-presentation as supporters of the 'little' people (for example, Gritschmeier, 2021, p.51; Moreau, 2021, p.100; Sauer, 2021, 59; Dietze; 2020, p.150; Becker and Dörre, 2019). Reasons for the high proportion of middle-class participants could include the reluctance of lower middle-class and working-class women to talk to a researcher, the fact that fewer women are employed in blue-collar jobs (Scrinzi, 2015, p.87) and/or that I did not interview the electorate but members of the party, who occupy certain active roles (for example, chair of a local branch) and are therefore more likely to be middle-class and highly educated. Due to participants' class background, it is perhaps no surprise that class-based rhetoric was largely absent from the interviews (as can be seen in my analysis), this contrasts with Becker and Dörre's (2019) interviews with working-class voters, who talked about class-specific inequalities (p.153). As mentioned in the literature review, the privileged white middle-class' sense of entitlement is easily translated into culturalist racism and the fear of losing 'traditional' values (including gender norms) (Celik et al., 2020, p.152; Becker and Dörre, 2019, p.153).

No.	**Pseudonym**	**Region**	**Age group**[72]	**Type of Interview**	**Role**
1	Weber	West Germany	50s/60s	Video call	Local politician
2	Schulz	West Germany	50s/60s	In person	Local politician (city parliament)
3	Bauer	West Germany	40s	Video call	Politician state or federal parliament
4	Wolf	West Germany	70s	Phone call	Member of local branch
5	Braun	West Germany	50s	Phone call	Member of local branch and former employee
6	Schwarz	West Germany	60s	Video call	Member of local branch (board leader)
7	Wagner	West Germany	50s/60s	Video call	Member of local branch and on district council

[72] I decided to only provide age groups instead of the exact age of participants. This further ensures anonymity. Some women did not tell me their exact age but did give indications about it, which explains why I sometimes cannot tell if they are in their 50s or 60s and 20s or 30s.

8	Klein	West Germany	18/19	Video call	Member JA
9	Kramer	West Germany	60s	Video call (only my video)	Member of local branch (board leader) and on district council
10	Gruber	Austria	30s	Video call	Member of local branch and employee
11	Fischer	West Germany	50s/60s	Video call	Member of local branch and employee
12	Huber	Austria	50/60s	Written	Politician state or federal parliament
13	Richter	West Germany	60s	Video call	Member of local branch (member of board)
14	Neumann	West Germany	60s	Phone call	Member of local branch
15	Schmidt	East Germany	20s/30s	Video call	Member of local branch and in district council
16	Koch	East Germany	60s	Written	Active supporter of AfD on local and city level
17	Zimmermann	West Germany	50s/60s	Video call	Member of local branch (board member)
18	Lenz	East Germany	30s	Written	Member of local branch and on district council
19	Krüger	West Germany	40s/50s	Written	Member of local branch
20	Pichler	Austria	50s/60s	Phone call	Member of local branch (board member), left the FPÖ summer 2021
21	Moser	Austria	20s	Phone call	Former politician state or federal parliament
22	Schäfer	East Germany	40s	Video call	Politician state or federal parliament
23	Becker	West Germany	60s	Video call	Member of local branch and on district council
24	Bergmann	East Germany	50s/60s	Written	Member of local branch
25	Schröder	East Germany	40s	Video call	Member of local branch

Table 1: Participants

As illustrated in table 1, I use surname pseudonyms for participants. When I started writing my analysis, I used first name pseudonyms, however, towards the end of the writing process, I realised that in real life, I would never be on first name terms with my participants. In German-speaking countries, people who do not know each other and talk to each other in a formal setting normally use the surname to address each other. Therefore, I decided to use surname pseudonyms to avoid creating an artificial familiarity and closeness. Reflecting on my previously used first name pseudonyms, I had grown familiar with them, through the writing process. I had the feeling that I had spent much time with them, which I think was amplified through the usage of first names.

Conducting the interviews: The process and relationships

What practical issues did I have to consider for the interview process after I had recruited participants? Like so many others, I had to adjust my research because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and I conducted interviews mainly on skype, zoom, the phone, and via emails depending on the technical possibilities and preferences of my participants.[73] With the consent of my participants, I recorded all the interviews. In the beginning, I thought I preferred video interviews as I was able to see reactions. Interviews via video calls are often seen as more useful than telephone interviews because of the visual contact. For example, Janet Salmons (2012) argues that videoconferencing allows the closest resemblance to face-to-face communication, because non-verbal signals can be observed (p.2). This includes the possibility to display emotions (Salmons, 2016, p.6), which is crucial for my research. However, the six interviews I conducted online or on the telephone without video were also successful and the data produced seems to be as rich as in the video call interviews. In the telephone calls, I sometimes felt more at ease, because my reactions were not visible to the participants. In previous studies on the quality of telephone interviews, respondents have been described as more relaxed on the phone or online than in person because they remain on "their own turf" (Novick, 2008, p.393). For me it was also easier to be on my "own turf." I normally was exhausted after interviews and was glad to be in my own space as I could immediately listen to feminist podcasts to 'detoxify' from some of the racist stories.

In general, I would argue that the change to online and telephone interviews has not reduced the quality of my interviews and made it easier to schedule interviews in different regions. The low response rate and slow responses illustrated that it would have been very difficult to schedule face-to-face interviews in different parts of Austria and Germany. However, embodiment is an integral part of the interview process (Ellingson, 2012, p.2). In a face-to-face interview bodies are literally facing each other. But even in a phone or video interview, participants are not interviewed by the "disembodied, questioning mind of another" (p.3). There is no question that bodies encounter each other differently online than they do face-to-face; meeting a person in real life allows you to see how they move and how their bodies react. Nalita James and Hugh Busher (2012) argue "when the face-to-face contact is absent, we cannot ignore the potential obstacles that anonymity and disembodiment pose in attempting to arrive at a relationship of trust

[73] I asked each participant what interview format they prefer. I conducted interviews between June 2020 and March 2021. The average length of the interviews was approximately 40 minutes (shortest: 20 minutes; longest: 80 minutes).

with other people online" (p.7). However, they are also aware that people do not leave their bodies behind when they enter cyber space (p.8).

I have had different experiences with embodiment in my interviews. In my only face-to-face interview, I met the participant in the city centre and our bodies walked from there to her office. We also left the office together and I saw how she avoided going through a protest of *Die Linke* (a left-wing party), which was happening at that time. Additionally, I saw her interaction with a colleague who was leaving the office when we arrived. She told me that he had just returned from parental leave and that she supports men taking parental leave. Both encounters would not have happened in an online or telephone interview. However, my video interviews allowed me to get a glimpse of the houses of my participants and see, for example, pictures on the walls or how they interact with their pets. For the video interviews, I also had to be aware of what I was wearing. In my first interview I almost wore a light blue blouse but changed my mind when I remembered that this is the colour of the AfD.

During one of my telephone interviews, the participant was still in the car, because she was caught in a traffic jam. When she reached her home, she explained what she was doing – that she was getting out of the car, walking to the house and then she quickly told her son that he could go upstairs to his grandparents for lunch. I did not see any of this, but she included me in what her body was doing until she sent her son upstairs and then concentrated on the interview. In other words, I had the opportunity to imagine her in her environment. This situation felt very familiar to me as many of my friends and cousins during my childhood lived in the same houses than their grandparents and going to the grandparents for lunch was very common. Through this connection I immediately felt connected to the participant.

I had difficulties to find any sense of embodiment in the five written interviews. I struggled to see the person behind the written text and the answers felt more abstract and less tangible. Originally, I did not offer written interviews in my recruitment emails, but some women responded to my call for participation, saying that they would only agree to written interviews. Due to the low response rate, I decided to agree to this. While they provided less in-depth data, they still gave me a sense of the women's stories and are therefore a good addition to my other more in-depth interviews. From one of the written interview participants, I also received more detailed stories when I sent her some follow-up questions. Evidently, the written interview participants also had difficulties seeing the person behind my emails. Krüger (AfD) wrote in one of her emails that she had forwarded

my email to other AfD members, who said that I am not trustworthy. She agreed with them but also said that she has nothing to hide and therefore can tell me ("or whoever is behind it [my emails]") her story.

The decisions I took during my research have of course affected the data. For instance, as mentioned above, I decided to openly state in my emails and information sheet that I am opposing the parties' views and that I am at CWS despite the knowledge that the AfD and FPÖ explicitly oppose gender and women's studies in their party programmes. This led to scepticism on the part of some of the members, but others were willing to talk to me precisely because of my opposition. My affiliation with CWS also affected the interview process itself, for example many participants talked about women in the party without me having asked my questions on that. My open opposition to the parties led to statements like "you probably see that differently", which shows that participants were aware of my standpoints throughout the interview. Nevertheless, besides of one participant no one asked me more about my own political stances.

While many feminist researchers stress the importance of rapport with and empathy for research participants (for example, Oakley, 1981), Lisa Smyth and Claire Mitchell (2008) argue that rapport and empathy are not necessary for research if reflexivity is used to understand the emotional dynamics (p.442). They conducted research with conservative evangelicals in Northern Ireland and with anti-abortionists in the Republic of Ireland – both groups with moral and political views that they oppose (p.441). They disagree with the assumption that rapport creates 'good' research data (pp.442-444), stating that "understanding is achieved through language, conversation and reflection, not through empathetic encounters" (p.444). Smyth and Mitchell's respondents were very keen to create rapport with them and ignored the opposing views, which showed Smyth and Mitchell that the participants wanted to use their research as a platform; something the scholars would not allow (p.446). I agree with them that rapport should not be necessary for research relationships, especially if it is only faked. However, rapport and empathy sometimes arise even if it is not intentionally created. Most of my interviews had a friendly atmosphere and I generally felt that some of the women would be likeable if it was not for their views. For example, talking with participants in the same age range about common cultural phenomena like *Star Wars* or university culture created very 'normal' conversations, which nevertheless were interrupted by reprehensible views, making me feel uncomfortable about the commonalities I found with some participants. Feminist scholars Shulamit Reinharz and Susan Chase (2001) argue that "uncertainty and

discomfort are likely to arise for interviewers and interviewees whose social locations differ dramatically" (p.12).

Feminist researchers emphasise the importance of being trusted by the interviewees and having an interviewer-interviewee bond (for example, Reinharz, 1992, p.27). This interviewer-interviewee bond can also be dependent on an insider/outsider role of a researcher. The insider/outsider role in research is fluid and changeable and my research clearly shows the unstable binary of this distinction (Sanghera and Thapar Björkert, 2008, p.554). Blee (2018) argues that researchers can fulfil the insider and the outsider role in the "cultural and meaning system" of their participants. Blee's insider role as a white woman helped her to get access to the field, but her political opinions and worldviews provided her with an outsider role (p.54). Donna Luff (1999) states that she sometimes easily fit in with her participants from the moral right wing, because of her own upbringing in the white middle-class with a mother, who stayed home to take care of her children, but then again felt alienated by, for instance, the homophobia of her participants (p.695). This shows the complexities of the researcher and participants' different social locations and subjectivities which may overlap (Reinharz and Chase, 2001, p.4). When it comes to the political stances of my participants, I was clearly an outsider. However, in most of the interviews, social locations with my participants overlapped. Examples for those overlapping social locations are: my whiteness and my citizenship status, my middle-class background, growing up in the same city, being in the same age range, being a cis woman, studying, speaking German and with some of my participants' previous activism on the left. Those commonalities improved the rapport between me and my participants. However, they also show the complexity of social locations.

As in all feminist research, I needed to assess and re-assess the power dynamics in my research with an 'unloved group' (Holland, 2007, p.202). As Gayle Letherby (2015) argues, power does not always lie with the researcher (p.90). What power did the participants use prior to and during the interviews and what power did I have in this relationship? Some participants were concerned about their anonymity and worried that I might misuse my power. I was able to ensure them that guaranteeing anonymity is very important to me. Furthermore, one power that I certainly possessed, is the power of forming the research outcomes and having the final say in the data production (compare Sehgal, 2009, p.328), which led to some mistrust especially in the email conversations before interviews. For example, Fischer (AfD) wrote: "In principle, I am interested in

your work, as long as it remains neutral." My answer to this was: "I understand your skepticism and hope that it will subside upon reading the attached information sheet. Please let me know if you would like to participate in an interview." Her wish that my work remain neutral was shared by several participants and created an ethical challenge. As I stated above, I do not think that neutrality in research is possible because the position of me as researcher will always be part of the research. With this in mind, I did not agree (but also did not disagree) to attempt being neutral. I allowed myself to benefit from ambiguous phrasings and provided reassurances without committing to what was requested by potential participants. However, I did commit to depicting their stories in their own words through extensive quotations in my analysis,[74] so as not to unintentionally twist their words, which I nevertheless critically analyse. Additionally, my analysis is based on the themes, which arose in the interviews, including those which contradicted some of my previous assumptions. With this in mind, I aimed for *Verstehen*.

My participants had power over me before the interviews, which was based on my dependency on their participation. The above-mentioned case of the head of the IFF demonstrates that it was possible for those I contacted to put obstacles in my way. Furthermore, some of the older participants used their age to create power dynamics during the interviews. Wolf (AfD), for example, started her answer to my question about why she joined the AfD with the following words: "Young lady, young lady, I am in my 70s, I lived my life successfully." This statement shows that she believes that she knows everything better because her extensive life experience provides her with wisdom, which I allegedly do not have as a "young lady." Her membership is a result of this wisdom and, according to her, my opposition to the party illustrates my lack of life experience.

After the interviews: Transcription and translation

My first task after the interviews was to transcribe the audio-recorded interviews. I manually transcribed all my interviews from beginning to end with the support of the transcription software *Express Scribe*. I transcribed each interview as soon as possible after I had conducted it (often on the following day), because my memory was still fresh and transcribing helped me to understand what I could improve in the interview process. For example, during transcription I understood better how I could enhance follow-up questions in certain interview situations because the transcription process showed me when I was unhappy about my follow-up questions and my reactions. Some of my

[74] A necessary caveat to this is that I translated the participants' words from German to English (see following section).

emotions became clearer during transcription as well because I had to listen to the same sentences several times. During the interviews, I was more focused on keeping the interviews going with follow-up questions, but during the transcription process I was able to get angrier as I was alone with what was said and had time to reflect upon it and write in my reflexive journal. Time spent with the data through transcribing helped me to familiarise myself with what was said, which was a good starting point for diving into the analysis (discussed further below).

There were several practical decisions I had to take before the transcription process. Ken Plummer (2001b) asks:

> Whether all the faltering, mumbling and confusions of everyday talk should be smoothed and rounded out in the transcriptions, and whether issues of mood and feeling should be commented upon. All this will depend on the purpose. (p.3)

I decided to transcribe mumbling and confusions, laughter, smiles and longer breaks between sentences, because in some cases they showed the confusions, contradictions and emotions of the participants and myself. Moods and feelings are important for my research and therefore I reflected them in my transcriptions.

I committed to produce a verbatim account of what was said. But as Poland (2003) argues, there are always some logistical and interpretive challenges when translating audio-recorded interviews into written form. For example, sometimes words might be mistaken for similar words: “This is particularly apt to happen in passages that are difficult to discern due to problems of poor tape quality” (p.5). I recorded my interviews through recording software which records video calls and phone calls on the computer. In a few calls, the internet connection was lacking and I struggled to understand some of the words. Because I transcribed soon after the interviews, my memory often helped me to remember what was said and I could make out the words and the meaning of sentences. While there was room for error, I was able to reduce it through my prompt transcriptions. After I transcribed an interview, I listened to the recording again and read my transcription to identify any possible errors. Interestingly, three participants asked me if they could read their interview transcripts and they did not have any content corrections.

Another challenge for transcribing was that “verbal interactions follow a logic that is different from that for written prose” (Poland, 2003, p.6). For example, in spoken language, people often do not clearly indicate where sentences end and transcribers need

to take decisions on when to use punctuation (p.5). Spoken sentences "tend to look remarkably disjointed, inarticulate, and even incoherent when committed to the printed page" (p.6). I decided not to tidy up the disjointed sentences because meaning might get lost. Interestingly, one participant returned the transcript to me with grammar corrections and more coherent sentences. Poland argues:

> The disjuncture between what coheres in natural talk and what demonstrates communicative competence in written prose comes as a shock to many respondents when they are asked or are offered the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews. Speaking from experience, I should add that interviewers themselves can find their own contributions, committed to paper, a rude awakening. (p.6)

In some cases, I experienced this "rude awakening" myself, when my sentence structures were inarticulate and included some mumbling.

After the transcription process, I decided to conduct the analysis in German because I wanted to avoid meaning getting lost in first translating all the interviews (Dincer, 2017, p.89).[75] I therefore only translated the quotations into English which I wanted to use verbatim in my written work. Several challenges arose during the translation process. Birbili (2000) argues that "researchers need to keep in mind that translation-related decisions have a direct impact on the validity of the research and its reports" (n.p.). For example, I had to take decisions about "words which exist in one language but not in another, concepts which are not equivalent in different cultures, idiomatic expressions and/or differences among languages in grammatical and syntactical structures" (n.p.). It helped me enormously in the translation process that I am fluent in both German and English, having German as my mother tongue and having lived in an English-speaking context for a decade.

I decided to use 'free' translation instead of 'literal' translation, because a word-by-word translation of German often does not make sense in English. I am aware that a 'free' translation "always involves the risk of misrepresenting the meaning of the conversational partner" (Birbili, 2000, n.p.). Like Dincer (2017) in her research, I use footnotes to clarify the cultural context in cases where the translation was not sufficient, thus decreasing the margin of error (p.93). Furthermore, I decided to use German words and phrases (in italics) that I struggled to translate, providing a description of those in

[75] The process of the data analysis is discussed further below, here I only discuss translation.

footnotes. In Chapter 3, for example, I have not translated the word *Stammtisch* and state in a footnote: “There is no accurate English translation for *Stammtisch*, the word refers to meeting regularly in the pub with the same people.” That my supervisors both have a good knowledge of German while having English as their first language, supported me in the process, as they could offer advice for some of the more challenging translations.

Before moving to discussing how I conducted the analysis of my interviews, it is important to provide an overview of my social media research, which served me with further supporting data.

Social media research

After I received my ethics approval on May 20th, 2020, I set out to collect data on social media for three months (20.05.2020–20.08.2020). While I wanted to conduct interviews because I argued that they are more suitable for my particular research interest, I was uncertain if I would be able to get access to interviewees and I therefore decided ‘backup’ data would be sensible. The study population for the social media research included all Twitter and Facebook accounts of women career politicians from the AfD and the FPÖ (Appendix 4) who are either members of the federal or a state parliament. By this definition, in May 2020 there were 36 women career politicians in Germany and 26 in Austria. In Germany 28 women had social media accounts that clearly identified them as members of the party. In Austria eight career politicians had social media accounts. There were also ten public and active Facebook accounts of the IFF and its different local branches in Austria. I observed all of these accounts: I created a word document for each account holder and twice a week, I read and copied all their posts into those documents.

Anabel Quan-Haase and Luke Sloan (2017) state that “analysing social media data in conjunction with other data sources can provide a fuller picture of social phenomena” (p.7). Social media is an important communication tool for the far right worldwide (Klein and Muis, 2018, p.540), therefore social media research seemed like a good back-up plan. By observing career politicians’ social media accounts, I wanted to focus on the stories and self-representation of women’s membership. In retrospect, I mainly got access to party propaganda and only an occasional glimpse of the women’s stories. By observing the IFF’s accounts I wanted to explore the collective sense-making of women’s membership in the FPÖ. Here I did receive some valuable insights into women’s spaces in the party, but the posts did not provide a sufficient amount of data.

Because I only observed accounts from public figures and organisations that act in public online spaces, informed consent for this part of the research was not necessary. There is a discussion in social science research about the ethics of social media research as to whether the observation of publicly accessible social media accounts should only be conducted with the consent of the owners (Beninger, 2017, p.58). The observation of public places, publicly available information, public organisations, governments, public officials and public agencies is normally exempted from informed consent and confidentiality. But the definition of the private and the public is especially messy on social media (British Sociological Association, 2017). I decided to only observe the social media profiles of career politicians and of the IFF, because they are aware of the public scope of their profiles as they want to reach as many people as possible. Additionally, I argue that politicians are responsible for their public activities and therefore do not have the right to be forgotten (McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2017, p.19). I followed Philipp Mayr and Kathrin Weller (2017), who observed the social media accounts of all candidates for the *Bundestag* in 2013 without seeking consent, but while assuring that those accounts were publicly used for the party.

During the data collection on Facebook and Twitter my presence did not influence the posts as no one was aware of my presence. However, the posts affected me and created an emotional response. Comparing my social media data collection and the interview data production I became aware that I was able to disembody the women politicians who write on Twitter and Facebook, while I am aware of the person in the interviews. In other words, the interviews provided me with a different perspective which helped me to avoid dehumanising the women themselves. Again, this shows how important it is to talk to members of 'unloved groups' as direct interaction with participants shapes the data and the understanding of the data.

I experienced a mix of emotions during my social media research. On my first day of social media research, I wrote the following in my research journal:

> Some posts are really terrible, while others seem almost normal. How will I cope doing this every day [I changed it to twice a week]? Maybe it gets easier, but even if it does, is it good or does it just mean I become numb.

In retrospect, I can say that I continuously felt nervous, angry and sad during my social media data collection. There were times when I questioned if I should give those posts

and their writers my attention, for example when they called the Black Lives Matter movement a racist movement against white people or when they wrote about ‘gender ideology’ and their antifeminist stances. However, those feelings encouraged me to reflect again on my research and I remembered that those views are the reason for my interest in how women who support those views explain their membership in far-right parties.

My social media observation supported my research process despite the limited suitability of social media data to answer my precise research questions. Being immersed in women politicians’ representations of the AfD and FPÖ’s ideologies months before the interviews, prepared me to cope with the interviews, which included some similar (but less intense) representations of party ideologies. Nevertheless, social media data does not provide a sufficient insight in women’s personal stories. I, therefore, decided to analyse the interviews and only use the social media data occasionally in my analysis chapters to show parallels between interviews and social media or to show contradictions between both data sources.

Feminist narrative research and analysis

Narrative research

Because of my research questions’ focus on sense-making, I decided to conduct narrative research. Before I move on to discuss how I analysed the narratives I identified in my interview data, I define what I understand by narratives and by feminist narrative research. There are many different definitions of narratives. I do not follow narrative research with strict guidelines, which are, for example, introduced by William Labov (2006). He defines that narratives have to start with a clear introduction, and then continue with a main section in which an event is narrated, and then end with a conclusion. For him the narrative construction has to follow the order of events in time (p.37). This approach does not consider wider social and cultural structures or the messiness of making sense of experiences. Many scholars have criticised the rigidity of narratives in this definition (for example, Georgakopoulou, 2017; Presser and Sandberg, 2015). Therefore, I base my understanding of what narratives are on narrative criminologist Lois Presser’s (2008) definition:

> What I call a narrative is more precisely an oral self-narrative, a spoken rendering of one’s personal experience as an agent in the world […] But a narrative is not a report on one’s entire life so far. Rather, a narrative may attend to a specific period of one’s life or to a single episode.

> Importantly, a narrative always draws selectively upon lived experience. (p.2)

In my own words, self-narratives, which do not have to follow a clear structure, show how people frame and make sense of their lived experiences.

Feminist scholars Jo Woodiwiss et al. (2017) argue that:

> feminist narrative research offers the possibility of going beyond exploring women's lived experiences to also examine how and why women come to understand and narrate those experiences in particular ways. (p.5)

In my research, I go beyond exploring women's lived experiences, which raises the question of what kind of narratives I explored through my data. I did not conduct the typical life-story research with biographical interviews lasting hours to cover the participants' whole lives. My focus was topical life-stories (Plummer, 2001a, p.10), which means that my research concentrated on one main topic in the lives of the participants: the topic of their membership. I wanted to know: How they got where they are regarding their political views and membership and how they make sense of it; why they took this path and not others (p.8); what is the social context and how are they situating themselves in broader discourses? In some cases, this involved parts of an auto-biographical telling, whereby participants would start telling me about their youth and adult life in order to make sense of their party membership, which followed decades of political disengagement, or even political engagement on the left. Narrative research can explore how individuals make sense of changes and transitions in their lives (Miller, 2017, p.39). The narratives which arose from my interviews, did not just include past events and experiences but also predictions or fears for the future.

Narrative research investigates how research participants construct and express their understandings of their realities (Esin et al., 2014, p.2). At the same time, narrative research also provides the possibility to position the research in broader social discourses (pp.2-3). Narratives are part of human existence as we constantly tell stories about ourselves to make sense of our realities (Presser and Sandberg, 2015, p.1). Barbara Johnstone (2001) argues that humans have an autobiographical impulse to talk about the past. We have an "urge to make our lives coherent by telling about them." Personal narratives are hereby not only an instrument for making sense of oneself as an individual but also of the wider social context (p.640). In this regard, I was not only interested in the

individual accounts but also how participants situate themselves within society (Miller et al., 2015, p.71; Presser, 2008, p.2). Personal experiences are used selectively in narratives (Presser and Sandberg, 2015, p.2), which means that a "chaotic mess of experiences" is formed into more coherent and culturally legible narratives (Ugelvik, 2015, p.24). In my research, I was interested in what Presser (2008) calls the narrative's substantial promise for understanding the wider social phenomena (p.9).

Situating narratives in wider social phenomena also explains why experiences in narratives are told differently depending on the circumstances of telling (Presser and Sandberg, 2015, p.3). This does not mean that the participants are lying but that they construct their understandings of social reality in different contexts (Esin et al., 2014, pp.2-3). My own talk and actions in the interview also played a role in the construction of the narrative, and therefore, I reflected on my role in data production in my analysis (Rapley, 2001, pp.304-306). For example, all participants knew that I am at CWS and were eager to tell me that women are equal within the parties before I even asked my questions regarding women in the parties. They clearly had assumptions about what I wanted to hear. The interview situation is not the only influence on the construction of the narrative; narratives are also part of a broader social context (p.3) and stories cannot be exactly reconstructed across time and places (Squire, 2013, pp.3-5).

The previously mentioned stance that narratives emerge out of different contexts also entails that personal narratives are influenced by and emerge from broader social discourses (Miller, 2017, p.43). These can be either dominant discourses or subcultural discourses (Brookman, 2015, p.210). My participants, for example, sometimes situated their narratives in the discourses of their parties. For instance, when it came to questions about women in the party, most of my participants started to explain their opposition to quotas for increasing the number of women, which is very much the parties' discourse. However, they then continued by adding their own experiences or ideas which partly diverged from the parties' discourse. Maria Tamboukou (2013) argues that the narrator reveals herself in the discursive context of narratives, showing "which institutional constraints she accepts and what rules she has to obey" (p.7). My participants clearly accept and obey some of the parties' rules. However, their narratives also show that there is room (even if restricted) for agency. Participants' own smaller everyday narratives can be influenced by or influence larger discourses (Cohen, 2010, p.70).

Most narratives were not clearly and coherently presented by interviewees. Some participants resorted to small stories of how they decided to become a member without

providing a clear structured story with a beginning, a middle and an end. For example, Richter (AfD) told me how she had gone to a nearby city to talk to people at the AfD information booth, before she then signed up for the party. She did not clearly present why she decided to even go to the information booth and I asked several follow-up questions to get at this. Georgakopoulou (2007) argues that scholars (for example, Labov, 2006) who depict narration as structured activity lose sight of (every day) small stories (p.33) as well as stories with contradictions and inconsistencies, which may arise in different social contexts (p.18). Small stories with inconsistencies are told outside interviews, for instance on social media platforms, but also in interviews participants did not tell linear stories, which shows fragmentation and open-endedness of experiences (Georgakopoulou, 2017, p.267). With this in mind, I follow Daria Dayter's (2015) flexible approach of narrative research, which includes the wide spectrum of stories in everyday talk and social media (p.19).

Analysing thematic narratives

I did not use strict guidelines for my data analysis because analysis depends on the data itself. Simply said, data analysis aims to translate data into meaning (Flick, 2014, p.4). I combined different approaches in my analysis, for example identifying thematic narratives and at the same time pursuing a constructionist approach and searching for broader discourses of narratives (Esin et al., 2014, p.6). Combining different approaches allowed me to both look at how women make sense of their lived experiences and the social structures in which their sense making is embedded.

In order to identify thematic narratives, I roughly followed the six phases of qualitative thematic analysis (TA) elaborated by feminist scholars Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006), discussed below. I hereby conducted all my analysis manually and did not use qualitative data analysis software because I wanted to be immersed in my data as much as possible. Instead, I used posters and mind maps to make sense of my data. I conduced all steps except for the final one in the German language.

Amy Fisher Smith et al. (2020), who interviewed former far-right extremists in Europe and North America, state:

> in conducting in-depth interviews and in adopting the method of TA, our aim is to prioritize the experiences and meanings of the FRE-participants [far-right extremist participants], but also to locate those

> experiences within the broader socio-historical and cultural context. (p.203)

My own research is based on the same principle. I started with the first phase of TA and familiarised myself with the data. During this analysis step, which already started during transcribing, I read and re-read all my interview transcripts and tried to understand the data on its own terms without categorising different themes. With this, I took a "semantic" inductive approach to data analysis, meaning I paid close attention to participants' told stories, which are the foundation of my analysis (p.204).

In the second phase, I coded my data, which means that I identified the most basic elements of the data (Fisher Smith et al., 2020, p.205), for example the different reasons participants recounted for joining the parties. In the third phase, I collated and sorted those codes into broader themes, for instance the fact that many participants' different reasons for membership had in common that they felt that 'something is wrong' in society. I then reviewed and refined these themes in the fourth step. Here, I re-read all interviews to ensure that the themes made sense and that I had not missed anything (p.206). In the fifth phase of my TA, I organised those themes into several overarching narratives, which are the basis of my analysis chapters. It is important to state that data analysis is always conflicted between researchers' own beliefs and assumptions and the assumptions' possible disconfirmation through the real data (Reinharz, 1992, p.29).

In the final phase, I wrote my analysis chapters and included translated quotations to provide "sufficient evidence of the themes within the data" (p.206). However, here I did not just write the narratives down. I analysed how the narratives are discursively constructed and plotted in different social contexts (Presser and Sandberg, 2015, p.15). Therefore, I also included techniques of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis can have many forms. In essence, it looks for socially patterned meanings of how we make sense of the world (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.188). I explored discourse structures and how they are enacted, confirmed, reproduced, or challenged by the participants (Van Dijk, 2001, p.253). Throughout, I used scholarship on far-right discourses (for example, on gender) as well as several theoretical concepts and put those in discussion with my research data. I also included social media data which overlapped with or contradicted the interview data.

To sum up, in this chapter, I illustrated how I prepared myself for my research with far-right women and the challenges arising through this research with an 'unloved

group'. Interviews were the suitable method for answering my research questions, because they provided a unique insight in women's narratives on their paths to membership, feminism and their roles and spaces in the parties. With my feminist approach to interviews, I was well equipped to conduct ethical and critical interviews. While I create an understanding for my participants' narratives, I did not provide a platform for far-right ideologies. My decision to conduct socially oriented narratives research allowed me to critically analyse participants' narratives without distorting those. The next three chapters show the detailed outcome of my analysis.

Chapter 3: Paths to membership

In this chapter, I explore my participants' accounts of their paths to membership. In doing so, I address my first research question on how far-right women narrate their reasons for joining the AfD and FPÖ. My focus is on the participants' narratives which are inevitably entangled with the parties' ideologies. My interest here is similar to that of Mulinari and Neergaard (2014), who ask why women have chosen, and what inspires them to represent a racist party (in their case the SD) in a context in which the women do not believe that they or their party are racist (p.44). I discuss below that some of the narratives in my research overlap with those identified by Mulinari and Neergaard. In this chapter I identify and elaborate three main narratives: 'othering' perpetrators of sexual violence; 'taking the red pill';[76] and the urge to act. All three of these narratives are embedded in and communicated via an overarching communication framework of everyday 'common sense'. I therefore open the chapter with a discussion of this frame. All three narratives furthermore are intertwined. For the sake of clarity, however, I first discuss each narrative in turn before I conclude by demonstrating the connections between them.

Communication framework: Everyday 'common sense'

Local AfD politician Weber told me a long story about how and why she joined the AfD, making sense of her membership with reference to common sense:

> And what they [AfD politicians] said, the 'party [AfD] of political reason', I remember that, from the centre of society, that was the catchphrase. And it did catch me, because I did not have great world changing ambitions anymore, just the feeling that political reason is missing and *gesunder Menschenverstand* [common sense]: people look, around you! It is difficult to look out of the red and green cloud-cuckoo-land [reference to the Green party, SPD and *Die Linke*], but someone must realise that something is structurally wrong.

Arguing that people and other parties are losing their common sense, Weber implied that everyone who does not support the AfD's aims is lacking in reason. Weber herself left behind her "world changing ambitions" and found common sense in the AfD. This alleged common sense and reference to the "red and green cloud-cuckoo-land" frames people not supporting the AfD as blinded by left-wing ideology, while the AfD is constructed as

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[76] The metaphor originates from the movie *The Matrix* (1999), in which humans are living in an illusion (the matrix). Humans can only become aware of reality if they choose to take the red pill.

ideologically neutral. Hark and Villa (2020) argue "dirty Green and lefty do-gooders" are depicted by the far right as being against their 'own' people (p.xxii). As discussed in Chapter 1, most right-wing populist parties, including the FPÖ, at least according to Mudde (2004), claim to defend the 'general will' of the people and use 'common sense' as the "basis of all good (politics)" (pp.543-544).

In the tradition of Antonio Gramsci, cultural theorists Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea (2013) define common sense as "a form of 'everyday thinking' which offers us frameworks of meaning with which to make sense of the world" (p.8). When Weber exclaimed, "people, look around you", she implied that her way of making sense of the world is easily available knowledge and therefore does not need any forethought or reflection (Hall and O'Shea, 2013, p.8). Hall and O'Shea in their analysis of the common-sense framing of the welfare state in British politics argue that politicians use the language of common sense to claim that their "policies cannot be impractical, unreasonable or extreme" because they are based on "what everybody knows" (p.8).

Common sense as *Alltagswissen* (everyday knowledge) is also a highly gendered concept as it is used in narratives that justify gender essentialism and the traditional role division of men and women which is perceived by many as being natural (Mayer, 2021, pp.36-41). As I discussed in Chapter 1, the belief that women and men are naturally different is part of many people's everyday experiences. Furthermore, believing in women and men's complementary differences attributes women with common sense in their stereotypical allocated roles, for instance as mothers and caring women (p.43). This indicates that common sense is supposed to be a "product of nature rather than history" (Hall and O'Shea, 2013, p.9), which explains why common-sense rhetoric is often used in socially conservative politics.

Crucially, Weber interlinks common sense and political reason (traditionally attributed to men as the 'ungendered' politicians), even though the latter is not based on *Alltagswissen* and has historically been contrasted with women's 'natural' fields of expertise (for example, motherhood) in Germany and beyond; a contrast which is still partly engrained in social mindsets today (Thurner, 2019, pp.40-44). This contrast was also recreated by some of my participants. Local AfD member Schmidt, for instance, stated that only a few women are acting rationally and within reason: most women are using their "gut feelings" instead. Here she uses the binary of reason and feelings which can be traced back to the Enlightenment and which is part of an antifeminist essentialist

gender order (Sanders et al., 2019, p.26), where emotions (attributed to women) are supposedly beneath thought and reason (attributed to men) (Ahmed, 2014, p.3).

The language of common sense was a thread throughout the interviews and frames the narratives on paths to membership and beyond (Chapter 4 and 5). Even though the *Alltagswissen* or *gesunder Menschenverstand* were seldom used, most of my participants' stories clearly evoke the concept of common sense. One way in which participants conveyed this idea was through describing social and political developments as 'mad'. Local AfD member Fischer stated:

> For me, conservative development is something which happens naturally. Currently I fight externally imposed changes such as: You have to do this, I am not allowed to eat meat anymore, I have to do this and that as a woman, or I am not allowed to have children because of CO_2. When I hear things like this, that is *irre* [mad].

For Fischer it is *irre* that people are allegedly coerced to be vegetarians or that young SPD politicians "call for abortion until the ninth month of pregnancy." Throughout her interview she constructed a sense of common sense around topics through depicting those topics in an exaggerated and distorted way. Social developments that she rejects are depicted as *irre* while conservative developments are posited as natural. Crucially, Fischer stated that women are forced to do "this and that", which mirrors a feminist argument against conservative politics that limit women's rights and forces women to adhere to traditional roles. However, Fischer twisted the feminist argument around because for her being conservative means counteracting "externally imposed changes." This illustrates how, as Hall and O'Shea (2013) argue, common sense lives from contradictions (p.10).

Local branch member Kramer (AfD) also referred to the topic of abortion, stating that she believes that "the girls from the Green party and the reds [SPD], who have requested this [abortion till the ninth month], do not really know what they have said or the extent of it." Depicting these 'girls' as naïve and lacking in common sense functions to deny them valid agency. Mayer et al. (2018) argue that antifeminist actors often depict left-wing women, feminists and LGBTQI people as naïve in their activism, which is a common strategy to silence them (p.54).

Ahmed (2014) meanwhile suggests that "feminists who speak out against established 'truths' [common sense] are often constructed as emotional, as failing the very

standards of reason and impartiality that are assumed to form the basis of 'good' judgement" (p.170). While Fischer and Kramer do not use the word feminists, they depicted left-wing women in the same way Ahmed suggests feminists are usually constructed. Fischer's description of others and their views as *irre* was echoed by eighteen of the AfD and FPÖ career politicians on social media with reference to topics such as immigration and violent immigrants, anti-racism and feminism. All of these posts were phrased in a way that suggested they were simply "telling the truth" (Hervik, 2020, p.94). In this way, career politicians are following the AfD slogan *Mut zur Wahrheit* (courage to truth), which implies that everyone else is lying or at least not telling the truth (Althoff, 2018, p.344).

Portraying others negatively is often a strategy for portraying the self as positive (Ugelvik, 2015). For some of the older participants, it would seem, it was important to mention that the AfD has been a *Professorenpartei* (party of professors) right from the start in order to present the party (and the self) in positive light. Richter (in her 60s), for example, explained: "I went to the website of the AfD and what really amazed me was all the professors who were listed on the start page, so much expertise." The older participants described it as common sense to trust a party with "so much expertise", which, I argue, shows how older participants seem to have more trust in authority and hierarchical structures (professor is the highest position in academia/science). However, that trust in expertise was only used selectively when it supported the parties. Local AfD member Wolf (in her 70s) argued that politicians from other parties "stole their PhD title" and she dismissed their expert knowledge. At the same time, she presented herself as an expert due to her profession as medical doctor and her 70 years of life experience.

FPÖ member Pichler's argument relied on an oversimplification of the political context, which like 'common sense' is a characteristic of populist politics (Graf et al., 2017, p.75). For example, she compared immigrants with "splinters in the skin" and stating further that "it does not work to introduce *Fremdkörper*" (foreign bodies). This dehumanising comparison of immigrants with splinters and *Fremdkörper* is used to illustrate that immigration obviously cannot work. Her 'othering' of immigrants as *Fremdkörper* leads to what Hark and Villa (2020) call "active estrangement" and "dehumanization", which arises from the certainty that "'we' are better" and "more human than 'them'" (p.25).

The dehumanising rhetoric plays into a long history of German discourses on national well-being and health which are in turn connected to narratives about social

hygiene and the national body that needs to be safe guarded from unhygienic *Fremdkörper* (Kapczynski, 2008, p.23). The splinter and *Fremdkörper* metaphors are used by Pichler as a means to convey how the nation is threatened by a disease from the outside. Kapczynski (2008) suggests that discourses such as these can be traced back at least until the period of Enlightenment (1700s) in the German context (and beyond), where the nation was often described with recourse to metaphors about the human body. Though this discourse of national health did not originate in the National Socialist period, it certainly reached its peak during this time and "would forever bear the imprint of National Socialism's murderous pursuit of German well-being" (p.2). As is widely known, the Nazis reduced the world into two groups: the healthy ('Aryan' Germans) and the sick (for example Jews, disabled people, mentally ill people) and pursued the goal of curing the nation of the sick (pp.14-15). Throughout my analysis, quotations from my participants' stories illustrate that certain participants relied heavily on metaphors of sickness (physically or mentally) and its cures. And it is crucial to keep the German history of those discourses in mind to understand the gravity of such analogies. This language of sickness, I content, is part of the common-sense framing because 'of course' no one would like "splinters in the skin." In fact, the mobilisation of common sense played a significant role in my doubts about my research as it was difficult to endure hearing horrendous stories being depicted with such certainty as common sense.

Finally, most of my participants blame the media for what they saw as blindly supporting the government and other political parliamentarian parties except the AfD and FPÖ. Wagner's (AfD) statement that "media coverage is full of lies" is only one example of this presentation of the media. Kramer (AfD) asked "whether journalists do not have a brain." Paula Diehl (2018) argues that far-right actors and the media have an ambivalent, symbolic relationship, where they need each other as the enemy to blame. The supposed lies of the media can hereby be blamed for people's rejection of the AfD and FPÖ. If the media reported neutrally, the argument goes, people's common sense would lead them to the AfD and FPÖ. As Fischer (AfD) stated:

> Our media are not leaving any space for the willing reader to think for themselves […] the result is that people who are much harder in their opinion are completely against the AfD, not because they know what the party stands for but because they do not think.

Through blaming the media, the participants as well as the parties themselves can still argue that they are acting, and are the best option, for 'the people'. When this contradicts

actual public opinion, this is explained away with reference to a climate of media incitement in which people have no room to think for themselves.

‘Othering’ perpetrators of sexual violence

Klein (AfD) my youngest participant (in her late teens) and a member of the JA, narrated her path to membership via her experiences of sexual harassment by *südländisch* (Mediterranean) looking men,[77] which she described as her main reason for joining the AfD:

> I had personal experiences by and by, of course I am still relatively young, as you can see, but I am afraid I anyway had experiences which were not so nice. And through those, I developed my political opinions […] my political interest in the AfD developed, because unfortunately I experienced diverse sexual harassments [verbal and physical] and I was tracked as well and all this unfortunately always from people, men, who looked *südländisch* and were immigrants.

This extract illustrates how Klein presents her ‘aversion’ to immigrants while at the same time arguing that she is not someone “who is completely against immigrants.”[78] Her narrative is part of a wider discourse on immigrants (Muslim and ‘non-Western’) who allegedly threaten women, which is supported by most far-right parties in Europe with the AfD as a key disseminator of that discourse in Germany (Hark and Villa, 2020, p.89; Berg, 2019, p.80).[79]

As Hark and Villa (2020) emphasise, this discourse builds on a long history reaching back four centuries and defining the relationship between Europe and its colonies (p.40). In Germany, furthermore, the trope of the ‘foreigner’ as a rapist was part of the Nazi party’s systematic racist propaganda, and similar stories continued to be told in West Germany after World War II. Robert Möller (1993) states that directly after the Nazi period, the reports of rape of German women by the occupying armies (especially by black US soldiers, French Moroccans and Red Army soldiers) were dominated by the same racist propaganda (p.24). In contrast, Austrian women were more likely to be

[77] I want to clarify that I do not downplay her experiences with sexualised violence and all sexual violence needs to be condemned. However, I am looking at the way she ascribed sexual violence to immigrants and based her support for the AfD as a result of that. As Hark and Villa (2020) argue “individual experiences of violence should, indeed, never, ever, be relativized.” (p.61)

[78] The denial of racism is discussed in the section on taking the red pill.

[79] Interestingly, the AfD’s election programmes from 2017 and 2021 do not mention sexual violence or violence against women; however, Islam as well as immigration are discussed at length (for example, AfD, 2021b, pp.84-87, p.89). Furthermore, the AfD publicly engages in this discourse of violence.

blamed for having relationships or being raped by men from the occupying powers (British, French, Soviet and US troops) or by refugees in the post-war period. The women were accused of acting against the national community with their 'female *Triebkräfte*' (seductive driving forces), which is a part of a wider misogynist discourse on women and their 'dangerous' *Triebkräfte* (Thurner, 2019, pp.76-83). Despite such differences in the Austrian and German post-war contexts, the FPÖ's discourses about perpetrators of sexual violence today are similar to those of the AfD. Like the AfD, the FPÖ instrumentalises stories of violence against women perpetrated by immigrants to mobilise women to join the party (Goetz, 2020, p.13). Both parties are then, 'othering' perpetrators of sexual violence; that is, they narrate sexual violence as mainly perpetrated by the 'other'. At the same time, they ignore that "misogynist and often sexualized violence is part of German [and Austrian] normality – not only against women, but also against queers, gays and lesbians, trans and intersex individuals, children and adolescents of all sexes, and structural vulnerable people in general" (Hark and Villa, 2020, pp.ix-x).

Despite 'othering' perpetrators of sexual violence, Klein said later in the conversation that she knows that "Germans of course are doing similar things, no human is without mistakes." Her narrative deviates here from the broader AfD narrative where sexual violence is barely committed by 'German' men (Berg, 2019, p.80). The difference for Klein is that if people are coming to a country in "search of protection", she believes they need to "adhere to the rules", and if they do not, "they have to be deported." Her fear of sexual violence is still projected solely on 'foreign' men (and not the 'German' men), as she described how that fear is provoked by all the immigrants in her city who make her feel like a stranger. This arguably shows her need for a simple world divided into 'we' and 'they', in which the 'other' (*südländisch* looking immigrants) cannot be integrated. This 'othering' includes a 'we', who is better than the 'other', while the 'other' is defined as the stereotypically violent 'non-Western'/Muslim immigrant who is a perpetrator (Hark and Villa, 2020, p.xxvi; pp.25-28; p.87).

All the participants, who used the strategy of 'othering' perpetrators of sexual violence as a major part of their paths to membership, are AfD members.[80] The participants' age plays a significant role for this narrative. Participants under 35 talked about their own fear of sexual violence or their concern for other young women, while older participants presented their daughters as being threatened by 'foreign' perpetrators.

[80] Most other participants, including FPÖ members, mentioned this narrative, but only briefly and it was not part of their main narratives.

Sixteen of the AfD and seven of the FPÖ career politicians posted stories of sexual violence in connection with immigrants on their social media accounts during my period of analysis. As discussed above the FPÖ uses similar discourses to the AfD in general terms, therefore I do not argue that FPÖ participants did not 'other' perpetrators of sexual violence as a result of their particular cultural context; the reason might just as well be the limited number of interviews I conducted with FPÖ women.

Though not entirely in terms of (sexual) violence, local AfD member Schmidt (in her 20s/30s) employed the concept of equality to explain her path towards membership. She said that, for her, "it is important that no one is oppressed", because:

> the party is against Islam and Islam is currently, with a few million followers, the biggest movement oppressing women and really abusing women, and the biggest threat for any women […] They [Muslim women] are set on fire, when they dare to look out of the window without a headscarf and that must not be. […] I met Muslim men and I really felt their misogyny […] I only met a few Muslim men, who see that differently, there are some of course, but not many.

This quotation illustrates how Schmidt depicts the integration of Muslims as almost impossible, and as the biggest threat to women. Schmidt's narrative can be explained through Farris' (2017) concept of femonationalism. As discussed in Chapter 1, Farris argues that "one of the central tropes mobilized by these right-wing nationalists is the profound danger that Muslim males constitute for Western European societies due, above all, to their oppressive treatment of women" (p.2). Schmidt defined equality between men and women as her main focus and claimed that equality is endangered because of Muslim men. She also depicted herself as acting, in the words of Farris, "in the name of women's rights" (p.1).

Later in the interview, Schmidt acknowledged, like Klein, that all men can become violent, and that she supports women's shelters:

> With some men you cannot see it even for ten years and then they are suddenly violent, there are many reasons why men become violent, he might have lost his job, I do not know, maybe his potency and for some it triggers something and then you cannot recognise them anymore, this might also be because of a brain injury […] and women, who are oppressed by their men, they need help from our welfare system.

In contrast to her account of violence perpetrated by Muslim men who for her are in a great majority violent, she argued that all men can become violent, but did not refer to their ethnic/cultural background as reason for that violence, providing possible individual reasons.[81] In her interview, Schmidt's focus lay on the connection she made between Muslim men and violence as well as the oppression of women. She stated furthermore that "young women and especially young girls who are teenagers, they are incredibly naïve and let men misuse and take advantage of them […] they deserve the highest protection because they cannot take care of themselves." The idea that young girls and women are not able to take decisions for themselves and therefore do not have common sense is part of a misogynist discourse used by several far-right and antifeminist actors (Hark and Villa, 2020, p.65). By discussing the women's perceived weakness, attention is taken away from the act of violence itself. Schmidt did not talk about experiences of violence done to herself; her story is a more abstract story of the threat of violence, which adheres to existing discourses on violence by the Muslim 'other'. I argue that Schmidt's narrative is part of an everyday common sense on violence, which far-right actors but also the media and other politicians continuously reactivate (p.25).

NYE in Cologne 2015/16, discussed in Chapter 1, dominates the following stories. As mentioned there, Hark and Villa (2020) argue that *Cologne* "marks the revival of a morally virulent 'us and them' distinction and the (re)activation of a racially charged everyday 'common sense'" (p.25). *Cologne*, which, as previously discussed, was the turning point of public support for and public discourses towards the right, led to the far-right mobilisation of many women (Sanders et al., 2019, pp.121-124). Zimmermann (in her 50s/60s), a local AfD member, told a story of her daughter's experience with sexual violence on NYE in Cologne:

> Well, the absolute decisive factor was quite certainly the events in 2015 in Cologne, in Berlin, in Munich. My daughter was affected in Cologne on New Year's Eve, she was robbed, groped, and insulted. I picked her up in the night, which is a four hours' drive. I was shocked about the number of people who were affected, mainly girls, a lot of young, small girls. […] Yes, that was the decisive factor, I thought something has to change in asylum policies, immigration policies, which we have, it is

[81] In the few cases sexual violence is mentioned disconnected from the 'other' on social media the offenders are barely mentioned. For example, Salzburgian state parliamentarian Marlene Svazek (FPÖ) posted several posts on the support of women's shelters in Salzburg.

> completely getting out of hand […] according to my research, the only option for democratic action was the AfD.

Zimmermann drew an immediate link between sexual violence and migrant men,[82] which, she claimed, led to her party membership, mainly because of her concern for her children.[83] She clearly followed the far-right mobilisation strategy in which:

> the violent perpetrator is marked as foreign, immigrant, misogynist and often Muslim, and as someone who has sexually abused and/or killed a girl or woman who is marked as 'German' or 'ours'. The other parties are positioned on the side of the perpetrators while the AfD presents itself like lawyers on behalf of the victims (Berg, 2019, p.85).

Zimmermann returned to the 'othering' of immigrants as perpetrators when she mentioned: "It scares me, what happens around us. I have the feeling that violence increased in the last five years." The last five years are referring to the years of an increased refugee population. In their narratives Zimmermann, Klein and Schmidt referred only to violence carried out by immigrants and refugees and not to violence that was perpetrated against immigrants. Ignoring or trivialising racist violence against 'others' is also a typical thread of far-right discourses (Hark and Villa, 2020, p.15).

An additional story of violence was told by local AfD member Braun (in her 50s) who, like Schmidt, drew a more abstract picture of violence than Zimmermann and Klein who both narrated their personal experiences. Braun said:

> And then it came as it had to come, […] with New Year's Eve in Cologne. I also have family in Cologne, I knew that all this would happen and how all of this would be covered up and people would be called Nazis. As a woman with all of this shit, you don't want to get under the wheels […] So I joined the AfD, because I also have a daughter, and here the issue with the Feldmann girl in Wiesbaden, who was raped. That those things happen is terrible, and of course we also have terrible people […] My daughter is fifteen now, and I tell her,

[82] Her interview includes further stories of 'failed' integration and the need to stop any further immigration, which she did not connect to stories of violence but stories of people who, for instance, cannot speak German after fifteen years in Germany and "get too much money from the state." However, her multiple statements about 'failed' integration show that she blames immigrants for several social developments.

[83] See the section on 'motherhood and futurity'.

> when she goes out, look out, I prefer this to: all humans are the same and all men are the same, pff I have to say I have my preferences that she stays away, because I also had my experiences as a young girl.

Braun's story was told in a manner which creates a sense of inevitability as she declared that she knew that *Cologne* and other events of sexual violence would happen. Hark and Villa (2020), who describe *Cologne* as signifier of sexual violence perpetrated by "North African and Arab men" (p.38), argue that:

> in the context of Cologne, this involved setting up (implicitly, at least), a priori, the essential valences of groups of people, and the alleged 'reality' of their relating. By pre-establishing such commonsense knowledge, the mechanism generates useful shortcuts for reading causality into events. (p.xxviii)

Braun did indeed use those shortcuts in her narrative which for her led to the inevitability of events. She mentioned several different examples of sexual violence including *Cologne* and the rape and murder of Susanne Feldmann by an asylum seeker in 2018. In doing so, her account is in line with the broader far-right discourse on sexual violence: by mentioning several incidents, she creates a threat scenario for all women in Germany. Additionally, Braun claimed that the public discourse does not allow women to speak out against this violence otherwise they will be called Nazis. Meanwhile, Braun's points about the media coverage of the events in Cologne contrasts with Hark and Villa's (2020) analysis of the media's role in public discourses after Cologne. They identified the shift to the right of many mainstream media outlets that took part in the public discourse (p.56).

Braun's quotation also shows that her daughter is important in her narrative with Braun presenting herself as caring mother. Like the other participants discussed in this section, Braun conceded that there are also terrible German people without a migration background, but her focus lies solely on immigrants. She drew a concrete distinction between 'European/German' men and the 'others' when she stated that she has preferences. Here she again followed the far-right discourse of 'us' against the 'others'. Braun thereby tapped into the theme of *sexual exceptionalism* because she depicted German culture as superior and progressive while she dismissed other cultures. As discussed in Chapter 1, Dietze (2019) uses the terms *sexual exceptionalism* to define discourses, which are based on the idea that one's 'own' culture is superior that is

illustrated through the supposed 'progressiveness' of sexual freedom and gender equality (p. 20).

I agree with Lynn Berg (2019), who discusses the German context, that it is necessary to disagree with the narrative of the 'othering' of perpetrators of sexual violence while also understanding the context and the way in which the narrative is used as an instrument (p.85). Reflecting on the interviews, hearing stories of violence made me feel uncomfortable due to my own opposition to sexual violence and due to my own anti-racist stances. As Villa states it is "destabilising" to have a discussion about sexual violence, in which criticism needs to be carefully balanced with avoiding falling into racist attitudes. However, that should neither mean avoiding talking about sexual violence and its perpetrators nor talking about racism in campaigns against sexual violence (Hark and Villa, 2020, pp.111-113). The conclusions my participants drew are racist and ignore the broader social structures behind sexual violence.

Taking the red pill

Local AfD member Schmidt (20s/30s) used the metaphor of 'taking the red pill' to narrate her path to AfD membership and how she became interested in politics. She stated: "I was also completely ignorant and undiscerning and at some point, I got my red pill and then I started to be interested in politics." The metaphor originates from the movie *The Matrix* (1999), starring Keanu Reeves, in which humans are living in an illusion (the matrix) which has been created by machines to enable control over them. Humans can only become aware of reality if they choose to take the red pill. Neo, the main character who already feels that something is not quite right (Currin et al., 2017, p.403), is given the choice of continuing to live a delusion ('taking the blue pill') or of gaining a new and true understanding of reality ('taking the red pill') (Van Valkenburgh, 2021, p.87). Cultural reference to the red pill has been made by different political actors. Feminist activists in South Korea used the metaphor of the red pill, for example to describe their experiences with online activism which opened their eyes, giving them a "new vision" of the misogynistic nature of online spaces in South Korea (Jeong and Lee, 2018, p.705). The reference has also been made by the misogynist men's rights movement in the US which claims "to expose the 'true nature' of feminism as oppressive to men" (Dignam and Rohlinger, 2019, p.595). Even though Schmidt was the only participant who directly used the metaphor, some of my AfD participants' stories follow, at least partly, the same

logic.[84] In these narratives, personal experiences or a specific political/social event (including *Cologne*) are described as leading to a new understanding of reality. Even though the act of taking a pill suggests a sudden understanding of reality, this sudden grasping of reality was not always the case in my participants' narratives. Arguably though, it was also not the case for Neo who already knew that something was wrong before he took the red pill, and taking the red pill simply initiated a process of gaining a new vision of reality and uncovering the true nature of it, which can also be a slow process.

Turning points

The first type of stories falling under the narrative of taking the red pill feature major turning points in one's political attitudes. A couple of participants told a tale of being left wing in their youth and formerly fond of multicultural settings before realising that something felt wrong. Local AfD politician Weber, who is in her 50s/60s, explained:

> For three years I was active in the leftist scene. At that time I was a squatter and participated in anti-nuclear power protests [...] Well, long story short I entered working life and that just changes your worldview, solely because you are in the middle of life and you notice that it is not that easy to change the circumstances. Following this, twenty, thirty years – as usually the case – I worked and well-behaved, I voted for the CDU, as you were supposed to act at that stage of life. The conditions were good, I thought it would continue like this, but at 50 or so, I realised something is wrong here!

The first turning point in Weber's narrative was the move from being left wing to voting for the conservative CDU party and being aligned with social expectations. Weber recounted her life course story that started with her youth, involved reflecting on life experiences which finally led to her AfD membership and her new vision of reality. Her narrative can be compared to those of Blee's (2018) participants (racist women in the US), who told stories of conversion, in which they "create a rational basis for their involvement" and they retrospectively construct their entry into a racist organisation around a story of personal transformation (p.132). The context of Blee's research is

[84] I note that none of the FPÖ members used this narrative. One possible reason for this is that I only interviewed four FPÖ members. Another is that the FPÖ as an older and more established party uses fewer narratives of finally understanding 'reality' in its own party discourses. As previously discussed, the party has existed since the 1950s and therefore has promoted its own 'reality' for almost 70 years.

somewhat different as her participants had joined groups that engage in physical violence, which women are less likely to do for social-cultural reasons (Rommelspacher, 2011, p.45). Unlike my participants, Blee's participants narrated a single sensational event, for instance a car accident, which led to their conversion (Blee, 2018, p.132). Weber may not have mentioned one particular personal event, but she told a story of slow conversion. She portrayed this in line with the expression mentioned by local AfD member Schmidt in her interview: "If you are not left when you are young, then you don't have a heart, but if you have not become a conservative when you are old, then you do not have a brain."

Weber experienced her second turning point at 50, when she realised "something is wrong here", referring to the Euro crisis and immigration policies. Describing how she lived in a city as a woman, she argued that she "experienced on her own body" that immigration does not work. Weber did not expand on this point – here Blee's (2018) argument that "bodily experience" is part of a gendered way to narrate conversion is instructive. "I realised", Weber continued, "that already in those days, immigration, as it was done, did not really work and that has nothing to do with xenophobia." The denial of racism, evident in this quotation, is part of many of my participants' narratives. This echoes Mulinari and Neergaard's (2014) Swedish participants who described themselves as normal people who do not want to be connected to deviant behaviour like racism (p.49). Ruth Wodak (2020) argues that the denial of racism fulfils the need for a "positive self-presentation" (p.341); a need, which is deeply gendered. Mulinari and Neergaard's participants, for instance, had a certain understanding of femininity, which was grounded in the act of caring (p.49), whereby a caring woman cannot be racist. I argue that the denial of racism and "positive self-presentation" have an even higher significance in the German context, in which being connected to racist behaviour invites comparisons with Nazis. My participants seemed to avoid this comparison either with saying "they know I am neither a racist nor a Nazi" (Bauer, AfD) or with refraining from the topic completely.

Weber presented herself as compassionate and good, recounting how she tried to improve integration. In her 50s, she explained, she became a teacher for immigrants, which meant a complete change of careers. She narrated this experience as a further turning point, which showed her that the integration of Muslims does not work. Weber stated: "I was in two minds, on the one hand, there is deep sympathy, which is completely appropriate and on the other, there is harsh reality." While still constructing herself as compassionate – she claimed to have feelings of sympathy for the stories of refugees – she argued that reality demonstrated that integration is an illusion, and that she could not

change anything as a teacher of immigrants. The story of her experiences with Muslim immigrants can be defined as her final red pill moment. She recalled:

> and then I realised for the first time, we might have a majority of people with a Muslim background, with whom we really can live well together, but as soon as there is a small minority, who really are radical, I don't want to say extremist, even though some of them were, then the majority is not standing up anymore.

Through her stories of her experience, Weber constructed an "all-knowing, committed self" in the narrating present, much like Blee's (2018, p.133) participants in their conversion stories. In other words, for Weber her path to membership was completed when she gained a new and correct vision of reality.

Local AfD member Braun's life course story overlaps with Weber's at least in parts.[85] Before Braun's story reached its turning point, she described her younger self as left leaning: she voted for the green party and knew people from the Antifa.[86] She stated: "For me it was always clear that I am antifascist, thus without fuss or quibble, and I was multicultural, we always travelled a lot. I also married an immigrant, half-immigrant, a Greek, a half-Greek." Here, like Weber, Braun described herself as open-minded and cosmopolitan underlining this with her left-wing and multicultural past, as well as with her marriage to a Greek man. Her turning point began, as she recounted it, when her daughter started school in the early 2010s. She explained: "And I was completely cured from the ideas of multiculturism after three years of primary school in this beautiful *bunte* [colourful- refers to a diverse school] primary school." Her choice of the word "cured" suggests that she was 'sick' before, which taps into the metaphors of sickness discussed above. The narrative of taking the red pill is hereby connected to being 'cured' from illusion. As she described it, Braun was first happy about the *bunte* class in which only three children did not have a background of immigration. She described her past self as "completely naïve", which suggests a conversion from being naïve to enlightened (Blee, 2018, p.132).

Braun's story follows arguments of culturalist racism mainly focused on anti-Muslim discourses (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2014, p.45). Culturalist racism is also

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[85] Braun also used the narrative about the 'othering' of sexual violence as shown above, which is closely connected to her turning points analysed here.

[86] There is not just one Antifa in Germany. The Antifa consists of different antifascist groups and subcultures which all use the name Antifa to describe themselves (Jänicke and Paul-Siewert, 2022, p.7).

visible in Weber's story about Muslims in her integration courses. Due to Braun's disillusionment with the *bunte* school, her son went to a Greek orthodox school class instead, which she argued worked much better as there was a "shared culture." She stated that she would not have thought this before but there are "clear differences." Here, she tapped into the far-right narrative of 'threatened spaces' by immigrants, for instance, the narrative of 'estranged' schools (Ajanovic et al., 2015, p.78).

Braun's description of the summer of 2015 can be characterised as her final red pill moment:

> And I have to say, when I saw the hordes of men, who crossed the border and all Muslims, all, or African or whatever […], you only had to look at the images, only men and those types, I already knew, this cannot end well. Firstly, we do not have enough women here, those men are excess humans there, and then I thought, oh god, what about my daughter…

With words like "hordes", "those types" and "excess humans", Braun used offensive and racist language while at the same time focusing on caring for her daughter. Mulinari and Neergaard (2014) argue that far-right narratives that are rooted in a purported concern about children ground racism in the notion of care (p.50). As one of their participants indicated: "it is because we love; not because we hate that we are in SD" (p.51). Braun constructed her story of how she came to be a member of the AfD around her children. As shown in the previous section, Braun narrated her daughter's experiences as dominated by violence of the other cultures, which revealed to her the incompatibility between cultures. Her conclusion is that the AfD is the only legal option of acting against this newly understood threat to reality and she emphasised that she does not want to engage in illegal activities.

Weber and Braun both told stories of changing selves initiated by several experiences, which can be described as red pill moments. Reflecting on both interviews, I realised that I felt uncomfortable. In their stories about their pasts, they had many familiar experiences to mine, such as being left wing and traveling a lot. While they told stories of their youth, I could almost identify with them, which increased the shock when their culturally racist perceptions showed themselves.

From non-involvement to involvement

Tales of participants' former lack of involvement in politics are partly in line with the narrative of taking the red pill. Fischer (50s/60s), a local AfD politician, described herself as apolitical before 2015. For her there was a clear-cut turning point, which is directly connected to her anti-immigration stance. Fischer narrated her earlier life as *bunt* (colourful), which included living in England and having been self-employed. Her turning point was described as follows:

> And at some point, I felt that I am irritated about what is going on in the news, with immigration and so on, but I also pushed this away, because I had my own life, my really good life. And then I came home one evening from a really long working day and I turned on the TV and watched the news like I always do, and I see the pictures in Munich at the train station, where many people were arriving, and young girls were throwing teddy bears. I turned off the TV, I sat down, and I was shaking and since that day I was politicised, because that was for me the moment, I could not understand.

Fischer narrated her emotional response to the arrival of refugees in the summer of 2015 as a turning point that led to her political involvement. The summer of 2015 has been termed the "so-called Summer of Welcome" as German borders were opened for refugees and civil society was mobilised to show hospitality (Hark and Villa, 2020, pp.36-37).[87] In Fischer's story, her red pill moment took place in front of the TV which showed footage of the arrival of immigrants. Before that, she explained, she already felt irritated, but she decided to ignore her feelings and to stay in the illusion as her life was good.

Fischer's reaction of shaking indicates fear – a fear which can also be identified in the previous section about Braun's story of seeing all the "Muslim men crossing the border." Ahmed (2014) argues that refugees as those "without home" are the "sources of 'our fear'" (p.80). The "language of fear", she elaborated, intensifies the threat posed by refugees, "which works to create a distinction between those who are 'under threat' and those who threaten" (p.72). In Fischer's story it is the "young girls", who are under threat, while the refugees function as the perceived threat. Ahmed (2014) argues that fear is used for political mobilisation (p.64), which can also be observed in Fischer's account. With

[87] However, at the same time far-right violence against refugees increased and the federal government passed new stricter asylum regulations and provided support to close Europe's borders (Hark and Villa, 2020, p.37).

Fischer's red pill moment being connected to the supposed threat for young girls, she amplifies the importance of finally being able to see reality.

An even more powerful narrative of fear was told by local AfD member Wolf (70s). She described her life as successful and claimed that before 2015 she had never seen the need to join a party. She also did not have time for politics, she claimed, because of her job as a medical doctor and her children. Wolf's turning point is the same as Fischer's and connected to the arrival of refugees in 2015. However, Wolf used more directly racist language, which made her interview very difficult to endure (as I discussed in Chapter 2). Her red pill moments were the "mass invasion of 2 million people" [88] and "when an 85-year old woman was raped in our forest and I told my husband, this is it." She continued, creating a threatening scenario with statements like "and now the *Kanaken* are coming", using a dehumanising word for immigrants which shows her disgust at immigrants.

Wolf did not mention the red pill, but she claimed that the media is "brainwashing" the population, which I argue can be defined as 'blue pills'. She continued that everyone who does not follow the mainstream (took a 'red pill') is denounced as a Nazi by the media. Here she mentioned:

> Hohohohohoho, the [her] five children, they suddenly say that their parents are Nazis […] do you know what a Nazi is, I was born in 1950 and until now I still have not met a Nazi and I am also definitely not a Nazi.

Like Weber and Braun, Wolf denied being racist. She also denied being a Nazi, denying even that there are still Nazis in Germany, which she makes clear with her statement that she "was born in 1950" (and therefore allegedly has never met a Nazi). That it is her children who call her a Nazi shows that her membership has caused a rift between her and her children, which illustrates the extent of her determination to be an AfD member.[89]

At a later point in the interview, Wolf commented further on Nazi history:

> You cannot put this into perspective, it is unique in our German history that we have killed the Jews. That we Germans maybe did that bureaucratically perfectly, who knows, no idea. It is a very bad history,

[88] This number is exaggerated, in 2015, under 1 million asylum seekers registered in Germany.
[89] I discuss stories of self-sacrifices in the next section about the 'urge to act'.

> but we cannot reduce the history to that, those 12 years, I am not ready to do that.

While Wolf conceded that it is a "bad history", she downplayed her condemnation as she argued that those 12 years should not define German history. Stating that "we Germans maybe did that bureaucratically perfectly", she even used a positive marker for "we Germans"; in line with: history was bad but it was implemented well. Significantly, only three other participants made direct reference to the Nazi period. However, this was not connected to their paths to membership. All of them mentioned that they do not understand why the Nazi era is still defining German history and why they are compared to Nazis. In my introduction, I explored how West German political elites in the 1980s started to include historical remembrance into their dominant discourses, which entailed the social condemnation of those who downplayed German historical guilt and those who used Nazi ideology (Art, 2006, p.146). Here my participants were tapping into far-right discourses which oppose the historical remembrance and relativise the crimes of National Socialists, which is in line with Gauland's comparison of the Nazi period with a *Vogelschiss* (see introduction). Wolf is clearly on the same page as AfD politicians like Gauland and used the discourse on the alleged insignificance of the Nazi past to make sense of her membership.

Something went wrong: Other cultures and communism

Participants' stories about experiences with other cultures and experiences with communism are narrated as closely connected to the feeling of something going wrong. Local AfD member Krüger's story serves as an example here.[90] Her most important reason to join the party is that "after years in the orient" she found "an alarming changed Germany." She wrote in her written interview:

> In many things I did not recognise my homeland anymore as such. Not just regarding the increasing value decline, but also the fact that I – even though I just left the *tiefsten Orient* [the deepest orient]– found the same here. You recognise change much more if you have been away for many years.

Krüger argued that she more easily understood reality than others because of her experiences in the *tiefsten Orient*. Her usage of this phrase alongside her description of

[90] Weber, Fischer and Braun's stories also incorporated experiences with different cultures, however, I will not repeat those.

the orient taps into an orientalist discourse whereby the orient functions as the 'other' and "has helped to define Europe as its contrasting image" (Said, 1979, p.25). For Krüger, however, this contrast has been lost as Germany is allegedly becoming the orient, which is part of racist ideas on the Islamisation of Europe, which is, as illustrated in Chapter 1, part of the AfD and Pegida's discourses.

Krüger's experience of coming back to Germany can be seen as her red pill moment. This story also positions her as an expert in being able to recognise this alleged change in Germany becoming like the orient – with her positive self-presentation as expert she suggested that she knows best. For Krüger, the only party that speaks the truth about this development is the AfD and she admires their *Mut zur Wahrheit* (courage to truth). Her self-presentation as expert on Islam was interesting for me, considering my own long-standing experiences in a Muslim-majority country and my own very different perceptions of reality[91] – a reality that for me is dominated by the growing threats of the far right and not of "Germany becoming like the orient."

Finally, some participants used stories about their experiences with communism (in the GDR or East Europe) as their main path towards supporting the AfD. Koch, a local AfD supporter, grew up in the GDR. She wrote about her decision to join the AfD:

> I was retired for a year and had been concerned with the social situation in our country for many years […] I also listened to and watched more news and other political programmes on TV, radio and other media and realised very quickly that a lot was left out or misrepresented. I participated and still participate today in Pegida demonstrations in Dresden. Here I learned and still learn many political details that we do not hear on the news. This brought back frightening memories of GDR times!!! Therefore, I thought I have to do more and not just join Pegida protests.

Koch's final red pill moment, as she recounts it, happened during the Pegida protests, which provided her with all the information she needed to understand that, according to her, Germany under Angela Merkel is similar to the GDR dictatorship. This narrative is not surprising, as communism is one of the threats that the AfD claims it protects Germany from (Bogerts and Fielitz, 2019, p.144). Volker Weiß (2019) argues that today's far right in Germany (and beyond) is fixated on the left as a dangerous enemy despite its

[91] I lived and worked in Jordan for the four years prior to my PhD.

current very evident lack of political power. The whole political landscape represented in parliament including conservative parties are depicted as left wing by the far right (p.73). The left wing in a second step is then often equated with communism and with suppressing all other opinions.

No need for the red pill? The stable self

Certain participants did not include a red pill moment, constructing their paths to membership as a linear process, where they stayed the same, but the surrounding situation changed. For them, it was not that they had previously misunderstood reality or that they were deceived by a false reality rather reality itself changed. Bauer, an AfD career politician, who was born in an Eastern European country, stated, for example, that developments in Germany "bring back memories" especially for her parents, including memories of a lack of freedom of speech and arrests. As she sees it, she and her family are the experts on communism, and she has a "huge problem with everything socialist." For Bauer, her and her family's experiences with communism have resulted in the construction of a stable self with an unchanging political attitude. Describing herself as always political, Bauer does not need a red pill. While she explained that she did support the CDU in the past, she argued that the AfD took the role of the CDU, which for her led to the logical conclusion to no longer support the CDU. Bauer explained:

> In the past, I was in the CDU, I was locally even active during my student time, but then I realised that Europe and Euro politics did not match with what I wish for Europe and for my country one bit and then the CDU lost me as a party member, because they changed their positions, my positions stayed the same.

Bauer clearly narrated a stable self, who acted logically after her surroundings changed and the CDU allegedly moved to the left. She argued that she "not even needed one day to think about it [her membership]" and she has been part of the AfD from almost its beginning.

Gruber and Moser, the two youngest participants (20s/30s) from the FPÖ, also told stories of a stable self and therefore did not have to include a red pill moment. I argue that the narrative on 'taking the red pill' is less likely to be told by younger women because for most older participants red pill moments were constructed around decades of perceived illusions. Gruber and Moser entered the FPÖ very young. Gruber comes from a family with similar views to her own and she mentioned that she was "socialised like

this." She stated further that the decision to join the party was "very easy, because, as I said, firstly I am from such a family and secondly there are no topics where I would say that I cannot agree with the party programme." Gruber is one of the few participants who directly mentioned family members being part of their paths to membership. As mentioned in Chapter 2, interview research about the far right in diverse national contexts has identified the family or friends as a significant factor for many women to join far-right parties and movements (for example, Blee and Linden, 2012, pp.101-102; in the context of the FPÖ, Rösslhumer, 1999, p.67). Scrinzi's research (2014a) on far-right members in Italy and France also revealed that many women join far-right parties because of their family or their husbands, which she framed as "couple- and family-activism" (p.7). My research findings do not support the significance of this factor, which could be due to my participants' wishes to present themselves as independent and strong women (further discussed in Chapter 4). Furthermore, an additional reason for the absence of this narrative from my data, could be that most of my participants were middle-class women and Scrinzi (2014a) identified the narrative mainly among working-class women (p.7).

Moser, currently a local FPÖ member whose family is supportive despite slightly different views, explained:

> I think I have always been political. I already stood up for others when I was at school and that continued like this. And when I moved from the countryside to the city, I saw many differences and I have seen certain problems and then I decided in my late teens to join the FPÖ, I looked at different parties before […] and the FPÖ was the right one for me.

Even though, Moser experienced a turning point in her surrounding with her move to the city, she presented herself as always having been political and acting for others (discussed further in Chapter 5), which she continues with her FPÖ membership.

The urge to act

Almost all participants described the urge to act in their interviews and for some it even dominated the narrative of their path to membership. In the interviews the urge to act often resulted from stories about 'othering' perpetrators of violence and red pill moments. As part of the narrative of the urge to act, participants told stories about not being able to 'stay in the living room' anymore, enduring self-sacrifices to act and their need to act as mothers for their children's futures. Beyond and/or as part of the urge to act, some

participants pointed out positive rewards they gained from their actions, which included the joy of acting in a community.

The deprivation of agency: "I cannot just stay in the living room"

Many participants from both parties recounted their urge to act with reference to leaving the private sphere, for example by using metaphors of not being able to stay on the sofa or in the living room anymore. A metaphor which was also visible in social media posts. For instance, Nicole Höchst, a Member of the German Bundestag for the AfD, posted on July 18th, 2020 a demand for people to "get off their sofas" and join a protest against the Covid politics of the government (Facebook). Similar sentences, like the following, were typical in my interviews:

> It is not an alternative for me to sit in my living room, to meditate and to tell myself, ah it will all be fine, someone will act, but no one acts and that's why I am still active. (Weber, AfD)

> Me and my husband had the opinion that it is little or no use to debate in the living room or at the *Stammtisch* (table of regulars),[92] because you cannot change anything with it. Therefore, I decided to run for a local position and to join the party. (Huber, FPÖ)[93]

> What else could I do, I had to do something, I thought I cannot just rant in the living room. This was not good for my psyche, I think I would have fallen sick, if I had not started to be active, because I am convinced by it. (Becker, AfD)

These are just a few examples of participants mentioning the urge to leave their private spaces to act publicly. Becker even stated that she would "have fallen sick" if she had stayed in her living room. She used a metaphor of sickness to illustrate how urgent and necessary her action seemed to her, at least as she recalled it.

Xydias (2020) identified how AfD women politicians tend to locate their party affiliation in the home (for example, calling their membership the "first marriage" with politics (p.118)).[94] Interestingly, my participants are talking about leaving their homes.

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[92] There is no accurate English translation for *Stammtisch*, the word refers to meeting regularly in the pub with the same people.

[93] Huber's reference to her husband and the need for his approval and support shows a heteronormative family hierarchy in line with her conservative views discussed in Chapter 4.

[94] Scrinzi (2014a) similarly identifies that many far-right women of the LN and FN situate their activism in the private domain, for example organising meetings at home (p.8).

As Xydias points out this framing is feminised through reference to the home (p.118). A reference which is embedded in the patriarchal gendered structures of the private (women's) and public (men's) sphere (Sauer, 2020, p.32; see also Scrinzi, 2014a, p.8). However, as Carter (1997) argues of 1950's West Germany, the role of women in the private sphere could encompass public agency for women through their consumerism in West Germany (p.71). Interestingly in the light of Carter's study, my participants narrated that they can no longer be only consumers of political decisions and therefore need to leave their homes and act. My findings complicate those of Xydias through shedding light on more in-depth stories of local AfD women members that show that origin stories are more diverse and multifaceted than they are presented in public discourse (for example in speeches and social media).

Local AfD member Wagner recounted that she joined the AfD because she wanted to be part of decision-making processes. The urge to act results hereby from the feeling that the government excludes citizens from active agency, which the AfD allegedly offers. Wagner explained:

> Thus, for me democracy is without question very important, and this is what the AfD stands for. They want more decision-making powers for citizens, we are only taxpayers and that cannot be right, they [government] decide over our heads and I do not want this.

This resonates with Sauer's (2011) observation that in today's Western democracies many people have the feeling that citizens are only consumers of political decisions and are therefore merely passive observers of political elites who are not representing them (p.125). Parties like the AfD and FPÖ present themselves as the only alternative and "force against the political status quo" (Yoder, 2020, p.49), with which they try to catch those who are *politikverdrossen* (politically disenchanted) (p.39) and mobilise them to become members and act.

The feeling of being excluded from political agency was also described by Fischer (AfD), as discussed in the previous section, when she talked about watching the news at home and feeling shocked and excluded by decision makers. Sauer (2020) argues that the populist far-right's promise of "affective agency" is a successful mobilisation strategy for people, who feel "deprived of agency and rights" in today's neoliberal societies (p.33). The feeling of dissatisfaction is used to mobilise members to act (p.30). In expressing a feeling of deprivation of agency and demonstrating how the AfD mobilised her through

their promise of "affective agency", Wagner narrated that she needs to act and cannot just be the passive citizen the government allegedly wants. However, as argued in Chapter 1, political dissatisfaction alone cannot explain paths to membership (in contrast to Kamenova's (2021) argument); political dissatisfaction has to be accompanied by a general belief in far-right exclusionary ideologies, which my interviews further illustrate. For Fischer, for example, the feeling of political dissatisfaction arose when she realised, through the pictures of refugees arriving in Munich, that the government was acting against her ideological beliefs.

So far, the participants I have been discussing in this section were all over 50; But the narrative of the urge to act was also prevalent in my interviews with the generations in their late teens, 20s and 30s. Klein, a local AfD member, explained:

> In general, it [joining the party] was an easy decision for me, because I wanted to be politically active and I think, this is the best way, to do something for what you want to change. Thus, I have to, I have to engage myself politically, so that I can stand for it, what I want to reach, I have to, in the end I have to do something for it.

Klein's story includes a youthful 'thirst for action' and she represented herself in the interview as determined, which is illustrated by her repeated use of "I have to." Like Becker with her reference to "falling sick", Klein narrated a real sense of urgency. The focus here lay on being active to contribute to change, which also dominated the stories of Schmidt and Lenz, who are both local politicians in an East German state and in their 20s/30s. They felt obliged to act and contribute to what they perceive to be positive change, if possible, and to make sacrifices for it such as experiencing difficulties in their jobs and lost relationships because of their party membership. This, they emphasised, shows their conviction. Bound up with this is the presentation of a dutiful self. Lenz described herself as "*pflichtbewusst* [dutiful]" and she stated that she had "sacrificed [her] relationship and [her] old job."[95]

Self-sacrifices

Lenz's account brings notions of self-sacrifices to the fore. In her interview, local AfD member Becker made reference to Martin Luther to illustrate why she must act despite her sacrifices:

[95] Participants' self-presentation as dutiful is also part of their roles in the parties, which I discuss further in Chapter 5.

> "But here I stand, and I cannot help it," to say it in the words of Martin Luther. I thought this through well, I am convinced by it, that I do the right thing and I have to make these sacrifices.

Luther, a crucial figure for the protestant church in Germany due to his role in the Reformation in the 1500s, has been a symbol and identifier for the creation of national identity in Germany for centuries.[96] Most importantly, today he still symbolises social, cultural and political importance for different German religious and cultural actors (Kałążny, 2020, p.208). By citing Luther, Becker equated herself with Luther as a figure, who takes immense risks and makes immense sacrifices to fight against an oppressive power (p.209). Like many other participants, Becker mentioned specific sacrifices, for example that she was looking forward to a quiet retirement in which she could spend all her time with her family. Additionally, she told me that she had lost contact to some family members and friends because of her membership and that her relationship with her daughter became tense. Through those sacrifices and her comparison with Luther, Becker presented herself as acting righteously.

Becker's account and the sacrifices described by Lenz and other participants create an image of selflessness a typical construction in the narrative of the urge to act. Becker compared herself to a man (Luther), but selflessness is also a gendered construction and more often associated with women's roles in society. In her research with right-wing conservative women in the United States, Rebecca Klatch (1987) identifies that "the time and energy devoted to political activism is interpreted [by right-wing women] as part of the self-sacrifice and altruism essential to the female role" (p.46). Even though her research was conducted over 30 years ago and in a different context, this observation overlaps with my interviews and shows that the construction of the self-sacrificing woman includes participants self-presentation in line with feminine norms.[97]

Weber (AfD), who also mentioned many self-sacrifices (for example that she lost all her friends), presented herself as a good person, who is acting righteously as well. However, she recalled, that she accepts her personal sacrifices because:

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[96] For example, in the 19th century he was the symbol for a new emerging young Germany in contrast to the old Roman powers. He symbolised the revolutionary and the liberator of thought (Kałążny, 2020, pp.201-203). Furthermore, during the Nazi time Martin Luther, who himself used antisemitic narratives in his writings, was used in Nazi ideology as a symbol for national identity (p.207).

[97] Stereotypical feminine roles are further discussed in Chapter 5.

> It is important for me to get up in the morning and to be able to look in the mirror and say: I believe it is good what you do, you stand up for your opinion.

Through the phrase “to be able to look in the mirror”, she indicated that she can be proud of herself because of her active support for the AfD. The mirror is an instrument through which one can see oneself like others do. As Bourdieu (2001) argues in his work a masculine domination, women are depicted “as symbolic objects whose being is a being-perceived, [which] has the effect of keeping them in a permanent state […] of symbolic dependence. They exist first through and for the gaze of others” (pp.66-67). With the metaphor of the mirror, the “gaze of others” is recreated by looking at oneself from the ‘outside’ and Weber is positively reaffirming herself with her own gaze. Through this self-affirmation, she made sense of her recalled sacrifices, which followed her party membership.

(Beyond) the urge to act: Acting in a community

Coming back to Sauer’s (2020) discussion of the far-right’s promise of “affective agency”, the urge to act is entangled with a feeling of doing something good and being part of a group. Not all participants talked about the urge to act as an individual action in line with the metaphor of “getting of the sofa”, some participants emphasised that they joined the party because they wanted to act in and be part of a community. The parties themselves mobilise members through advertising the possibility to acting together in a group. For example, the text of one of the AfD flyers (AfD, 2021a) for the recruitment of members asks people to be “*Mitmacher* [participants]” and to “act now” and be part of “exciting conversations, new friends: Party work is fun.” The flyer promises community and rewarding feelings such as excitement. Even though far-right politics mobilise many people through their anger or fear, emotions of joy and pride are also an important factor to reinforce memberships (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017, p.583).

AfD career politician Bauer, who has been in the party almost from the beginning, recounted her feelings of relief when she saw that there are others who share her criticisms of the system. Only after doing so she stated: “I have to act for my beliefs.” And it was important to her that she and these others “started all together”. For her, the beginning of the AfD was a “big joint venture”, which created a community of like-minded people. The unity of like-minded people and the feeling of togetherness in action is also part of Huber’s narrative of her path to FPÖ membership. “The membership creates unity between like-minded people and also togetherness”, she explained to me.

For some of my participants group membership seemed crucial while others did not mention it. Group membership can be a decisive factor of joining parties as it often leads to a sense of belonging and to a process of self-verification through others (Knowles and Gardner, 2008, p.1200). This recalls Blee and Linden's (2012) research on far-right women in the US and The Netherlands in which they classify some of their participants as wanderers who are "searching for political homes and constituencies of identifications" (p.102). The need for community was dominant in the narratives of Klein (AfD) and Moser (FPÖ), who are in their late teens and 20s. Klein, who, as mentioned above, narrated an urgency for her membership, stated:

> It was relatively easy, because the people are really super nice to each other and yes therefore, they made it easy for me, because you are so openly welcomed and also if you have like-minded people around you, that is very, very good.

This story is embedded in her wider story of being excluded and "hated" in school because of her opinions and of how she now can be active with people who understand her. The example shows again the importance of the process of self-verification through like-minded people (compare Scrinzi, 2014b); a verification that Klein clearly did not have in school. I argue that this verification is especially important for young women who have not built a strong sense of belonging yet and cannot get self-verification through family and/or careers. Megan Knowles and Wendy Gardner (2008) argue that through the rejection by a group, in Klein's case her classmates, people try to form connections with other social groups, in Klein's case the Young AfD (p.1201).

Even though Moser did not talk about stigmatisation due to her FPÖ party membership, she emphasised the benefits of being active with friends she met in the party. For example, she talked about the first group of people she worked with in an election campaign: "We were a pretty cool group, really young, motivated, friendly, funny people, I still meet with them today." According to Moser, their motivation and activism brought them together. With this sentence Moser also drew a picture of a normal group of people who are "cool", "young, motivated, friendly, funny." These positive characteristics (young, hip and happening) are in contrast to the public image of the party and its youth organisation which are not depicted as normal by public media discourses (for example, Kamenova, 2021; Diehl, 2018).

Motherhood and the future of 'our' children

Some of the AfD participants, told stories about motherhood and children in connection to the urge to act for (their) children's future.[98] These stories also include self-sacrifices, which is in line with cultural, political and social references depicting mothers as self-sacrificing women. For example, in the 1990s former German chancellor Helmut Kohl inaugurated a memorial in Berlin for the victims of war and tyranny, which is a sculpture of a mother embracing her dead son, who was a German soldier.[99] The statue clearly depicts mothers as having to bear sacrifices (Pickford, 2005, pp.149-150). Local AfD member Richter's interview is a good example of this kind of story as the urge to act dominated her interview and is linked to acting and sacrificing herself for her daughter and future grandchildren:

> I am always asked: "Why are you doing this to yourself?" This question also always came from my daughter: "Why are you doing this to yourself?" Because she knows that I cannot just shake off what happens and what we have to endure or when we [AfD members] are marginalised […] and then I said to my daughter regarding the question "why are you doing this to yourself?" […] I am doing this because of you, I am already in my 60s and retired. And I said, I can live the rest of my life without serious changes, but I am looking towards the future, I think of you and I hope I will also have grandchildren, and I do not want to put on them what I see as the future right now if the development continues. And this is my motivation.

Richter joined the AfD in a West German state in 2013, explaining that her final decision to join came from her belief that she must act if she does not like what is happening in Germany and if she wants to defend her family's future.[100] She narrated her path to membership as one full of self-sacrifices, which she accepted for what she described as a

[98] It is not possible to draw conclusions on the role of motherhood for FPÖ women members due to the limited number of interviews with FPÖ members. But I note that the role of motherhood has been especially important in Germany after World War II, which is discussed further below.
[99] The statue is a reproduction of a sculpture by Käthe Kollwitz after her son died as soldier in World War I.
[100] Here it is interesting to note that in the case of the LN in Italy only a minority of women (those who are part of the Catholic faction) frame their far-right support as a defence of their family and children (Scrinzi, 2014a p.7). Instead they make sense of their support through narratives of caring for the nation and the weakest members of the national community (p.8). This could be explained by a greater historical presence of the extended family in Italian culture (Luciano et al., 2012, p.152).

good cause – in her narrative, this is not connected to her own life but to the future of her daughter and possible grandchildren.

In his theory of reproductive futurism, Lee Edelman (2004) criticises heteronormative narratives that connect the future to the figure of the child, evident for example, when politicians present themselves as defenders of children with reference to issues like education and drug usage (p.2). He argues: "We are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the child" (p.3). As he points out, this is not just a far-right narrative, but an idea used by many political groups (for example, environmental groups). Reproductive futurism is so powerful and pervasive because it is difficult to argue against; as the rhetoric indicates people who oppose the political topic are opposing the future of children (p.3). In Richter's narrative, the "fantasy of the future" (Edelman, 2004), in connection to her concerns for her daughter and possible grandchildren's lives (caring for her kin), is clearly recounted as her main motivation for political activism. This positive self-presentation by Richter and other far-right women includes the idea that women who care about their children are normal/decent women who supposedly cannot be racists (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2014, p.50). A positive self-presentation that is used to make the self and the parties seem more acceptable.

Richter constructed a gendered self when she argued that she was "thinking of future generations and as a woman, and parent in general, you always have the best for your child in mind." Here she connected or even conflated her womanhood to motherhood/parenthood. The connection of being a woman and mother is also made by Bergmann, a local AfD politician in an East German state. She wrote in her written interview: "I would like to shout to women: 'Do something, those are your children, it is yours and their future! Fight for a better life, fight against misuse of power and the restrictions of our civil rights!'" For her, women are responsible to act for their children's future and her expression of "shouting to women" shows her frustration with those women who do not act like her. She clearly conflated womanhood with motherhood as if all women are or should be (only) mothers. Interestingly, almost half of my participants do not have children and most of them do not emphasise the importance of motherhood. I argue that this shows participants' different ideas of women's roles (further discussed in Chapter 4).

There is a long history of connecting the mother and child to the future of the country in the German context. In his study, Möller (1993) shows how all parties (left,

centre, right) in 1950's West Germany used the idea of a reproductive future in their party slogans. For instance, the CDU used the slogan "Wille zum Kind" ("The will to have a child") and the SPD used an electoral poster where a child says: "Mütter wir wollen eine friedliche und glückliche Zukunft" ("Mothers, we want a peaceful future") (pp.122-129). In 2017 the following AfD electoral posters was published (AfD, 2017, figure 1):

The poster shows former party leader Frauke Petry with her fifth child, indicating that the political fight is for German children. The quotation translates as: "And what is your reason to fight for Germany?" with "Dare [or be brave], Germany" along the bottom of the poster. The poster shows Petry as a mother and not as a politician and party leader, which places the emphasis squarely on the qualities of motherhood. Dietze (2020) argues that Petry exemplifies how women present themselves as mothers in politics.[101] This self-presentation of women party leaders is used to mobilise other mothers to join far-right parties if they care for their children's future (p.158). This strategy is also used on social media. For example, in Kathrin Ebner-Steiner's (AfD, Member of the Bavarian Landtag) post against Covid-19 measures, she used her own motherhood as her reason for action: "As mother I will act with all I have against health authorities. A corresponding inquiry for the Bavarian State Government is already in progress. #KES #AfD #Childrenfirst."

[101] In Chapter 5, I discuss how women have to negotiate between the roles of the (ungendered/masculine) politician and 'natural' roles of women.

Even though Ebner-Steiner was clearly acting as a politician when she filed the inquiry, the focus of the post lies on her being a mother. I argue that this rhetoric shores up the idea that the life experiences of mothers are women's main qualification for being in politics, appealing to their common sense as 'natural' carers. Following that logic, all mothers (or by extend all women) should 'naturally' join the AfD to fight for their children. In line with this, a few participants told me that they believe that all women (mothers) in the AfD have the same reason (their children's future) for joining the AfD, which many of my interviews contradict.

Though local AfD politician Schmidt (20s/30s) may not have children, she used a similar narrative but without making direct reference to motherhood. As the following quotation shows, she talked about possible children and future generations:

> The turning point for me was that someone told me, if you stay inactive now and you only vote but you are not acting, then your children and children's children and the children after that and the whole generation will learn about this history and will believe that you were part of this, because you are always put in the context of your time. The way people were acting in the 1960s, we also see a hippie in our mind, we do not see those who criticised the movement and then I could not sleep because of the thought that my great-grandchildren will think, I was one of those, who thought this is great and probably hold a sign at the train station [referring to people greeting refugees at German train stations in 2015], I do not want this.

Schmidt narrated parts of her path to membership around the idea of acting for future generations and the fantasy of the future.[102] In stating that she wants to leave something positive behind and not be judged for not acting, her urge to act is presented as not just based on the idea of a better future, but on how she will be seen in the future. This shows a wish for future acknowledgement, which might be denied by political stigmatisation in the present.

Schmidt's reference to future generations gains further significance in the context of how the concept of generations is mobilised in German culture more broadly, not least with reference to history (Vees-Gulani and Cohen-Pfister, 2010, p.16). A key work here

[102] Schmidt connected the idea of acting for future generations with her previously discussed fear of the Muslim 'other'.

is the study of German sociologists Karl Mannheim who wrote about the importance of generational cohorts in the 1920s (Kohut, 2012, p.5). More recently, Heinz Bude (2005) has labelled Germany the "land of generations" (as cited in Vees-Gulani and Cohen-Pfister, 2010, p.2). According to mainstream accounts of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the so-called second generation after World War II actively differentiated itself from their parents and grandparents' generations, who have lived through the Nazi period. Many writers from the second generation, for example, published novels about their dissonances with their parents and grandparents regarding their Nazi pasts. This second generation was the driving factor for the West German '68er movement (pp.4-8). Thomas Kohut (2012) argues that the difference between West German '68ers and those in other Western countries was the conflict the former had over the Nazi pasts in their families and in society (p.6). Meanwhile, as Susanne Vees-Gulani and Laurel Cohen-Pfister (2010) argue, there was little discussion about the Nazi past in the GDR (p.11).

Schmidt, an East German participant who was born after German reunification, is the only interview partner who positioned herself in contrast with a former generation. Interestingly this is not in reference to the generation of the Nazis. Rather, when she stated "you are put in context of your time", Schmidt drew a distinction between herself and the generation of 1968 (second generation), who challenged the Nazi past, when she said that she does not want to be seen like she sees that generation. In the German context, I argue, it is significant if people choose a specific generation to distance themselves from, which is not the generation of the Nazis, because this generation is responsible for the horrendous crimes of the National Socialist era. Instead of criticising the Nazi generation, Schmidt tapped into far-right discourses, in which the generation of '68 is blamed for a variety of perceived social and cultural malaises, including "a decline or even loss of values due to decadence, liberalism, feminism and a cult of homosexuality, to the decline in birth rates among the native population and to the welcoming culture towards migrants" (Goetz, 2021b, p.68).

Finally, the narratives on motherhood and futurity contribute to the creation of a caring and loving gendered self. As Blee (2018) argues, the motivation of women to join racist movements is not necessarily hate as their recalled motivation is often based on stories of love (p.64). Far-right groups and women might act out of love for their own, depicting themselves as caring for the well-being of others (p.123), however if some of my participants genuinely act out of love for their children and future generations, this

love clearly stands next to the hate their parties spread. Ahmed (2014) poses the questions: "What does it mean to stand for love by standing alongside some others and against other others?" (p.122). My interviews illustrate how the far right can make use of members' caring/loving stories, because through stories of 'love' participants make sense of memberships in line with the idea: "it is because we love; not because we hate" (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2014, p.50).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have been discussing my participants' narratives of their paths to membership, thereby addressing my research question on how far-right women narrate their reasons for joining the AfD and FPÖ. As I demonstrated, my participants clearly depicted themselves as acting in their own, their children's and 'the people's' interests (also compare Scrinzi, 2022). The question of whether women act against their own interest when they support the far right is one often asked in research, for example, in research on white women supporting Trump (Miller-Idriss, 2020, p.3). Surprisingly perhaps, my participants described the AfD and the FPÖ as the only parties that represented their interests as women. And their narratives depicted party membership as not only the best option, but as following directly from everyday common sense.

The narrative on 'othering' of perpetrators of sexual violence demonstrated how participants made use of a racialised everyday common sense which is part of a wider far-right discourse. Certain stories about experiences of violence merged with narratives of taking the red pill, where the experiences were described as an 'eye opener'. The participants' narratives on the red pill included major turning points in their political attitudes, which saw them undergo a conversion. Stories of a previous non-involvement in politics as well as experiences with other cultures and with communism could also be part of the narrative of taking the red pill. By contrast, the narrative about the stable self stood in opposition to taking the red pill as participants did not recount personal turning points. Meanwhile, the 'othering' of perpetrators of sexual violence and taking the red pill led to the narrative of the urge to act, which included stories about the wish to change the world and the need for community and acting together. For some participants this role was linked to the fantasy of the future, the child and motherhood. The narrative on the urge to act is embedded in the far-right's promise of 'affective agency' (Sauer, 2020).

The participants' individual stories are clearly entangled with the parties' ideologies. Their interpretations of events were partly based on far-right discourses, for example, discourses on dichotomies between cultures, on *Mut zur Wahrheit* and "simply

telling the truth", on having no alternative, on 'we' against the 'others', on violence and immigration. Here, I also illustrated that members of the far right adopt the populist rhetoric of their parties and use 'common sense' as "basis of all 'good' (politics)" (Mudde, 2004, pp.543-544).

Narratives of the gendered self and self-making are a thread throughout the three main narratives discussed in his chapter. The stories of my participants included the participants' self-making as caring mothers, as mothers who are good politicians, as normal, as good and open-minded persons/women. They created an image of selflessness and narrated the self-sacrifices they endured for their children and/or 'the people' and the country. Here I found parallels with Klatch's (1987) research on conservative women in the US more than 30 years ago. The self-making as the good woman/person included furthermore the denial of racism and hate, which Mulinari and Neergaard (2014) identify as a common theme for women in the SD. In general terms, there were many overlaps with reference to self-making discernible between my participants' narratives and the women in the SD, including the gendered loving self. However, the Austrian and German examples have their particularities, including AfD participants' efforts to present themselves as good and caring people, who allegedly 'cannot be' Nazis, which is even more significant in light of the German history and responsibility for the Nazi crimes.

Furthermore, I argued that the lack of the red pill narrative in interviews with FPÖ members suggests that the FPÖ as an older and more established party uses fewer narratives of finally understanding 'reality' in its own party discourses. In the Austrian context, the party has promoted its own 'reality' for nearly 70 years. This as well as the normalised integration of the FPÖ in the Austrian political system might also explain why the Austrian participants engaged less in stories of the caring/loving self, who allegedly cannot be racist.

Finally, while there are many overlaps in the stories of my participants, there are also clear differences and multifaceted stories of their paths to membership. For instance, the participants who based their paths to membership on their children and future generations conflated womanhood with motherhood and assumed that their children's future were the motivation for most women, which was not the case. This illustrates that some participants centre women's interests solely around motherhood and assume that all women have the same path to membership (based on their motherhood). Finally, there were generational differences. For example, certain older participants told their life stories with many personal turning points, while some younger participants explained

their membership more in terms of their families' political engagement or their own recent experiences, for instance, with sexual violence.

In the next chapter I turn to narratives on feminism and gender. There I pick up some of the questions that arose in this chapter, such as how the 'othering' of perpetrators of sexual violence is connected to the ambivalent entanglement of racism, sexism and feminism and how my participants use everyday common sense for making sense of gender and feminism.

Chapter 4: ‘Equality is the only reason I am politically active.’ Narratives about gender and feminism(s)

The AfD and FPÖ, as discussed in the introduction, are male-dominated and part of a broader antifeminist movement in Germany and Austria. It is therefore of particular interest to explore what women members have to say about feminism(s).[103] The AfD presents feminism as *falsch verstanden* (misguided) because, it alledges, the feminist movement only values women in employment but not as mothers (AfD, 2016). Meanwhile, the FPÖ claims to support equality between women and men in practice while rejecting equality measures which it sees as only supporting women’s employment (FPÖ, 2017), thereby giving a nod to feminism without using the term. In this context, it is interesting that nine of my participants named women’s equality as one of their main reasons for joining the parties. Aligning with Angela McRobbie’s (2009) theorisation of postfeminist discourses, there are many contradictions within these narratives of feminism(s), which seem to contain both antifeminist and feminist sentiments (p.1), as I demonstrate in this chapter. To analyse my participants’ contradictory narratives about feminism(s), I therefore use feminist approaches to postfeminism (for example, Scharff, 2012; Budgeon, 2011; Gill and Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2009). While not all participants use the word feminism itself, they at times make its presence felt through their avoidance of the term. Echoing Christina Scharff’s (2012) research on the repudiation of feminism by young women in Germany and Britain, “feminism was not only implicitly invoked, but also rejected without any mention of the term” (p.27). After a brief elaboration of feminist approaches to postfeminism and of feminisms in Austria and Germany, I examine what emerged as the three main narratives on gender and feminism in my interviews: women’s individualisation; the idea that feminism is going too far; and the claim of superiority (the ‘othering’ of feminism).

Situating the narratives about gender and feminism

Feminist approaches to postfeminism

Postfeminism is not a homogeneous concept and has been used to characterise aspects of contemporary culture since the late 1990s, when – broadly speaking – a feminist politics of transformation was exchanged for notions of freedom, empowerment and choice (Gill

[103] Most of my participants do not differentiate between the variety of feminisms, therefore I write here feminism(s).

and Scharff, 2011, p.3).[104] Various feminist scholars argue that, within postfeminism, antifeminist and feminist ideas become entangled, and that postfeminism, in the words of Shelley Budgeon (2011), “relies upon a fundamental contradiction – feminism is both incorporated but simultaneously reviled” (p.281). Several backlash discourses have been identified within postfeminism, for instance the idea that feminism is an issue of the past that was successful but is now no longer necessary (Gill and Scharff, 2011, p.3). The ‘pastness’ of feminism includes the motif that we have accomplished equality, as demonstrated by the individual achievements of women (Budgeon, 2011, p.281). A second backlash discourse is the claim that feminism leads to women’s unhappiness (Gill and Scharff, 2011, p.3) as it is too extreme and ideological (Scharff, 2012, p.1).

Postfeminism does not just entail a feminist backlash as, crucially, elements of feminism become incorporated. McRobbie (2009) argues that certain aspects of feminism have become part of political and institutional lives, including the individualistic discourses of empowerment and choice (p.1).[105] In other words, measures for women’s equality are incorporated into different institutions, which provides opportunities for women to participate in all areas of public life.[106] But this excludes a feminism concerned with social criticism and structural change, only comprising liberal, equal opportunities feminism (p.18). In this way, we see how postfeminism and neoliberalism are entangled, due to their shared focus on individualism rather than on the social and political. As Rosalind Gill and Scharff highlight, neoliberalism is clearly gendered, and women are constructed as its ideal subject because they are expected to self-manage and discipline themselves while being provided with allegedly ‘free choices’ to manage their lives (Gill and Scharff, 2011, p.7). McRobbie (2009) demonstrates, too, that feminism is treated as common sense while at the same time being hated (p.12). With a focus on Germany, Scharff (2011) elaborates this further, illustrating how the slogan “everyone is equal” is depicted as common sense (p.33) while the term feminism leads to unease and bewilderment among many (p.1). She argues that especially young women are reluctant to talk about feminism as they are afraid of being regarded as unfeminine, man-haters or

[104] I grew up in the postfeminist era and for a long time, I did not really know much about feminism and was not really interested in it either. As I remember it, people never really talked about feminism and our educational system did not include feminism or the history of feminist movements in the curriculum. I remember that feminism was often negatively depicted and that feminists were called *Emanzen* (a demeaning word for women, who are emancipated).

[105] I want to emphasise that I believe that individual empowerment is essential but not sufficient on its own (Budgeon, 2011, p.290).

[106] This includes the integration of feminist objectives into the modernising goals of the state, which is closely connected to the transnational networks of the EU and UN (Marx Ferree, 2012, p.228).

lesbians (p.2), which shows their postfeminist gender anxiety (p.75). Feminism and femininity, she argues, are hereby often portrayed as mutually exclusive (p.13).

A brief elaboration of feminisms in Austria and Germany

While many of my participants' stories pick up aspects of postfeminist discourse, they also reflect their parties' discourses on gender and feminism (discussed in the introduction and Chapter 1), which are, in turn, shaped by, the history of feminisms in Austria and Germany. Feminisms in Austria and Germany have, as elsewhere, always included many different strands (Lenz, 2018, p.26; Messner et al., 2018, p.6); it would exceed the scope of my work to provide a detailed discussion of feminisms in both countries.[107] I will however provide a brief overview of feminist history relevant to my participants' narratives.

Certain participants support some of the topics of so-called second-wave feminism(s).[108] Main topics of this wave included the right to education, the right to work and equal payment, political participation, abortion rights, gender self-determination and the freedom from violence (Holland-Cunz, 2018, p.7). Additionally, as Juliane Lang (2020) demonstrates, the double burden for many women of paid employment and care work has been on the agenda of feminists since the 1970s; however, the idea of the double burden is also instrumentalised by far right and conservative actors, who claim that women should focus on care work (p.350). Central for my research is the associated notion of 'freedom-of-choice', which has also been part of feminist debates for decades and was central to second-wave feminism (Budgeon, 2015, p.304). Simona Isler (2015) discusses how the women's movement has been in conflict over the question of women's roles in care work and paid employment. For instance, sections of the women's movement in the 1970s (in the German-speaking context and beyond) demanded 'wages for housework' in order to value the everyday work of women and provide social visibility. This demand was supported by Marxist feminists, who critiqued the Marxist focus on the exploitation of largely male workers without recognising the exploitation of women through housework (pp.218-223). Isler points out that this demand was part of a liberation struggle from capitalist housework as well as paid labour (p.224). It was met by criticism

[107] For a better understanding about feminisms in Austria, see: Zachas, 2020; Mayer, 2018; Messner et al., 2018. For more literature on feminisms in Germany, see: Zachas, 2020; Schmincke, 2019; Holland-Cunz, 2018; Marx Ferree, 2012.

[108] Second-wave feminism is widely considered to have started in the United States and Europe with the civil rights movements in the 1960s/70s and lasted until approximately 1990s. In contrast, to the collective memory in Austria and Germany of that movement, the second wave was already heterogenous and many different strands of feminism existed (Schmincke, 2019; Mayer, 2018).

within the feminist community however. Opponents of the demand argued that the call for 'wages for housework' endangers feminist aims as it would not free women but enslave them (p.226). Feminist Marxists, in turn, have criticised the positive depiction and myth of paid work as liberating for women (p.228). Still today, feminist theorists and activists, as well as other political actors (including the far right), discuss these topics (Holland-Cunz, 2018, p.8) and the focus on individual choice has been co-opted by neoliberal antifeminism as well.

It is important to note that feminisms in the GDR differed greatly from those in West Germany and Austria. The state socialism of the former GDR provided some benefits for women including public childcare and abortion rights (since 1972) but left little space for feminist activism and movements, which certainly does not mean that there were no feminists in that state. One of the spaces that feminists made use of in the GDR was fiction writing (for example, feminist writers such as Irmtraud Morgner and Christa Wolf). Through this, they told a counternarrative to the state's claim to provide women with emancipation (Marx Ferree, 2012, pp.54-55; Martens, 2001). As mentioned previously, in average 90 percent of women worked outside the home in the GDR but women still tended to be responsible for most of the care work (Scharff, 2012, pp.18-19).[109]

The so-called third wave of feminism, as it is broadly understood, started in the 1990s and included a further diversification of feminisms. Post-structuralist feminist and queer theory, which had become popular among younger feminist activists outside more established feminism in Germany in the late 1990s had significant implications for feminist politics with German feminist scholars such as Sabine Hark and Heike Raab using queer theory to explain and contest gender inequalities (Marx Ferree, 2012, p.195). In Austria, too, the late 1990s and early 2000s came with a respectivity to queer theory, which has been influential for activism and not just scholarship (Mayer, 2018, p.350). In her study of the varieties of feminisms in Germany, Marx Ferree (2012) writes that she attended a lecture by the feminist philosopher Judith Butler in Berlin in 1997, which felt more like a rock concert than an academic lecture. She describes this as the "Butler boom" among younger (mainly academic) German feminists, who were enthusiastic about Butler's gender theories, such as gender performativity (p.176). Here, generational

[109] Just three years after reunification, a wave of unemployment led to a 40 per cent loss of jobs for men and women. This led to further discrimination for women as they had to navigate the structural disadvantages of now being part of the Federal Republic of Germany (Marx Ferree, 2012, p.17).

differences became visible as many feminists, who had been part of the second wave movement, feared that the focus on gender would shift attention away from women's issues and that the idea of the collective would get lost – this belief is shared by many of my participants.

While queer theory and activism were popular in certain Austrian and German feminist circles, feminist ideas were barely present in mainstream society in the late 1990s and early 2000s and the word 'feminist' tended to be used derogatorily as an insult (Scharff, 2011, p.266), as I experienced growing up in Germany. As Scharff (2011) remarks of this postfeminist period in Germany: "It has been widely documented that women, and particularly young women, do not identify with feminism as a label or political movement" (p.265). However, since 2006, the term has been used more positively, at least in certain contexts. 2006 saw the emergence of what has been termed 'new' German feminism which can usefully be understood as part of this postfeminist era. 'New' German feminism was a response to the so-called German *Demografiedebatte* (a debate about demographic change in Germany), stoked by conservative antifeminist and racist concerns about the decline of the 'German people' due to a low birth rate. Ironically perhaps, this debate also led to a new public debate about feminism (Scharff, 2011, p.265).

While critical of the postfeminist claim that equality has been achieved, 'new' German feminism reflects many postfeminist themes. And, as has been observed, it represents the views of a rather homogeneous and privileged group of women (white, well-educated, heterosexual, neoliberal) (Scharff, 2011, p.265-66). One example of this 'new' feminism is the book *Die neue F-Klasse. Wie die Zukunft von Frauen gemacht wird* (The new F-class. How the future is made by women) written by the German author Thea Dorn (2006), who interviewed eleven women she defines as avant-garde (p.37).[110] Some of these women endorse feminism and others, like Dorn herself, prefer to use a new term (*neue F-Klasse*) to distance themselves from the 'old' feminism of the second wave (Scharff, 2012, p.110).[111] Elisabeth Klaus (2008), who labels this 'new' feminism as *Elitefeminismus* (elite feminism), argues that elite feminists use neoliberal self-praise, do

[110] Dorn uses the term avant-garde for the women because she argues that they, as women with a successful career, would have been an absolute exception 30 years ago. Even though they are still a minority they are now a league of their own and were able to reach their aims with their own individual efforts (p.37).

[111] Ironically, second wave feminists, labelled as 'old' by the 'new' feminists, called themselves the *neue Frauenbewegung* ("new women's movement") to distance themselves from the first wave women's movement (Schmincke, 2019, p.2).

not engage in social criticism and are inherently part of heterosexist discourse which only includes and privileges heterosexual cis women (pp.176-180). Here the postfeminist 'rejection' of feminism is directed against an older feminism "from which the new feminists desperately seek to distance themselves" (Scharff, 2011, p.268). Barbara Murero-Holzbauer (2018) argues in her Master's thesis on elite feminism in Austria that themes of the 'new' German feminism have been part of the Austrian discourse as well, for example the focus on individualism and freedom-of-choice have dominated popular discourses and books like Dorn's were widely read in Austria.

Today, the multiplicity of feminisms is influenced by local, regional and global debates (Lenz, 2018, p.20) and reaches from the radical equality feminism of German second-wave feminist Alice Schwarzer, which includes anti-Muslim racism and trans-exclusionary standpoints (anti-gender), to pop and queer feminisms, anti-racist feminisms and Black feminisms.[112] These multifaceted strands partly support each other and are partly in opposition to each other (Zachas, 2020, p.34). Ulrike Koch and Anna Zschokke (2014) argue that the internet, for example, provides queer feminists with a space to produce knowledge which is accessible to people who have or have no prior knowledge about queer feminism. Additionally, the internet allowed campaigns like #metoo[113] and the German speaking versions *#Aufschrei* (outcry; started in 2013) and *#Ausnahmslos* (without exception) to be seen by the public and conventional media (Druecke and Klaus, 2014, p.63).[114] In Austria and Germany, the response to these campaigns was also met with a backlash, which saw parts of the public question the credibility of these women, claim that these hashtags lead to 'cancel culture' and that these are individual problems and not a collective issue (Hausbichler, 2018) – a discourse in which some of my participants are engaged.

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[112] The photo project *This is what a feminist looks like in Frankfurt* (Frauenreferat der Stadt Frankfurt am Main, 2022) is a great example of the diversity of feminisms. The project was published in a book, in which 167 feminists are presented with a photo and a short description of their feminisms (including, queer feminism, Black feminism, equal opportunity feminism, anti-racist feminism, liberal feminism, elite feminism, etc.).

[113] The black American feminist Tarana Burke started #Metoo in 2006 to offer support for Afro-American women, who experienced sexual violence. The campaign only became internationally known in 2017, after the actress Alyssa Milano asked women to post under the hashtag if they experienced sexual violence, thousands of women followed this appeal (Martini, 2020, p.255).

[114] Feminist activist Anne Wizorek started *#Aufschrei* in 2013 as a Twitter campaign against sexualised violence and street harassment in Germany. Tens of thousands of women used the *#Aufschrei* to share their experiences of harassment and sexual abuse (Karcher, 2016, p.73). The campaign *#Ausnahmslos* was a feminist reaction to NYE in Cologne. The feminist organisers of the campaign stand against sexualised violence and racism, and therefore reacted against those actors (including feminist Alice Schwarzer), who used Cologne for their racist campaigns.

In bringing to bear feminist approaches to postfeminism on my data and situating my participants' narratives in the history of feminisms in Austria and Germany, I am introducing a new angle into considerations of far-right discourses about gender and feminisms in Austria, Germany and beyond.[115]

Women's individualisation: Strong women and their choice(s)

Narratives about individual experiences, strong women, the rejection of quotas and freedom of choice emerged from my data. To a certain extent, these narratives illustrate the postfeminist theme that equality has been achieved; terms like 'empowerment' and 'choice' fulfil the 'former' role of feminism (Gill, 2016, p.624). Most of my participants avoided using the term feminism, too, endorsing women's individualisation in ways that echo postfeminist discourses (McRobbie, 2009, pp.13-15).

Individual experiences: 'I have never been disadvantaged'

FPÖ politician Huber (in her 50s/60s) and local AfD member Wolf (in her 70s) stated that they had never experienced disadvantages because they are women. "Fortunately, I was brought up in such a way that I was never told that I was less worthy because I was a girl", commented Huber when I asked her about the space for women in the FPÖ. "So, in my whole life", she continued, "I have never questioned whether I am just somewhere or have achieved something because or despite the fact that I am a woman." "I have coped with everything", observed Wolf as reply to my question on the AfD's claim that feminism is misguided. "I have never believed that women are discriminated against. Maybe, I don't know; it is not my own experience." Wolf continued: "I myself have never experienced in my own biography in 70 years that I am disadvantaged as a woman. Never."

While Huber acknowledged that she has been fortunate, Wolf claimed that women have never been discriminated against. These statements illustrate a focus on personal experiences, thus lacking a consideration of social dimensions which were overall absent from their interviews. This mirrors the endorsement of individualism in postfeminism and neoliberalism and the lack of social and political discussion (Scharff, 2012, p.51). In popular discourse, feminism tends to be perceived as detrimental to responsible and

[115] As discussed in Chapter 1, Sprengholz (2021) discusses the women's rights narrative of the AfD in parliament with a postfeminist lens. However, he mainly uses an anti-Muslim framing of the AfD's postfeminist narrative, which I also identify but it is not my main focus. In general, if postfeminism is mentioned in connection to far-right discourses, it is connected to anti-Muslim stances (for example, in Boulila and Carri, 2017).

autonomous individuals as it is seen as a collective movement, which allegedly limits strong individual woman (p.11). This depoliticisation, indicated through individualised rhetoric and experiences, is a thread throughout my interviews. In contrast to most other participants, however Wolf, who even asserted twice that she had never been disadvantaged despite her 70 years, is not mobilising the postfeminist narrative that women's discrimination lies in the past and has been overcome (Scharff, 2012, p.29); it 'most likely' never existed in the first place. She thereby showed an antifeminist endorsement of women's individualisation, which renders feminism (past, present and future) obsolete (McRobbie, 2009, p.11). Wolf was already in her mid-twenties (in 1977) when, for the first time, women were legally allowed to work without the permission of their husbands. I suggest that, because of her age, her denial that women's discrimination ever existed is even more significant due to all the legal restrictions she grew up with, which were abolished because of feminist activism.

Local AfD member Klein (in her late teens) is the only participant under 50 who stated that she had never experienced discrimination:

> For me, feminism is, at times, rather a topic which I keep away from because, as I said, I don't have so much to do with women but rather with men. Accordingly, I have never thought, yes I must now somehow, I must now stand up for my rights as a woman […] I was never mistreated just because I am a woman.

Klein's narrative further illustrates the bypassing of a political discussion of feminism in her conclusion that she never had to stand up for her rights as a woman because she always got along better with men and therefore avoided feminism. This narrative is rooted in a misogynistic discourse of women's avoidance/rejection of other women (Paxton and Hughes, 2014, p.114), which Bronwyn Winter (2002) examines in her research on the Australian right-wing politician Pauline Hanson. Hanson, as Winter reveals, described women as backstabbing and men as better friends (p.204). Through distancing herself from feminism through her friendships with men, Klein presented feminism and men as mutually exclusive, which is connected to both the postfeminist and antifeminist depiction of the feminist as man-hater; an image which especially young women want to avoid (Scharff, 2012, p.2). Based on Butler's work (1993), Scharff (2012) uses a performative approach to argue that the negotiation of feminism is linked to the negotiation of gender identity and heteronormativity. Feminism is hereby perceived to 'trouble gender'. In that vein Klein's rejection of feminism can therefore also be seen as

a performance of gender as she wants to demonstrate that she is not an unfeminine manhater (pp.12-14),[116] which shows her anxiety about feminism and gender relations. This is an anxiety that Scharff (2012) also observes in her research on German young women's perception of feminism. She concludes: "Numerous participants rejected feminism because they did not want to be regarded as unfeminine woman, a man-hater or a lesbian. These repudiations of feminism can be interpreted as performance of gender and sexuality." (p.13)

Zimmermann is a local AfD member in her 50s/60s. Anxiousness about feminism and gender identities is also visible in her account of her individual experiences which, she claimed, show that women's equality has been achieved. After my question about her opinion on the AfD's definition of *falsch verstandener* (misguided) feminism, she answered:

> And on the subject of feminism, well as I said, I learned [a male-dominated manual profession] 40 years ago, well, I think I'm feminist [uses the male noun] enough to show that in our country everyone regardless of gender or church or how they feel in their body, Germany offers every opportunity [for people] to make everything out of their life. You just have to do it and want it. But there are all opportunities; I don't see where anyone is limited here. It's just for me always a question of: do I want to, do I want to, do I sacrifice time, do I sacrifice anything of mine to achieve this goal, am I hardworking enough, am I ambitious enough? You can get all the support; it's all there. It's all in front of you; you just have to want it. So, to say feminism, what is feminism? Equal rights, yes, we have them here in Germany; I don't know anyone who is disadvantaged.

For Zimmermann, her training in a male-dominated manual profession is proof enough that anyone can do anything in Germany if they want to. She repeated this several times with different words (every opportunity, all opportunities, no one is limited), which suggests the importance of this narrative for her and indicates her anxiety about feminism as well as gender identities. She argued that there is no need to discuss gender because individuals are responsible for their own lives, emphasising further that everyone is personally responsible for being aware of what they want and for being willing to work

[116] I discuss the role of femininity in a later section.

hard for it. Even though she claimed to be feminist enough, because of her vocation, she then rejects feminism on the grounds that equal rights already exist. Her individualistic discourse about self-management and responsibility is a substitute for feminism in a postfeminist discourse (McRobbie, 2009, p.1), with her description of people as free resembling the subject of neoliberalism and postfeminism. Zimmermann ignores gender and other social barriers and does not see the need to discuss the implications of gender for life chances.

Finally, in the case of Koch, a local AfD member in her late 60s who brings the GDR perspective into the discussion, the experience of growing up in East Germany prior to unification is used as a means to describe the collective experiences of women in East Germany:

> We women in East Germany are EMANCIPATED[117] enough. […] Feminism – we did not deal with this question at all in the GDR because we women were lathe operators, excavator drivers, foreign trade merchants, crane drivers, graduate engineers, etc.! When we joined the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany] in 1990, it already started with *Kauffrau* [businesswoman] [the first word in female form] etc. But we were still equal as women, and that is important! To the east of the FRG, our men also cook, clean, and take care of the children.

In contrast to the above discussed participants, Koch invokes the collective experiences of women in the GDR to argue that women there were not disadvantaged. Her narrative illustrates what Heft (2015) called an East German post- or antifeminism, which includes the idea that the East reached emancipation long ago. Koch based her rejection of feminism on the argument that East German women are emancipated due to their employment in all fields, which she defines as the end point for feminist activism (p.191). As previously mentioned, women in East and West Germany have had different experiences regarding feminist and women's issues (Scharff, 2012, pp.18-19). Koch's age is shaping her narrative here as most of my other participants from East Germany only experienced a few years of the GDR before unification and were therefore largely socialised in reunified Germany, which does not mean that East and West German experiences have been the same since unification (p.19). Koch's comment about the arrival of the *Kauffrau* after unification displays her repudiation of current feminist

[117] Koch provided her answers to my interview in written form, the capital letters of 'emancipated' were used by her.

debates and she defines those as a West German *Irrweg* (false track) – she refers here to the debate on gender-inclusive language.[118] She drew a clear distinction between women and men in the East in comparison to the West, where women supposedly are not emancipated. Heft (2015) characterises such differentiations from the West as anti- and postfeminist repudiations of feminist debates as they indicate that equality has been achieved in East Germany at least (pp.191-92).

Fostering individual strength

Career politician Bauer, in her late 40s, used a narrative about strong women to define 'real' feminism.

> *Nicole Roy*: The AfD mentions *falsch verstandenen* feminism in their policy programme, and I wanted to ask you whether you believe there is also an adequately understood feminism and what it would look like?
>
> *Bauer*: Yes, there is. That is precisely what I said earlier: Women's confidence to request what they are entitled to. I want equal rights; I do not want us all to be the same. We are not; that is obvious. But I want equality – which we have as women – to get the jobs we want and good jobs and go into politics. Self-esteem is necessary, and that we strengthen each other and say, yes, we want to help each other, and we support each other, and if someone is a little bit shy, then another woman takes her under her wings and helps her. But it is about self-esteem to say, we can do this, we can make this, and we do not need quotas. That is real feminism to be strong as women and not to say, we need help from someone. The women before us also did not need that. Alice Schwarzer also did not do this; she stood firm and said her opinion. We do not need pity.

Bauer only mentioned the term feminism after I used it in my question; however, her answer ("that is precisely what I said earlier") shows that feminism is implicitly present in the interview beforehand (Scharff, 2012, p.27). The quotation illustrates several postfeminist themes, including the focus on individual strength and depoliticisation of feminism. However, by mentioning feminist Alice Schwarzer, who has been active since the second-wave women's movement, Bauer contradicts a postfeminist narrative of

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[118] West German feminists were disappointed after reunification, when "a [East-German] woman would stand up in a meeting and use the male form *Professor* or *Elektroniker* to identify her occupation, rather than adding the "-in" grammatical ending" for women (Marx Ferree, 2012, p.166).

opposing 'old' feminists (Scharff, 2011, p.268). German popular media and antifeminists often have attacked Schwarzer (Becker-Cantarino, 2014), who has been the personification of 'old' feminism. At the same time, it is not surprising that Bauer mentioned Schwarzer and puts herself in this lineage as she today fuels far-right discourses on anti-Muslim and trans-exclusionary stances (Hark and Villa, 2020, p.77).[119]

It is also relevant to mention that Bauer is from the same generation and has similar characteristics to the group of white, well-educated, heterosexual[120] women who created a 'new' (elite) feminism in Germany in the early 2000s (Scharff, 2011, p.266; Klaus, 2008, p.180). As mentioned above, before moving on this 'new' feminism is closely related to postfeminist discourses and emerged after decades of using feminism as a swearword in Germany. Bauer's individualistic talk about strong women is, for instance, in line with Dorn's definition of the *neue F-Klasse*. Bauer showed her disregard of differences among women, which is also common for this 'new' feminism – feminism has been reframed as a 'common sense' choice whereby structural constraints have been discarded in favour of a more individualistic rhetoric (Scharff, 2011, pp.265-272). Certain aspects of feminism are perceived as a matter of course, for example equal access to education and jobs, while structural inequalities are ignored.

In the quotation, Bauer makes clear that she wants equal rights, but that equality is mainly already there. Nevertheless, she showed gender awareness when she acknowledged that women need to support each other and gain self-esteem to get jobs and join politics. In other words, she argued for women's solidarity, which sharply contradicts some of the other participants' narratives, especially Klein's, as she stated that she does not have so much to do with women. Bauer illustrated an understanding of specific gendered differences and power dynamics. She is aware of the difficulties for women of entering public spheres, but instead of claiming feminism, she is lobbying for individual strength (on that, see Scharff, 2012, p.10; p.58). I argue that she went a step further than the postfeminist narrative of individual strength and individual responsibility when she said that women should support each other – an idea that only two other participants emphasised (discussed further below). However, Bauer partly contradicted herself by also saying that women do not need help because strong women can make it on their own and "do not need pity." I agree with Wimbauer et al. (2015), who argue that

[119] I discuss the entanglement of feminism with anti-Muslim stances further in the section on narratives of superiority.
[120] I discuss heterosexuality in the section on saving femininity.

the narrative of the strong woman constructs a neoliberal performance myth, ignoring inequalities and discrimination, which leads to the perception that "women should not whine" (p.51).

Bauer's narrative, then, is clearly contradictory, which mirrors the fundamental contradictions of postfeminism, whereby antifeminist and feminist ideas are entangled (Budgeon, 2011, p.281). Bauer described inequalities and at the same time disregarded them:

> From my brother or […] my husband, I know that when they go into salary negotiations, they beat their chest and say I am the biggest, best, greatest, most beautiful and entitled to everything I demand. We women are always a bit shy; we do a good job, and we believe that sooner or later the boss will recognise that we are performing well and then we will get the promotion, and we will get more money, which is not the case. We must learn to act just like men, say I am the best here, and know it. I am entitled to the money or the promotion or the mandate. I think we must work on that and teach this self-confidence to young girls.

Bauer clearly recognised the problem that women get fewer promotions or jobs despite their good performances, concluding that masculinity is the desirable default. Yet, she ridiculed the behaviour of men by using the metaphor that they beat their chests – an animalistic illustration of strength and domination/intimidation. Her solution here is to change the behaviour and mindsets of girls and women so that they can act like men and receive the same rewards. In this way, she contradicted the idea that good performance leads to success; rather, masculine behaviour does. Using "we women", she included herself and me in the narrative and, despite her otherwise individualised rhetoric, creates a sense of collectivism and support aimed at strong women, which is also common for the 'new' feminism and can be read as a call for female solidarity but only directed towards a specific class of women (comparable to Dorn's (2006) *F-Klasse*).

Gruber, a local FPÖ member in her late 30s, also emphasised the need for strengthening women's confidence. Demonstrating gender awareness about the confidence 'problem' of women, she stated:

> What is undoubtedly also a female phenomenon is that women are less confident than men and therefore show less elbow fighting. […] I have

> often experienced this myself: one takes a back seat and thinks, yes, maybe a man can do that better than I. But I think that is still a social problem that lies with women themselves. […] I think it's more a problem that exists in women's minds.

Though Gruber may define women's lesser confidence as a social problem, she solely located it within women's perceived natural capabilities and not within society. She also did not offer a solution for this problem, implying that women have to change their mindsets and become more confident, which I interpret as a plea for stronger women. In line with postfeminist narratives, Gruber did not talk about the need for structural change but about the responsibility of women to change. Even though she is a decade younger than Bauer, she also grew up at a time when postfeminist narratives were dominant and when the 'new' feminists were publishing and discussing on talkshows their books about the individual achievements of strong women. As mentioned earlier, those themes and books were also part of the Austrian discourse (Murero-Holzbauer, 2018) in which Gruber's narrative is situated.

Fischer (AfD) also argued that women need to be supported in their self-esteem. In her 50s/60s, Fischer indirectly hinted in the following quotation that she had been part of the women's movement in the 1970s/80s, which differentiates her from Bauer and Gruber and the young women who are often the focus of postfeminist narratives:

> I had an outstanding youth, my time when I was twenty/thirty in the 1970s/80s and that's already, that was a celebration, that was a celebration to the extent that we were free, […] you were allowed to be who you wanted to be, you had the opportunity with your work to achieve something. […] We were angry, we have, especially me and many of my friends, I have emancipated myself, I remember when I was young, I was sixteen or seventeen, so when my first female friends wanted to move in with a boy, they had to get engaged or at least pretend or get it certified otherwise they got no apartment at all, and that's something. I've also experienced a lot, so I've experienced this development, in parts also co-created change.

Fischer argued that in the 1970s everyone (all individuals) could do what they wanted and could achieve something through their work. She only vaguely invoked ideas of collectivity when she stated that "we were angry" and that she co-created this

development. German feminist sociologist Gerhard (2020) argues that after the 1980s, the sense of a collective "we" in the women's movement disappeared as individualism came to dominate most of society. Fischer's narrative shows this shift. She mentioned 'we' but did not talk about collective action as she stated that she had emancipated herself and that her friends took individual action to live with their boyfriends. By mentioning the heterosexual relationships of her friends, Fischer perhaps aimed to underscore the heteronormativity of her experiences.[121] As mentioned above, Scharff (2012) identified in her research "the heteronormative requirement that women like and desire men renders feminists' identification problematic […]" (p.76) because feminists are portrayed as unfeminine, manhaters and lesbians (p.2).

Nevertheless, support for women is vital in Fischer's narrative, and she is active in the party on this topic:[122]

> Women often make themselves small; they are usually in the background and say: I don't know and cannot do this, let him do it. And that is one reason why I say I want to support women. They should understand that they are someone […].
>
> There are two things: on the one hand, to bring strong women simply into mandates, into good mandates, not because of the material stories, but because of the work. That's one thing, but that's more secondary, that's what I said before, maybe find the pearl, I'm concerned with strengthening women in their self-esteem.

Similar to Bauer and Gruber, Fischer professed to wanting to support women and strengthen their self-esteem. However, the metaphor of finding "the pearl" and her wish "to bring strong women into mandates" illustrates an individualistic approach to feminist issues like women's representation in politics. The focus on the achievements of women and allegedly achieved equality builds a parallel to postfeminist and feminist discourses (Budgeon, 2011, p.281). Fischer wants to showcase women like a pearl and ignores structural differences. Nevertheless, she also advocates solidarity between strong women (on that, see: Klaus, 2008, pp.181-182).

[121] Further discussed in the section on feminism is going too far.

[122] Her role in the part is further discussed in Chapter 5.

'I am not a quota woman'

Bauer, Gruber and Fischer talked extensively about the fostering of individual strength. Even though other participants did not discuss this idea at length, they emphasised their rejection of quotas for women. Here they tapped into the individual performance myth, discussed above, which ignores structural inequalities (Wimbauer et al., 2015, p.51). Wolf (AfD) stated:

> My point of view is that whoever can make something of himself [sic] and who does something himself, no matter what gender, transgender, man, woman, heaven knows what, he can also somehow achieve something, yes and for this, he does not need the support of any groups. What do I know? Women, men, the best, the best [*der Beste* (male form)], theeeee Beeeest [*die Beste* (female form)] prevails. That should be the case; I am also against the women quota. […] the people who deliver the best results, who do the best work, yes, whether it's a man or a woman […]

Wolf argued that gender does not matter and that everyone can achieve everything if acting and performing well. She supports the individualistic notion of meritocracy: that the best will make it. Significantly, she exclusively used male (pro)nouns at the beginning of the quotation, which could be construed as indicating that men are more often the best or that gender does not matter, and therefore language does not need to be gender inclusive. When she used the female form of 'the best', she stressed it through a loud and long accentuation, which may well have been encouraged by my research topic as she knew that I research women in the party. With her expression "heaven knows what" Wolf indicated her anxiety about different genders beyond binary cis gender. At the same time, she presented herself as 'tolerant' of individuals and argues that only the performance of individuals counts, not their gender. Her alleged tolerance marks "heaven knows what" genders as deviant and marginal: according to Wendy Brown (2006), tolerance is a discourse of depoliticisation that marks the "objects of tolerance […] as deviant, marginal, or undesirable by virtue of being tolerated […]" (p.14).

That almost half of my participants, as well as 27 of the career politicians on social media, used the narrative of "I am not a quota woman" shows that they endorse their parties' firm rejection of quotas, which is also reflected in both parties' low percentages of women representatives in parliament (Ahrens et al., 2020, p.3). However, over half of

my participants stated that they want more women in the party but without the quota.[123] Bergmann (AfD) wrote in her written interview:

> I consider a 'quota' for women to be utter nonsense. People should fulfil certain functions only and exclusively based on their abilities. However, women's work should be better 'rewarded' because it is precisely the highly motivated but rather 'quiet' women who are not noticed enough.

Bergmann showed awareness that women are often less rewarded than men when she mentioned that "quiet" women are overlooked; nevertheless, she did not conclude that this disadvantage for "quiet" women should be solved with measures that tackle structural inequalities. Arguing that individual abilities should be the only factor considered, she did not detail how women's work might be better "rewarded."

Other participants used 'positive' and 'negative' examples of individual women as arguments against the quota. Wagner (AfD), for example, provided 'negative' examples of quota women, such as Claudia Roth, Annalena Bärbock (green party politicians) and Sawsan Chebli (SPD politician), who, in her opinion, are completely ineffectual. Rösslhumer (1999) in her study identified similar narratives among her FPÖ participants, who claimed that the quota only helps "weak and bad women", who are unqualified, with "weak and bad men" warranting no mention at all (p.135). My participants also showcased strong women who could make it without quotas. "We have great women in the AfD," explains Wagner (AfD), "for example, Ms Weidel [current co-leader of the AfD]. Those who perform should also be included." According to Schäfer (AfD):

> [One AfD politician] was in the state parliament; she is now pregnant with the 5th child, so that's quite a power woman. That's quite a power woman; she has mastered her job as a member of parliament very well and already had four children. Her husband has supported her; he works at a university and has helped her, so I think the women in the AfD are already very self-confident and have also always, yes, fought through life.

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[123] I discuss participants' claim that they want more women in the party in Chapter 5.

Schäfer claimed that the AfD politician who was able to be in parliament, have four children and be pregnant simultaneously, shows how women are very self-confident and can make it independently or with their husband's help. This is a very individualistic showcasing of one "power woman" and again supports the narrative of individual strength and depoliticisation.

Freedom-of-choice: 'Modern' and 'traditional' narratives

In her late 20s, Moser (FPÖ) is one of the few participants who said that she joined the party as a way to further women's equality. Focusing on freedom-of-choice, she stated:

> Why the FPÖ, because I believe it is the responsibility of politics to create conditions for people […] and the essential issue is to create measures to reduce inequalities and for women, for example, the gender pay gap and that women have social security. And we from the FPÖ always say that, especially regarding women, we support their individual life models, and it does not matter if a woman chooses to stay home with her child. This is equally important as if she decides to work. It is of utmost importance to guarantee freedom-of-choice […] public childcare is a good thing. In the same way, if you say that a woman decides to stay at home, maternity leave will be accounted for. To guarantee freedom-of-choice, suitable measures must be supported.

Moser's focus throughout her interview was on *Frauenpolitik* (women's politics). In contrast to most other participants, she stressed that it is the responsibility of politics to reduce inequalities. Above she briefly mentioned the gender pay gap as one such inequality.[124] Even though the gender pay gap is mentioned in the FPÖ's election programme 2017 it is not a dominant topic for the party.[125]

Moser's main focus in the interview was freedom-of-choice; an issue the FPÖ highlights as the most important topic for women. Indeed, the topic was mentioned by all four FPÖ participants and, as Rösslhumer (1999) points out, many FPÖ women were already supporting freedom-of-choice decades ago (p.131). By mentioning existing

[124] This topic is mentioned by the IFF. The IFF Steiermark, for instance, posted on June 24th, 2020, a quotation from their member Sandra Beisteiner: "The #equality of #women in the #labour market must be a matter of principle! Women-specific professions must be financially upgraded - fair pay for the work done." However, the gender pay gap is not mentioned by AfD participants and on AfD social media accounts it is openly denied.

[125] *Frauenpolitik* or family policies are not included in the FPÖ's election programme 2019 (Goetz, 2020, p.4).

inequalities that political parties need to address, Moser contradicted the dominant postfeminist theme that equality has for the most part been reached. At the same time, she used the postfeminist theme of freedom-of-choice, focusing on women's individual choices ignoring structural inequalities. Freedom-of-choice has been co-opted in postfeminist discourse, which shows how certain feminist ideas are pitched up while others are left out. Moser emphasised women's right to work and to stay home, which according to her, should be ensured through public childcare and maternal leave. She argued that the best support for women is, therefore, guaranteeing their freedom-of-choice.

Moser went on to illustrate an understanding of the ways in which women get judged for all the decisions they take when she stated: "The most important thing is respect because I think many women experience that they are judged no matter what they decide to do." Here, Moser made a nuanced observation on how society perceives and constantly judges women – most other participants only argued that women get judged if they stay at home to take care of their children but not if they are working. Through her statement, Moser unwittingly alluded to a flaw in the idea of freedom-of-choice: how negative judgment can restrict free choice. As Budgeon (2011) states, "[a]n uncontextualized understanding of the ideal of 'choice' reinforces a regime of personal responsibility and a separation of self from gendered contexts" (p.285). I argue that Moser to a large degree understands this wider gendered context; however, she did not criticise the gendered restrictions and limits of freedom-of-choice, which include, for instance, the gendered hierarchies and inequalities shaping women and men's choices and opportunities (Orloff, 2009, p.322).

In contrast to the younger FPÖ members, career politician Huber (50s/60s) argued for a mother's 'choice' to stay at home, at least in the first three years of a child's care, and blames the state for taking that choice away from women. She is in the party, she claimed:

> for real freedom-of-choice in childcare. If care within the family is supported financially like childcare outside the families, then those women who want to experience the most crucial time of their children's lives themselves can look after them until kindergarten – without financial loss […]. If *Frauenpolitik* [women's policy] is suitable for all women, it should also be good for mothers who do not want to hand over their child to state childcare right away in the delivery room.

In suggesting that mothers are forced ("right away in the delivery room") to give their children to childcare outside the family so as to not incur a financial loss, Huber mobilises the far-right trope that women have been coerced into the labour market and therefore are robbed of their freedom-of-choice (Sauer, 2007).[126] Mentioning financial loss here taps into the idea of 'wages for housework'; however, her standpoint is very different from the feminist Marxists who criticise the exploitation of women through unpaid work. Huber's argument is that women's real wishes – including for traditional role divisions – are not considered (Rösslhumer, 1999, pp.45-46). She clearly supports the preservation of the traditional male-breadwinner system where women are primarily responsible for caregiving (Palier, 2010, p.23). A different picture to Huber's claim that mothers are coerced to go back to work is provided by Rathgeb and Wiss (2020), who illustrate that only 20 per cent of all children under three are in formal childcare in Austria and only 23 per cent of mothers of children under six years are working in full-time employment (in comparison to 40 per cent in the EU on average). In other words, Austrian family policies only allow a minority of mothers of young children to be formally employed in Austria (p.3; p.7).

Huber clearly illustrated her support for traditional ideals of the nuclear family with the mother as 'natural' carer. In contrast, Moser talked about freedom-of-choice from a 'modern' angle as she does not ascribe a 'natural' choice (the choice to be a mother) to women. While Huber told a traditional narrative, Moser used the tropes of 'freedom' and 'choice', which are allegedly offered to young women in a postfeminist era as feminism is made superfluous (McRobbie, 2009, p.11). I argue that the difference between Huber and Moser's usage of the freedom-of-choice trope illustrates the effectiveness of the FPÖ's strategy to include gender political narratives as well as antifeminist narratives in order to address different groups (Goetz, 2020, p.2), for example, young women who support the liberal ideal of freedom-of-choice and women who support traditional ideals of the male-breadwinner model. This strategy arguably leads to ambivalent statements on the part of the FPÖ and its members who either use the ideal of the traditional family and the role of women as mothers or the postfeminist notion of women's freedom-of-choice. This ambivalence echoes the contradictions in postfeminism in its inclusion of antifeminist and feminist ideas (Budgeon, 2011, p.281),

[126] Similarly to Huber, many of Scrinzi's FN participants call out the 'double burden' for women and the need for freedom of choice, but only criticise that women allegedly do not have the choice to not work (2017b, p.97).

as well as 'traditional' and 'modern' views on family structures, which can both be covered under the trope of freedom-of-choice.

Though certain AfD members also talked about freedom-of-choice, the narrative was more prevalent among FPÖ women. As a relatively new party, it is only recently that the AfD has played a role in debates on freedom-of-choice; it is therefore not comparable to the FPÖ whose discourse on freedom-of-choice is more developed and comprehensive as they are part of these debates since the 1980s. The AfD claimed in their election programme of 2021 that they were supporting the nuclear family as fundamental to society, advocating that children should not be given to public childcare in the first three years (AfD, 2021, pp.104-107). While stressing the importance of women's choices, then, the AfD clearly emphasises the value of the traditional family model, criticising all other political parties who allegedly coerce women into employment (Sprengholz, 2021, p.492).

Local AfD member Krüger (40s/50s) wrote to me:

> It would also be important for me to create the framework that allows women to live the role they want to – whether at work or in the family; some manage both, although that not infrequently destroys the family. The AfD is accused, again and again, of standing for an old role distribution; the woman must stay at home at the stove. She doesn't have to do that if she feels called upon to do something else […]. In addition, our government has not managed to create feasible conditions (especially financial) for a very long time, which would make it easier for a woman to decide for the family as 'main job'. Many women want to be stay-at-home mothers – if the earnings of the man were enough […]. Why should such an important job of mother not also be paid?

Though Krüger may state that women should decide on the role they want to live, she continued by focusing on the importance of the job as mother. She judged working mothers when she wrote that this often "destroys the family." Later in the interview, she also mentioned that she feels sorry for the children of (working) mothers who do not have time for them. She clearly supports a traditional family model in which women can find their individual happiness in the heterosexual nuclear family (Dölling, 2008, p.27).[127] Her

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[127] Due to the different history of families in Italy and Germany, Scrinzi's LN participants are not just lobbying for wages for housework in the nuclear family but for women's care work in the wider national community and family (2017a, p.876).

request that the mother's job be paid corresponds with the feminist demand for 'wages for housework'. However, her aim is not the liberation struggle from capitalist housework but the reinforcement of women's role as mothers. In claiming that many women would choose to stay at home if they could, Krüger supports traditional ('natural') gender roles. Her narrative illustrates that the demand for 'wages for housework' can be used, then, to reinforce traditional roles. Here, Krüger alluded to the AfD's claim "that a woman's choice to be a mother and housewife [in Germany] is not only discredited but also made economically impossible by government policy" (Sprengholz, 2021, p.492).

Local AfD member Schmidt (20s/30s), who is the only younger participant supporting this traditional narrative, also endorsed the idea that each woman must decide on her role for herself, before asserting:

> I do not agree with new-fashioned ideas: 'oh yes, I'm the top manager here, and my husband is somehow the babysitter'. That simply doesn't work, that doesn't work for children either, because they merely cry when daddy is there and not mommy. That's how it is, a lot of men also have a big problem with that and are completely overwhelmed with it, because the child doesn't stop crying.

Schmidt emphasised the idea that changing the traditional division of labour does not work (she twice stated that it "doesn't work"). By calling the father who looks after the children the "babysitter", she illustrated that the role of the mother is 'natural' while the father's is not, which she further underlines with the image of the crying child. Though Schmidt is not a mother, she stated that if she has children in the future, she will be the one who takes care of them. Here, she depicted herself as fulfilling her natural calling (Dölling, 2008, p.28). As a young woman, she might feel that she needs to defend this position against the neoliberal idea that women should do it all. As Dietze (2020) states, for women who have a full-time job and are the primary carer for their children, "emancipation feels very exhausting" (p.151). Indeed, Sprengholz (2021) identifies a critique of the neoliberal commodification of women as a recurring theme for the AfD (p.492), which corresponds to the critiques of feminist Marxists who criticise the myth of liberation through paid work. However, it is of course not the neoliberal capitalist system that the AfD is criticising but 'modern' roles for women, which are advocated by left-wing politicians and feminists. The AfD has close contacts with neoliberal think-tanks and often supports neoliberal politics, as Kiely (2020) points out (pp.410-411). Contradictions in the AfD's discourse with regard to neoliberalism allows the party to

attract women like Krüger and Schmidt as well as women who are more in line with a neoliberal agenda.

In her interview, Bauer (AfD) also briefly employed the concept of freedom-of-choice, but from a less traditional angle:

> The AfD stands for a traditional family model: father, mother, child. And we can also see that women sometimes prefer to stay home with the children, and we want to support this. [...] It should be possible for women but also for men, who say they want to stay home and take care of their children.

Bauer told me that politics is her life and that she works twenty-four seven. She does not have children but explained the circumstances of a friend who wanted to stay at home with her children but could not afford to do so. For her, it should be financially possible for a woman or a man to stay home with children. However, she also went on to say that a man "should stay at home and *play* the househusband" if he wants, suggesting, as Schmidt did with "babysitter", that she does not see this as his natural role.

For Fischer (AfD), women have the choice of two equally essential options: career and/or family. She argued: "As a single and a *Unternehmerin* (businesswoman), I am not the prototype of a conservative woman [...], but that is also conservative for me because I think the family picture is a free choice." She did not describe freedom-of-choice for mothers; instead, she talked about careers and motherhood separately. She also provided the example of her two nieces to illustrate freedom-of-choice, one of them being like her an independent woman and the other being a mother and living the traditional life.

To conclude this section, a pattern of narratives about female individualisation and strong women clearly arises from my data analysis. Using feminist approaches to postfeminism as analytical tool, I illustrated a range of feminist and antifeminist themes entangled within my participants' narratives about individualisation. I argue that narratives about individual experiences with regard to an absence of discrimination, the fostering of individual strength, the rejection of quotas and freedom-of-choice all ignore structural constraints and function to depoliticise women's positions in society. A few participants did identify constraints and inequalities for women in society but used an individualised approach to feminist issues, which led to contradictions in their narratives as they offered individual solutions for structural problems. Additionally, the different interpretations of freedom-of-choice (traditional and modern) also illustrated how the

parties can balance very different and contradictory perspectives under the same topic of debate.

‘Feminism is going too far’

One of the prevailing narratives within a majority of interviews is that feminism has gone too far.[128] Sanders et al. (2019) argue that many far-right actors in Austria and Germany acknowledge the historic fight for women’s rights, but that not many call themselves feminist (p.176), because equality, in their eyes, has already been reached and contemporary feminism(s) are unnecessary and/or harmful. The themes of ‘women are already equal’ and feminism is ‘gender madness’, which includes the narrative ‘defending femininity and masculinity’, are present in most interviews. In the following section, I explore these themes and show how far-right narratives on gender and feminism go beyond postfeminist discourses.

Women are already equal: “Let the things develop in their normal course”

Local AfD politician Weber (50s/60s), argued that women have already achieved a lot:

> When I look at how far women have come in reality. For example, in the 70s, my mother – I’m from [a big city] – had to ask my father for permission to work. We have not had women’s suffrage so insanely long yet, and if I now really look, then I can only say: People, for God’s sake, let the things develop in their normal course.

Weber’s narrative is contradictory as she argued that “things” (gender equality/women’s rights) should develop normally using the phrase “organic development of society”, which depoliticises women’s rights. Simultaneously, she talked about women’s suffrage and how women’s positions in the 1970s changed. Both of those developments did not change ‘organically’ but were changed by women’s movements and even entailed feminist support for militant actions at times (Gerhard, 2019, p.15; Karcher, 2016). For Weber, it is common sense that women should have the same chances as men, which allegedly is mainly the case. According to her, discrimination against women lies in the past as women’s equality has been achieved and still existing inequalities will be eradicated by ‘natural’ developments.[129] This is a typical far-right (Mayer and Goetz,

[128] Some of them did not use the word feminism but talk about feminist issues (for example, gender-inclusive language) going too far.
[129] Unfortunately, I failed to pick her up on this contradiction in the interview.

2019, p.219) and postfeminist narrative, in which feminism is declared redundant (Budgeon, 2011, p.281).

Two statements made in my interview with Fischer, a local AfD member in her 50s/60s, further illustrate the idea of 'natural' development with reference to women's rights. After my question about the AfD's statement on *falsch verstandenen* feminism, discussed above, she first argued: "*Falsch verstandener* feminism is feminism that is implemented through *Zwang* [coercion]. I do not perceive this as normal, for example, this whole me-too story." Fischer used words like *Zwang* several times during her interview – an idea that has an important function in the rhetoric of the AfD as the party pits *Zwang* against choice (Sprengholz, 2021, p.492). Here Fischer tapped into the "imagination of right-wingers that emancipation is 'dictated by elites and feminism'" (Dietze, 2020, p.149) and does not follow a 'normal' path. Fischer used the me-too movement as an example of this *Zwang*, thereby falling into antifeminist rhetoric against the me-too movement which includes the claim that me-too is part of a *Verbotskultur* (cancel culture) (Hausbichler, 2018, p.14).

Later in her interview, Fischer used even stronger rhetoric in her rejection of contemporary feminism:

> I find this whole story of feminism sad because it is *pervertiert* [perverted]. After all, they [feminists and left-wing politicians] stepped over boundaries […] Some things we reached with emancipation are now *pervertiert*, it tips over, it is not natural anymore.

Fischer's use of the word *pervertiert* on two occasions underscores the idea that feminism has gone too far. The word perversion has a long history in psychoanalysis and has been used to categorise people who do not adhere to social norms and limits in their sexual behaviour (Sharpe and Boucher, 2003, p.151) and are therefore allegedly in need of a cure (Rothenberg and Foster, 2003, p.2). This problematic and highly moralising categorisation as *pervertiert* is also used to judge social norms beyond sexual life. 'Perversion' indicates that social limits have been overstepped and therefore that the order of the world is at risk (Rothenberg and Foster, 2003). For Fischer contemporary feminism is a perversion, which suggests the need for a cure for this 'abnormality'. Additionally, her depiction of feminism as coercive and imposed from the outside creates an image of a sort of feminist bully. Despite her strong rejection of feminism here, Fischer lobbied for women's solidarity several times during her interview, co-opting some feminist themes.

Both Weber and Fischer, then, depicted feminism as no longer necessary because equality has been reached while at the same time positively acknowledging the historic fight for women's rights.

Krüger (AfD; in her 40s/50s) did not advocate solidarity between women and took up antifeminist and conservative arguments in her interview. She wrote:

> But I am sure the *kranke Blüten der Emanzipation* [sick blossoms] of emancipation] are the only reason so many women have hardly any children nowadays and are less able to devote themselves to children. Men and women are equal (of course they should be), but they are not of the same kind; they have different characteristics, gifts, abilities, dispositions, which can be helpful for different tasks – so also for family life, the education of children; men and women do not have to compete, they complement each other. Only women can give life, which is a unique destiny.

Using poetic language, Krüger blames women's emancipation for taking away the opportunity for women to take care of their children and, therefore, their chance to fulfil their "unique destiny" and be happy (Ahmed, 2010, p.50). For her, emancipation is, in the words of Ahmed, "recognisable as the cause of our sickness" (Ahmed, 2014, p.98), which in Krüger's case may also implicitly refer to the sickness of the nation. The *kranke Blüten* evoke what McRobbie (2009) calls the "monstrous ugliness" of feminism in the postfeminist era (p.1). Usage of the word *krank* (sick or diseased) implies again the need for a cure as well as the fear of further contamination and decay (Ahmed, 2014, p.83). If emancipation spreads sickness and disease, it might infect others, but it can also be cured. The quotation implies that the nation is sick because of emancipation, which is the reason for low birth rates and leads to the decline of the nation and puts it at risk of being 'overtaken' by the 'other' (Dietze, 2019, pp.141-145). The argument that traditional life models are destroyed by feminists was used in the *Demografiedebatte* of the early 2000s, discussed above, which saw conservative and antifeminist public figures like Eva Herman[130] blame the women's movement for the fall of the birth rate and the forgotten real destiny of women, including complementary classical role divisions and women's responsibility for the nation's future (Dölling, 2008, pp.26-28).

[130] Eva Herman is a former TV presenter and the author of *Das Eva-Prinzip: Für eine neue Weiblichkeit* (Eva's principle: For a new womanhood) published in 2007.

Most far-right actors in diverse contexts use binaries, like Krüger and most of my participants do, to explain the existence of the 'natural' dual gender system, where men and women are part of a complementary relationship (on that, for example, Klammer and Goetz, 2017; Mulinari and Neergaard, 2017), which leads to the idea that "men and women are equal […], but they are not *gleich gearted* [of the same kind]" (Krüger). More than half of my participants reject the idea that women and men are the same, describing the idea as 'unnatural' and something imposed by feminism and gender equality measures. Through the usage of the word *gleichartig/gleich gearted*, participants implied that they reject the deconstruction of gender binaries.[131] Gruber's (FPÖ) words are instructive here:

> There are specific topics where I say, this is too much for me, just too much, I am, of course, I am a woman myself, I want women to have the same rights as men and to be *gleichwertig* [of the same value] but not *gleichartig*, there should still be differences.

Gruber invokes the idea that gender equality has mainly been achieved here, and that even though there are still visible inequalities between men and women, some differences are 'natural' and should not be changed by feminism. She asserted: "Hopefully, every woman is a feminist, but not those feminists you normally imagine, who want to be more masculine than men […]. So, for me it is like this, I wish for equality but not sameness." "Those feminists" step over 'natural' boundaries – a form of feminism that she described as "exaggerated." As Scharff (2012) argues, the statement that someone is not like 'those feminists' is part of and replicates discourses against feminism (p.40). Even though Gruber has a more liberal view than most participants on feminism, she defended – like most others – the 'natural' gendered differences, which mirrors the FPÖ's antifeminist position on equality support (Falter and Stern, 2017, pp.187-88). The FPÖ blames emancipated women and gender politics (which again can be read as a signifier for feminism) for an alleged *Gleichmacherei* (turning everyone into the same) (Goetz, 2020, p.4). But, like Moser, Gruber did not reject feminism outright. This could be because of the increasing visibility to younger women (especially online) of different feminisms in the last decade, as discussed above. Additionally, both Gruber and Moser are aware of gendered inequalities and so seemingly cannot bring themselves to say that feminism is

[131] The rejection of *Gleichartigkeit* led to several contradictions in narratives. For example, Bauer said that she is against *Gleichartigkeit* but as shown earlier she also talked about women needing to be more like men, who are "beating their chests."

redundant. Moser, for example, mentioned the gender pay gap and Gruber stated that it is more difficult for women than men to have a career, with both claiming that they want to change these social inequalities.

Beyond postfeminism: 'Gender madness' versus 'common sense'

On June 19th, 2020, Beatrix von Storch, Bundestag MP, retweeted the following post from the AfD parliamentarian group:

> @ Beatrix_vStorch exposes the insanity of the other parties in the debate on the transsexual act: "The political fight of the gender ideologists is directed against biology, reality and common sense!" #Bundestag #AfD

The post includes a video of von Storch's anti-trans speech in parliament, in which she ridiculed the attempt of the green party to introduce a law which would make it easier to change genders legally.[132] She stated, for example that this proposed law is "Orwell 2.0" and that "The Greens' gender diversity in practice looks like this: Men bear children, win gold medals in women's sports, go to the women's sauna, and, of course, men can invoke the women's quota." The post and her speech illustrate how the narrative of 'gender madness' is mobilised, depicted as detrimental to common sense. Von Storch calls other parties insane and used anti-trans statements to mobilise support. For her, trans people disrupt the notion of binary sex and their existence is against common sense (Schuster-Craig, 2021, p.141). As mentioned in Chapter 1, despite von Storch's antifeminism, her argument is in vein with trans-exclusionary feminists' ideas against trans people (Pearce et al., 2020, p.681).

During my social media observation, nineteen women posted 53 posts about 'gender madness' and 'gender ideology', which shows how they can vilify everything connected to gender through reference to the concept of 'gender ideology', which taps into the previous discussed international discourse of the anti-gender movements (Schmincke, 2018, p.32). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Kováts (2018b) argues that far-right actors in Austria and Germany connect the word gender to the perceived threat of a

[132] On June 19th, 2020, the green party brought forward the motion to cancel the 40 years old transsexual act and instead pass a new law: the right for self-determination. The reason for this motion was to overcome the barriers for trans persons to change their name and gender in official documents (for example, passports). Under the transsexual act, people have to provide a medical report to officially change their gender. The proposed right for self-determination would make it possible for trans people to change their gender without such a report (Deutscher Bundestag, Drucks. 19.19755., 2020). Even though the motion failed, the introduction of the right for self-determination is now part of the coalition agreement between the new government (SPD, the Greens, FDP) and will most likely be introduced.

forced gender identity (p.79), which allegedly erases the 'natural' differences between women and men. With this, the far right incites what Villa (2017) calls 'German angst' about the topic of gender (p.104).

Most participants gesture towards discourses of 'gender madness', including the idea of the creation of a new 'genderless' human (Falter and Stern, 2017, p.189). However, they did not explicitly invoke the notion of 'gender madness' or 'gender ideology'; rather they adopted some of the anti-gender discourse's topics, discussed in Chapter 1, participants denounced for instance: policies of gender equality, the abolishment of the 'natural' gender binary and gender-inclusive language. For example, after I asked Schwarz (AfD; in her early 60s) about her opinion of the AfD's support for traditional gender roles, she stated:

> I don't think much of gender at all, no. With these little stars,[133] for me, those are mutilations of language. The gender roles, yes, my God, what's wrong with a woman being a mother, and a man being a father. Today the work is shared; I know that from my husband too.

In Schwarz's interview, I accidentally used the word 'gender' (the English term) in my question about traditional gender roles instead of using the German word *Geschlecht* (gender or sex) – the German language does not have a specific word for 'gender'. That might have triggered Schwarz's answer, showing her rejection of the concept of gender. Schwarz highlighted the importance of binary gender/sex for her when she emphasised that the gender roles of women as mothers and men as fathers are common sense and that men and women are equal as 'work is shared', which is still a dominant view in society (Mayer and Goetz, 2019, pp.208-209).

The trope of gender-inclusive language as "mutilation of language" is part of the far-right discourse on 'gender madness' and is dominant in wider society as well. Both AfD and FPÖ participants, explicitly mentioned language as a measure that is not helping women. FPÖ career politician Huber (in her 50s/60s) wrote that women should join the FPÖ:

> because we are the voice for the silent majority regarding many women's and family issues. We do not stand for exaggerated measures

[133] One way of using gender-inclusive language in German is adding a * between the male and the female form in order to include non-binary people. For example, the German words for students is *Studenten* (male) and *Studentinnen* (female). To be inclusive in addressing a group of students the following form can be used: *Student*innen*.

> such as the *Binnen-I*, the changed text of the federal anthem and other placebos that do not bring anything for women but for a reality-based women's policy.[134]

Here Huber used the far-right concept of the madness of gender-inclusive language to show that feminism has gone too far, which, she implies, is a widely held view (of the "silent majority"). Most participants used male (pro)nouns as their default in the interviews, mirroring the AfD and FPÖ's rejection of gender-inclusive language. Schwarz called gender-inclusive language a "mutilation" and Huber a "placebo" that does not help women. Both descriptions evoke the language of sickness, which again illustrates the idea that Austria/Germany need a cure from feminism, which has gone too far and in the wrong direction.

Huber also implied that feminists are narrow-minded with their "unimportant" and "niche" issues that are "not based in reality" and do not address women's 'real' needs; ideas that were mentioned in several interviews. For Huber, these "niche" issues encompass issues the anti-gender movement is lobbying against including the usage of gender-inclusive language. Huber's depiction of feminists as pedantic and narrow-minded, furthermore, is part of the postfeminist rejection of feminism (Scharff, 2012, p.30). Another example of supposed feminist narrow-mindedness can be found in Fischer's (AfD) discussion of the me-too debate:

> If a man looks at my cleavage – at my age, no one looks at my cleavage anymore – but that's not bad. That's also lightness. Yes, if he falls into my cleavage and says something stupid, then he just gets a slap in the face, but a little bit of flirting that's wonderful.

In other words, Fischer blames feminists for a loss of 'lightness', trivialising sexual harassment in the process, invoking the idea of the feminist "killjoy" (Ahmed, 2010). With this narrative, she follows the antifeminist arguments that the me-too movement endangers sexual freedom because it changes gender relations in which women's bodies must be available to men (Lenz, 2018, p.27).

[134] The *binnen-I* is an instrument to include women and men into the written language instead of having the male form as default. This instrument is less inclusive then the * as it does not include non-binary people. In 2011/12 the text of the Austrian national anthem was changed to include women into the anthem's language.

Weber (AfD) coined the term "*Genderei*" (adding the German ending *-ei* to gender) [135] to indicate her rejection of everything connected to gender. The ending implies that the concept of gender leads to senseless actions. She argued further that there is a will to change men and women, which does not help women. In response to my question on her perception of feminism, she stated:

> When it comes to Judith Butler or so, you can probably understand where I'm coming from; this is a feminism that is feminist extremism that has lost all sense of proportion and, in the end, doesn't really help women. […] Alice Schwarzer doesn't like us, but I find a lot of what she says very reasonable. I also really believe that we still need strong voices which always put their finger in the wound.

Weber does not reject feminism outright, instead focusing her criticism on Butler as an example of how feminism has gone too far and is failing women. She stated that equality between men and women is one reason to be in the AfD. Choosing Butler as a negative example for feminism, she follows the discourse of the anti-gender movement here, in which Butler is often depicted as the personification of alleged 'gender ideology'. For example, the Austrian antifeminist Rosenkranz (2008) accuses Butler of using the disguise of scholarship to bring assert their political agenda (p.47). Hark and Villa (2015) point out, actors of the anti-gender movement like Rosenkranz claim that gender studies are not scholarship but 'pseudo-scholarship' that spreads 'gender ideology'. These antifeminists do not usually explain how they define scholarship, seeming to depend on the positivistic idea of hard science which objectively depicts 'natural' facts (pp.20-21).

Weber's quote illustrates that she is not against feminism per se – at least as she understands it – but against feminist academic concepts of gender (p.26). As she highlighted, she supports the feminism of Alice Schwarzer, which might well be connected to Schwarzer's anti-Muslim stances. Indeed, Schwarzer herself has had heated debates with Butler, which have included Schwarzer's claim that gender studies and queer studies are removed from reality and Schwarzer's racist views against Muslims (Zachas, 2020, pp.29-30). The conflict between Schwarzer and Butler started after journalist and academic Vojin Saša Vukadinović published an article in *Emma* (Alice Schwarzer's magazine) in 2017, in which he claimed that gender studies and queer theory have destroyed the political aims of the women's movement and relativise Islamic violence

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[135] *-ei* is a collective suffix, which indicates that there is too much talk about gender.

(and here he explicitly named Butler). In turn Butler has argued that Schwarzer and *Emma* used a racist discourse in response to the events that took place in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015/16 (pp.29-30).

Only Krüger (AfD) explicitly used the notion of gender mainstreaming and 'gender ideology', which, in her opinion, and together with other ideologies, have substituted religion in Germany.[136] The AfD and FPÖ portray gender mainstreaming in their respective countries as the main threat and instrument of 'gender ideology'. They claim that it is part of trans/queer identity politics; however, in reality, it is a technocratic policy instrument (Kováts, 2018a, p.532) which many feminists criticise because they believe feminist goals are sacrificed and gender and equality are depoliticised (Litosseliti et al., 2019, p.10). In other words, gender mainstreaming is criticised by both feminists and antifeminists but for opposite reasons. The anti-gender movements blame gender mainstreaming for the destruction of binary gender identities and its endangering of society (Dombrowski and Hajek, 2021, pp.46-47). AfD career politician Christina Baum, for instance, posted a speech of herself in May 2020, in which she blames "feminist gender ideology" for the destruction of the family, calling it a "sick and hostile to life ideology" (Facebook, May 20th, 2020). Like my participants, she used a language of sickness to describe feminism and 'gender ideology'. But in contrast to my interviews, women politicians on social media explicitly posted stories about 'gender madness', possibly because they are targeting people on social media who agree or who can be mobilised by those stories. It is also important to note that participants might have been subtler in the interviews because they were talking to me as a feminist researcher, and they knew that I disagree with them.

Defending femininity and masculinity

Stories about defending femininity and masculinity were prevalent in my interviews and are part of the discourse on 'gender madness' versus common sense. In respone to my question about her perception of feminism, local AfD member Kramer (60s) stated:

> I think we women should stay women and not try to be men. […] For God's sake, I don't want to have the conditions of the 50s and 60s, where women were socially branded […] but I think that we are overdoing it today. Take a look at the *Tatort* series on German television; you always have a female detective who tells off the little

[136] Krüger is one of two participants who included religion dominantly in her narrative.

foolish detective [a man], who is subordinated to her, and tells him how things should be done better. […] the tough female inspector, who runs around with her legs apart like a cowboy […] Yes, these are also subtle manipulations against which we defend ourselves.

Kramer used the narrative of going too far ("we are overdoing it today"), focusing on the idea that women are manipulated into behaving, in her eyes, in 'unfeminine' ways, not least through popular culture where women run around "like a cowboy" and tell men off. In her example the man is subordinated to the woman, which raises the question of whether, for her, women in leading positions are 'unfeminine'.

Later in her interview, Kramer argued for women's *Mut zur eigenen Weiblichkeit* ("courage to your own femininity"), which includes not "walking around like a man." The word 'courage' implies that it is difficult to defend this femininity. Kramer answered my question about feminism with "women should not try to be men", indicating that, in her opinion, feminists want women to be like men and that this may be all there is to feminism today. However, her words also imply that there was a better form of feminism which rescued women from the gender order of the 1950s/60s. Here she is clearly tapping into postfeminist discourse which implies that today's feminism and femininity are mutually exclusive and that all feminists are 'unfeminine' man-haters (for example, Scharff, 2012, p.2; p.13).

A common theme throughout the interviews was the fear of a form of feminism that coerces women into not being women/feminine anymore, and the fear of losing men. Unlike Kramer, most participants did not clarify what precisely they fear if women are not allowed to be women/feminine anymore – Rosenkranz's idea of a 'genderless' human remains a threatening abstract notion. In just under half of the interviews (which included participants of all age groups and regions) the idea of defending femininity was invoked, demonstrating the importance of this theme. The reason for the dominance of this narrative is that the majority of people grow up with binary ideas about masculinity and femininity, which offer idealised norms of how men and women should be, resulting in positive sanctions for acting in line with the normative gender roles (Sanders et al., 2019, pp.30-34). I agree with Wimbauer et al. (2015), who argue that there is no feminist coercion to change one's gender, but restrictive gender norms should be overcome (p.48). Kate Bornstein (2006) states that it is those who impose their idea of a real and natural gender system who terrorise and try to coerce those who do not fulfil gender norms (p.236). With their ideas of a natural gender system, my participants exploited a fear of

the creation of a new ‘genderless’ human, which according to Villa (2017) is a “common belief shared by an important share of German society” (p.104).

Kramer, in common with most participants, utilised the discourse of there being essential characteristics allocated to men and women, which determine how women should be. She explained: “We women have in our, I say in our softness and our yielding, in our creativity, we have infinite possibilities if we are the way we are.” By stating “we are the way we are”, Kramer clearly shows a gender deterministic view, according to which women have fixed feminine characteristics including “softness”, “creativity” and being “yielding.” She used the notion that women are ‘naturally’ nurturing and soft here, which many consider a common sense truth about women’s gender roles (Serano, 2013, p.141). Embracing those characteristics and roles offers cis women a reliable option. Since they grew up with those roles they are well-practised and lead to approval in their everyday lives (Sanders et al., 2019, p.28).

Like most participants, Kramer supports a view of women and men as complementary opposites; a view which, according to trans activist and academic Julia Serano (2016), leads to oppositional sexism as it is impossible “to empower women without either ridiculing men or pulling the rug out from under ourselves” (p.19). Oppositional sexism is built on the assumption that “if men are strong then women must be weak” (p.19) and if men are rational then women must be irrational. Serano (2016) elaborates: “This idea of opposites creates expectations for femaleness/femininity and maleness/masculinity that all people are encouraged to meet, and simultaneously delegitimizes all behaviours that do not fit these ideals” (p.103). Among my participants’ accounts, Schmidt’s (AfD; in her 20s/30s) narrative is the most extreme case of oppositional sexism:

> We in our *Geschlechter* [gender or sex] have different strengths and weaknesses, and I am sceptical about women in too responsible positions because I think a Federal Chancellor or a Federal President can’t make decisions based on his [sic] gut feeling and his emotions, that’s not possible, and unfortunately, women are wired in such a way that they often do that.

For Schmidt, being emotional, which she attributes to women, is synonymous with being irrational. She admitted that she could not fulfil certain positions because she is a woman and women act out of their emotions. Her statement mirrors the previously discussed

(Chapter 2) antifeminist essentialist gender order, where all women are presented as emotional while men use thought and reason (Ahmed, 2014, p.3).

For Gruber (FPÖ, in her 30s), too, it is a given that "women are women." However unlike Kramer and Schmidt, she did not state what she means by this and how she defines 'being a woman'. In postfeminist narratives, multiple forms of masculinity and femininity may exist, but it is "unimaginable" that femininity and masculinity are the same (Budgeon, 2011, p.285). Gruber used an undefined notion of masculinity to imply that feminists are 'unfeminine'. She stated: "But these feminists that you imagine, they want to be more masculine than men […] but a woman should still be allowed to be feminine." This statement illustrates Gruber's postfeminist gender anxiety. While she in general argues that all women should be feminists, she clarifies that she does not mean "those" feminists, who are too masculine and therefore 'unfeminine'. McRobbie (2009) argues many women do not precisely state "why [femininity] has been taken away from them" (p.21), and in Gruber's case, it is also not clear what has been or might be taken away; her fear remains abstract.

Some of my participants directly address their fear of losing 'real' men due to what they perceive as man-hating feminism. Braun (AfD), for example, stated: "I want for my daughter an acceptable man, but if I look at all those guys, I really do not know, they are women in men's clothing." She depicted contemporary men as effeminate. In other words, while my participants portray many women today as too 'unfeminine', men are allegedly too feminine (Scharff, 2012, p.74).

Bergmann (AfD; in her 50s/60s), too, discussed the alleged discrimination of men by feminists. She wrote:

> Currently – due to *falsch verstandenen* "feminism" – it is the man who is treated unequally, which should not be possible according to our Basic Law. […] 70 per cent of the time, men are portrayed negatively in the media; but many of the positive portrayals then show the supposedly "feminine side" of men!

Bergmann blames feminism for the supposed discrimination of men, who are in turn only ever positively portrayed when they are depicted as 'feminine'. She used oppositional sexism when she criticised the portrayal of 'feminine' men because she indicated that men should be portrayed as masculine. The women of the AfD and FPÖ seem to be afraid of losing their femininity, while some participants also seem to fear that men may be

losing their masculinity. Serano (2016) argues that the essential ascription of women as feminine and men as masculine is inherently flawed because "not all men are masculine and not all women are feminine" (p.97) and, with this, oppositional sexism heightens gender anxiety (p.106). My participants illustrated gender anxiety through their urgency to describe themselves as 'real' women, who are neither unfeminine nor man-haters. During the founding ceremony of the AfD's relatively insignificant women's organisations FridA in 2018, chairwoman Anja Markmann said that its members are not man-hating women fighting against alleged patriarchy (Sanders et al., 2019, p.139). Markmann's statement shows the anxiety that the idea of feminism can induce for women who are afraid to be seen as man-haters – here because they are founding a women's organisation which could be perceived as a feminist organisation. Needless to say, for a women's organisation within a male-dominated antifeminist party, it is crucial to distance the organisation from the labels 'feminist' and 'man-hater'.

Finally, after distancing herself from feminism (past and present), Wolf (AfD; in her 70s) mentioned that she had a lot of contact with feminist women:

> I have always had many encounters in my life with women who were yes very feminist, and I don't know either; I know my way around the lesbian scene very, very well. I have a friend who ran after me for 15 years, a lesbian woman, she was always in love with me, but I, unfortunately, was not in love with her.

Wolf seems to use lesbianism and feminism interchangeably here. She distanced herself from her lesbian friend when she stated that she was not in love with her. However, she also indicated that she tolerates lesbian women otherwise she would not be friends with a lesbian. Through stating that she "know[s] [her] way around", Wolf suggested that she is open-minded and knows what she is talking about. She is the only participant who drew a direct link between feminism and lesbianism, which does not mean that the link was not implied in other interviews. Scharff (2012) argues that in a heteronormative logic, unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian are used interchangeably (p.76) and all three alleged characteristics of feminists challenge "conventional constructions of femininity and heterosexuality" (p.86) which my participants want to secure. In the feminist movement of the 1970s, heterosexual and lesbian women were involved in a debate, in which many lesbian women argued that feminism is the theory while lesbianism is the practice, which frees women from men's domination (Gerhard, 2017, p.45). However, often it was also heterosexual women who used "lesbian" as a "magical sign" against men's domination

and as “carrier of the lesbian-feminist consciousness” (Hark, 1996, pp. 107, as cited in Bielby, 2018, p.111). Through this framing they played down the sexual aspect of being a lesbian. Specifically in West Germany, the term *FrauenLesben* (women/lesbian) “was used to draw attention to the fact that the position of women and lesbian was related but not always identical” (Karcher, 2016, p.82). Wolf experienced the 1970s and claimed to have known many feminists at that time,[137] which might explain that she was the only participant who drew a direct link between feminism and the “magic sign” of lesbianism.

To conclude, the stories about ‘feminism going too far’ arose from my data in various forms, including ideas about equality already being achieved, feminism as an unnatural development and feminism leading to ‘gender madness’ and endangering femininity and masculinity. Most of the accounts in this section illustrate that my participants have to negotiate their gender anxiety and their fear of transgressing beyond normative gender roles. They use postfeminist discourses and discourses of the anti-gender movement to distance themselves from a form of feminism that challenges conventional ideas about men and women. For some participants, their rejection of feminism is contradicted through their support for certain feminist ideas and for a feminism in the past. Additionally, there is a contradiction between certain participants’ desire to strengthen women and the believe of others that women are ‘naturally’ soft and not fit for leadership.

A narrative of superiority: The threat of ‘others’

In this section, I discuss the narrative prevalent in more than one third of my interviews that ‘we’ do not need feminism, but that ‘others’ do, which aligns with the postfeminist theme that equality in Austria and Germany has been achieved but is threatened by the ‘other’ (Scharff, 2012, p.46); a narrative that is related to the ‘othering’ of perpetrators of violence discussed in Chapter 3. Some participants mobilised the narrative on the alleged threat of losing gender equality because of Islam as one of their main reasons for joining the AfD. The same narrative also was mentioned by further participants and by half of the career politicians on social media though not as a means to explain their main motivation for joining the parties. [138]

[137] However, Wolf also made clear that she believes that feminism was never necessary because, as discussed previously, she asserted that she was never disadvantaged as a woman.

[138] Similar to the ‘othering’ of perpetrators of violence, the narrative of superiority was not mentioned by FPÖ participants. However, due to the low number of FPÖ participants I do not draw conclusions from this. The FPÖ itself uses arguments about the oppression of women in the context of migration of people from ‘patriarchal societies’ and has a pioneering role among the European right wing in instrumentalising

Fischer (AfD; in her 50s/60s) stated:

> Because of the high birth rate of the people from Arabic countries, Turkey, and Islamic countries, Islamisation will follow. I am surprised that especially all those feminists, who usually are so loud and talk about everything, I never heard from them that they get upset about what happens in Iran, what happens in Iraq, that women in Saudi Arabia, I believe now they can drive cars, what is this? Why is no one doing something against this? And no one can tell me they [Muslim women] are wearing this [hijab] voluntarily. They cannot help themselves because they were raised like this.

Fischer surprised me by depicting the threat of Islamisation after I asked her how she wanted to support women in the AfD. Though she started her answer through briefly discussing how she wants to support women in the party, she quickly moved on to discuss Muslim women, implying that the situation for women in Germany is already good (though allegedly threatened by Islamisation). In this way, women in Germany might need some support (for example, being encouraged and strengthened in their self-esteem by other women) but not feminism. She clearly blames feminists for being hypocritical because they allegedly do not talk about women in Muslim-majority countries who "cannot help themselves."

Fischer used the trope of Muslim women who need saving (Abu-Lughod, 2013), which illustrates a sense of superiority over (p.47), as well as a generalisation about Muslim cultures (p.6) which for her blur into Arabic, Turkish and Islamic countries. For Fischer, among other participants the veil/hijab is used as the 'obvious' sign of oppression in line with the AfD's standpoint more generally (Dietze, 2019, p.66). Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) argues that in the context of the Global North the image of the Muslim woman is often used to "symbolize just how alien this culture is" (p.6). Contemporary obsession/fascination with the image of the veiled Muslim woman can be traced back to the colonial obsession with women who were portrayed (and often still are) as in need of saving, which also 'justified' military actions like the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (p.47). Fischer argued that veiled women who say that they want to be veiled have a 'false consciousness' due to their socialisation in Muslim cultures; therefore, they need to be

women's rights for racism against Muslims (Goetz, 2020, p.6). Additionally, some FPÖ career politicians also used this narrative on social media.

'liberated'. In this way, she removes the agency from Muslim women, who, in her opinion, cannot break out of their socialisation.

The comparison of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' with the 'liberal Western self' supports the narrative of women from the Global North who do not need feminism anymore (Scharff, 2012, p.65). Becker (AfD) mentioned her rejection of Islam. When I followed up on her comment, she answered:

> What spontaneously comes to my mind is the role of women in Islam. I think we should see all that very critically, especially the more left-wing and green-minded people should reflect on that extremely critically. In Islam, a social model is exemplified, a patriarchal system and the women have to subordinate themselves to a very male-dominated system, yes.

Becker stated that leftist people should be against Islam due to the role of women in Islam and its patriarchal system. By saying that Islam should be seen very critically, she also implied that Germany has no patriarchal system, which she explicitly stated later. "The more left-wing and green-minded people", she talked about, include feminists, who, according to her, should be worried about Islam due to its patriarchal system. In the context of the US, Abu Lughod (2013) argues that the criticism of an alleged hypocritical feminism ignoring Muslim women's suffering on the part of many conservatives, not known for fighting for women's rights otherwise, is ill founded. In contrast Abu-Lughod observed that from the 1990s onwards many US feminists were actually focused on Muslim women instead of domestic feminism as amid post-Reaganite backlash it was easier to mobilise around topics (for example, forced veiling and female genital cutting) far away from 'home' and on which there has been a wide moral consensus in US politics (pp.7-8).

In the German context, these topics are engaged with by a wide range of actors including anti-racist feminists. However, my participants, and the form of feminism they would attach themselves to, address these issues by an 'othering' of Muslims and they use these causes as a means for claiming cultural superiority while blaming feminists for their alleged failure to take them up in favour of what are argued to be more trivial ones (for example, gender-inclusive language). That two of my participants refer to Alice Schwarzer, who plays a major part in the anti-Muslim discourse and supports a feminism Hark and Villa (2020) would call toxic (p.77), shows that anti-Muslim views of both far-

right and feminist actors are part of the femonationalist convergence, as theorised by Farris (2017).

Weber (AfD; in her 50s/60s), one of the participants who mentioned Schwarzer's feminism in positive terms, stated the following of the Muslim women she taught in her civic integration courses:

> I have met some incredible women in niqab who were veiled up to here [points under her eyes]; they were lovely [sounds surprised]. [...] I was always in this forced situation – on the one hand, wonderful people; on the other hand, as soon as I said something like equality or diversity or homosexuality is okay, being gay is great, men and women have the same rights, parenting also applies to men, I just noticed there was only, there was only incomprehension. There were these women, these really, really tragic cases, the young girls mainly from Turkey and young, who have married [into a Turkish family in Germany]. They come newly from some village in Turkey, and they were not an isolated case, and I know already, at the latest after half a year they are pregnant, and if they are pregnant then they will leave the course.

Though "wonderful people", their ideas are, according to Weber, detrimental to the alleged values of the Global North, like equality, diversity, gay rights,[139] and women's rights. She created the familiar image of Muslim women without agency ("tragic cases"). And by saying that she already knows what will happen, she demonstrated her deterministic view of culture. Like Fischer, Weber portrayed gender equality as 'common sense' in Germany, creating an image of cultural superiority. Here Weber racialises sexism by attributing it fundamentally to a racialised 'other' (see Scrinzi, 2014a, p.11). As discussed in Chapter 1, Dietze (2019) calls this discourse 'sexual exceptionalism', which implies superiority because of sexual freedom and gender equality in contrast to Muslim 'backwardness' (p.20). The ascription of unchangeable characteristics to all Muslims and the sense of German superiority lead, according to Dietze, to the ignorance of 'own' deficits and existing inequalities in one's own country (p.39). Additionally, Weber's narrative illustrates how civic integration policies and courses often portray

[139] Weber's statement about gay rights taps into a homonationalist discourse on the Global North's alleged embracing of gay rights, which is used for nationalist and racist politics to claim a moral superiority (compare, Puar, 2007). Puar (2022) argues that there is an endless contradiction of liberalism, liberal codes of queer rights and inclusion are used to demonise other populations while homophobia and exclusion are deeply embedded in the 'liberal' society itself (p.3).

gender equality as one of the essential values of the nation, which Farris (2017) also observed in her research in France, Italy, and the Netherlands (p.79). In this way, the idea of 'sexual exceptionalism' is institutionalised.

For local AfD politician Schmidt (20s/30s) "the profound danger that Muslim men constitute for Western European society due, above all, to their oppressive treatment of women" (Farris, 2017, p.2) is the main reason for her party membership. She stated:

> So, my most important topic is equality, which is the only reason why I am politically active; for me, it is important that no one is oppressed, which goes very far for me. I do not want women and children to be oppressed, but I also do not want men to be oppressed […]. Still, of course, it is a particular concern of mine that women are not oppressed […] because, from my perspective, we currently have this massive problem that the oppression of women is again on a forward march, and I definitely want to prevent this. [I asked why she believes the AfD is the right party for this.] Because the party is against Islam, and Islam is with a few million followers, the most considerable movement oppressing women and abusing women. This is the biggest threat for women because, in Islam, women are not allowed to be free; they are the property of men.

Schmidt argued that there is a backlash against women's rights because Islam threatens the equality of women and men, which is why she is politically active in the AfD. The AfD uses ideas about the alleged incompatibility of gender equality with Islam next to its own antifeminist discourses. This illustrates the contradictions in the party's attitudes towards gender equality: simultaneously equality is a settled condition not meriting feminist activist engagement and extremely precarious under threat by Islam (Hark and Villa, 2020, pp.xxi-xxiii). Schmidt's narrative is mainly concerned with saving German society from the alleged threat of the sexism of the 'other' and not saving Muslim women. Her interview illustrates the same contradictions that Farris (2017) identified in speeches of, for instance, French far-right politician Marine Le Pen who 'defends' women's rights against Islam at the same time as viewing the traditional family as the basis of the nation (p.35). As discussed above, Schmidt's views on women's roles are very traditional and essentialist. Her claim to be in the AfD because of equality stands in stark contrast to her statement about women who should not have leading positions because of their emotions.

Finally, local AfD member Koch (in her 60s) tapped into the conservative and nationalistic fear of demographic change:

> Equality and self-determination of women and men are in great danger because if the number of fellow Muslim citizens rises, which happens automatically because of their high number of children, soon Islam will have power in Germany. Then we do not have equality anymore.

Koch used the idea of high birth rates of Muslim migrants to illustrate her claim that Islam endangers Germany and the equality of women. In doing so, she denigrates migrant women and families, while simultaneously appealing to German women without a migration background to have more children – familiar arguments from the *Demografiedebatte* of the 2000s. Endangering the nation through an imbalance of birth rates is a prominent far-right argument (for example, Farris, 2017, p.68), which also underscores how the representation of the nation tends to be represented through female bodies reproducing citizens (p.69). The discourse of low birth rates, a favourite of the AfD, also includes a rejection of immigration as well as the trope of German white women being *gebärunwillig* (unwilling to give birth) because of 'gender madness' (Dietze, 2019, pp.144-45). This illustrates what Hark and Villa (2020) describe as "the contemporary entanglements between sexism, (cultural) racism and feminism: between, on the one hand, the battle against what a transnational and heterogeneous alliance now calls 'gender ideology' and the fight, on the other hand, against the so-called Islamization of the West" (p.xxi). In other words, anti-gender discourses and the narrative about cultural superiority are contradictory and creating ambivalence in far-right discourses.

I finally want to amplify that the oppression that women experience from any culture, social and national background should not be denied but the Western European depiction of Muslim women needs to be criticised (Farris, 2017, p.5). In the light of the prevalence of (cultural) racist ideas, I agree with Sanders et al. (2019) that it is essential to support antiracist feminism and feminist antiracism (p.15), which is not based on cultural generalisations and degradations but on understandings of various inequalities and patriarchal structures.

Conclusion

In my interviews, participants used rhetoric that resembles postfeminist discourse, certain feminist ideas and/or the language of the anti-gender movement, including the idea of 'gender madness' as well as openly antifeminist discourses. Interestingly, certain

participants who argued that they joined the AfD/FPÖ because they support women's rights also heavily relied on antifeminist and misogynist ideas, embracing the notion that women are not made for leadership positions due to their alleged emotional weaknesses and that women are already equal in rights but are 'natural' complementary to men. Participants' gender essentialist ideas are also part of an everyday 'common sense' and of most people's everyday experiences in wider society (for example, women are often still the main carers in their families) and therefore plausible for many people in Austria, Germany and beyond (Goetz and Mayer, 2022, p.93). With reference to my discussion in Chapter 1 on wider societies' views on gender in Austria and Germany, I argue that far-right women's narratives "absorb and generally exacerbate" (negative and positive) perceptions of feminism as well as the "gender logics of the surrounding society" (Blee, 2020, p.426).[140]

While there are some dominant discourses on feminism and gender in wider society, there is also a diverse range of views. I have illustrated that far-right women's views on feminism and gender differ significantly from each other as well. Some women promote traditional gender norms for men and women, whereby motherhood is the most important role for women. Other women relied on liberal arguments and stated that strong women can achieve anything in today's society, which is an individualistic approach to feminist topics. With these arguments, participants suggested that there is a 'right' kind of feminism. However, this feminism excludes social criticism and therefore depoliticises women's rights and gender equality. Furthermore, the narratives of participants, who support certain feminist ideas, still include their fear of transgressing beyond normative gender roles. For example, Gruber (FPÖ) stated that she hopes all women are feminists but not "those feminists", who are more "masculine than men." Participants' different ideas on feminism and gender illustrate that the AfD and FPÖ are successful in their strategy to include gender political narratives that allow for cis women in all areas of public life as well as antifeminist narratives, which promote traditional gender roles. The findings in this chapter illuminate far-right women's *own* narratives and show how members make sense of the contradictions within the parties' and their own discourses.

Finally, I demonstrated how my participants mainly reject feminism and at the same time touch upon some feminist discourses on gender equality, which supports their claim of cultural superiority due to the 'sexual exceptionalism' of the Global North

[140] This is also in line with Scrinzi (2022), who revealed that Italian and French far-right members' narratives, for example on gender, are not alien to mainstream values.

(Dietze, 2019). I pointed out that there is a femonationalist convergence (Farris, 2017) in the stories of some of my participants. They discussed themes, which are similar to Schwarzer's toxic feminism, who however would never support the traditional ideas endorsed by some of my participants, for example that women should not be in leading positions. As discussed in Chapter 1, the AfD and FPÖ's femonationalist discourses have been researched in-depth and my analysis in this chapter contributed perspectives of women in the parties to this scholarship. I have shown that some of my participants have been mobilised by those discourses and utilised them in their own stories to make sense of their party membership and support for the far right.

Chapter 5: Many spaces and roles for 'normal' women in the parties

In this final analysis chapter, I discuss participants' narratives on their roles in the AfD and FPÖ and how those roles are performed in the context of male-dominated party spaces. In the previous two chapters, I focused on my participants' narratives on their reasons for joining the parties, which in nine cases were connected to their views about feminism and gender. Here, I investigate how they experience their party membership. The AfD and FPÖ have both been described as *Männerparteien* (men's parties) (Sauer, 2020, p.25),[141] however Sauer argues that the parties use a 'feminisation' and 'de-demonisation' strategy to counter this image (p.26).[142] In the AfD and FPÖ, women fulfil crucial political functions despite the higher number of male members and masculine[143] party structures (Schuster-Craig, 2021, p.146; Klammer and Goetz, 2017, p.82). With this in mind, it is of particular interest to explore how women describe their roles in the parties and the spaces they are inhabiting.

I start this chapter by briefly discussing Nirmal Puwar's (2021) concept of 'space invaders' which captures how women in masculine settings "arrive and take up space, [while] their occupation of space is still contradictory and tenuous" (p.254). As discussed in Chapter 1, Puwar (2021) developed the concept of 'space invaders' through her research not just on women but also racialised minorities in senior positions in the UK parliament and civil service (p.251). Therefore, I must critically assess the applicability of Puwar's concept to my research as my research only includes white women in the far right. I continue by laying out my understanding of the concept of space, thereby setting the scene for my discussion of the women's narratives on their spaces and roles in the parties. Before I move on to women's roles, I discuss my participants' two contradictory narratives about space in the parties. The first narrative is that access to spaces is equal but that there are fewer women in the parties due to outside influences; the second narrative is that party spaces are indeed male-dominated. I then move to discuss the four main roles performed in the parties' spaces that I identified in the women's narratives.

[141] This label applies to different dimensions including the higher number of male voters and members and the masculine party structures (Sauer, 2020, pp.24-27).

[142] The so-called 'de-demonisation' strategy has been mainly applied to Marine Le Pen's strategy of softening her far-right party in France to make it more acceptable for a diversified electorate (Mayer, 2013, p.161 and Meret et al., 2017, p.142). Here 'de-demonisation' goes hand in hand with 'feminisation'.

[143] When I talk about 'masculine' and 'feminine' I am referring to cultural scripts and norms and not to allegedly natural traits.

The first two are stereotypical feminine roles: the nurturer/carer; and the dutiful/hardworking women. The second two roles are: the *Vorzeigefrauen* (token women); and the (masculine/unmarked) politician.

Far-right women as 'space invaders'

The starting point of Puwar's (2004a) research, which draws on feminist, critical race and postcolonial studies, is the paradox of "the arrival of women and racialised minorities in spaces from which they have been historically or conceptually excluded" (for example, in politics) and in which white men have been the somatic norm. Her research included in-depth semi-structured interviews with white women and Black MPs in Westminster from all political persuasions not just feminist and/or anti-racist MPs (2004b, p.66). The notable increase of women and to a lesser extent racialised minorities in political spaces like Westminster, is often praised as diversity (2004a, p.1). However, Puwar argues that the inclusion of different bodies still places those bodies as outsiders, who have to navigate their presence in a space dominated by whiteness and maleness (p.8). The public sphere (including the political sphere) is traditionally a masculine domain of whiteness, and white men are disembodied behind a 'gender and 'race' free guise' (pp.13-14), while the 'other' is marked by their gender and/or 'race' (2004b, p.69).

Since I apply Puwar's concept of 'space invaders' to my research (only) with white far-right women, a question could be raised about its applicability. After all Puwar (2021) herself criticises political feminist scholarship for a lack of acknowledgment that there are not just gendered but also racialised exclusions from the public and political spheres (p.254) and argues that it is crucial to understand the dynamics of maleness *and* whiteness (2004b, p.66). Additionally, she states, "there are also, of course, considerable differences between gender and 'race'. While the 'glass ceiling' has been cracked quite significantly with gender, for 'race' a 'concrete ceiling' has just been chipped ever so slightly" (2004a, p.7). Puwar (2004b) defines white women in politics as 'space invaders' due to their historical exclusion from the political (and other public) spheres. But she emphasises that there are differences in the intersection and that gender and 'race' are not directly equivalent to each other as they have different but also connected histories of exclusions. Furthermore 'race' and gender inequalities have often not led to alliances (pp. 69-72). She, furthermore, argues that "racialized bodies of color are perceived to be even more 'impolitic' or ill-fitting for political leadership than white female bodies" (2021, p.254). The Black figure (man or woman) induces a state of anxiety and disorientation in public spheres, which are dominantly white (2004a, p.39). Disorientation and anxiety can

also be generated along the lines of gender, but the reaction is less acute than with 'race' (p.43).

White women can be the somatic norm in political spheres themselves to the "extent to which their whiteness grants them a certain level of 'ontological complicity'" (Puwar, 2004a, p.10). In other words, they can be space invaders (because of gender and class) and at the same time the somatic norm because of their whiteness (p.10). Puwar argues that white women's presence in politics has increased significantly (p.39), and women are also taking positions above the 'glass ceiling' in traditional masculine subjects (for example, economic policy) (p.90). Nevertheless, the 'core' qualities of (political) leadership are still 'classically' male and the historical exclusion of women is continuously weighing heavily today (2021, p.252). While women now occupy positions from which they have been historically excluded, they need to performatively don a "political lion skin" (Pateman, 1995, p.6), which is ill-fitting because it is tailored for men (Puwar, 2021, pp.252-253). They are judged for how they 'do' their gender as well as how they 'do' their role as politician, which is based on male norms (2004a, p.93).

Puwar's above-mentioned starting point of looking at women and racialised minorities in spaces they have been historically excluded from, is especially crucial for researching the far right as it is strongly dominated by whiteness and maleness. Puwar herself argues that her analytical line could be applied to any space, which is based on those characteristics and histories (2004a, p.10; 2004b, p.71). While only looking at white women in far-right party spaces, I am not denying the sheer whiteness of those spaces, which allows women to be insiders because of their own whiteness. Additionally, in the previous chapters, I have shown how participants are engaged in the process of racist exclusions and therefore how they take part in the customs and rituals of whiteness (2004a, p.152), placing them clearly as insiders. Nevertheless, the AfD and FPÖ are *Männerparteien*, even though they actively include women and follow a feminisation strategy. I show in my analysis below that women in far-right spaces are still 'space invaders' and that they have 'to don a political lion skin' to enter the political space of the far right (p.11).

"All spaces are open to us except the men's toilet."

After I asked the questions: Can you describe the *Raum* (space) for women in the party?; What is your perspective on this?; most participants stated that the parties provide all the space that women need and that women are very welcome. Local AfD member Kramer

expressed this with a joke: “All spaces are open to us except the men’s toilet.”[144] Her intentional misunderstanding of my question (“I like to play with words”, she told me), nevertheless, shows that it is important to define what I mean by space for women in the parties. Doreen Massey (1994) argues that the term space tends to be used in multiple ways and with multiple connotations and that those holding different positions in spaces experience and understand those spaces differently (pp.1-3). The AfD and FPÖ as political parties include multiple spaces, from physical spaces like offices, meeting spaces and seats in local and national parliaments to more abstract ideas of (discursive) space, for example, the space to speak and to be listened to, decision making space, internal networks and space on social media platforms. My conceptualisation of space not only includes physical spaces; it also comprises the space to exist as an active member in local or national party structures and the space to take part in what feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser (1990) calls discursive interactions. Space is hereby political and never neutral or static and power structures and “relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation” are part of all spaces (Massey, 1994, p.265).

Local AfD member Schmidt, the only woman in her local parliamentary group, stated that “the space for women in the AfD is very big, because they [the men] are really happy when you join the AfD as a woman, because, in general, politics is more a men’s domain. That is just how it is.” Schmidt’s quotation is illustrative of the most common statement on space of my participants who argue that there is indeed space for women in the parties, that women are welcome but that there are fewer women in the party; something for which participants have different explanations (as discussed below). For Schmidt, space means the space to join the party. But she also stated that politics is a men’s domain naturalising that idea through the sentence “that is just how it is.” In other words, in her essentialist narrative, politics is naturally inhabited by men’s bodies, who – in Puwar’s (2021) words – function as the somatic norm (p.253). Following Ahmed (2006), this association of men’s bodies with certain spaces shapes the spaces to accommodate these ‘ideal’ bodies. “Gender becomes naturalised as a property of […] spaces partly through the ‘loop’ of this repetition, which leads bodies in some directions more than others”, she argues (p.58). But if politics is a men’s domain, Schmidt and other

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[144] This comment also indicates an opposition to the claim that toilets should not be divided into men and women’s toilets but should welcome all genders. The quotation is therefore hostile against trans and non-binary people.

women members cannot fully belong as their bodies are not accommodated by the spaces. As Puwar (2021) argues with reference to Massey's (1994) work:

> To be of and in a space, while at the same time not quite belonging to it, is an experience closely applicable to women in elite spaces in political organizations. The sheer maleness of particular public spaces and women's experiences of increasingly occupying them, while still being conscious of being 'space invaders', even as they enjoy these places is vividly captured by Massey. (p.252)

Schmidt seems to be aware that the party is a male domain but she did not criticise this. She claims to feel welcomed while knowing that her presence is not the norm, neither in the party nor in politics in general.

'Access to space is equal'

Most of my participants do not consider their party a men's domain, arguing instead that access to space is equal (hence all spaces are open), even though party positions are occupied by more men. Local FPÖ member Gruber stated that "women have in general as much space in the party as men have, it is just that we have fewer women. But in general, no obstacles are put in the way of women." The idea that "women have […] as much space […] as men" is in line with participants' postfeminist narratives discussed in the previous chapter, where women's experiences are individualised and the notion that equality has been achieved and that there are no structural barriers for women is emphasised. The spaces for women in the parties are hereby depoliticised and access to spaces is allegedly not gendered (Massey, 1994, p.250). Puwar (2004a) argues that those who are inhabiting spaces (including 'space invaders') often deny the effects that 'race', gender and class have on the exclusion or inclusion within those spaces (p.119). Fraser (1990) argues that the discursive interactions that take place in public spaces can never bracket out social inequalities along the lines of: "as if" the space is neutral and "as if" gender, ethnicity and class would not matter (p.63).

Denial of the gendered nature of space is apparent in Wagner's (AfD) angry answer to the question on how she experiences her membership in a party that is often described as male-dominated:

> No this is wrong, we are *hofiert* [courted], we are supported and as I said, I am supposed to take the chair, we are equal partners. I do not

> understand why this is always said: “old white men”, no […] I am the best example that I achieved something in the party.

Though she is the only women in her local AfD branch, Wagner believes that women can equally be part of the party spaces than men, which her case allegedly proves through her having been offered a leadership position. The German word *hofiert* (which can be roughly translated to courted) suggests that the AfD is going out of its way to recruit women. Being offered the chair, however, can be seen to reflect what Puwar (2004a) describes as the need for sponsors and advocates for women to enter spaces, in which women are not the norm. In other words, women often need to be welcomed by an established insider of a space (most likely a man) in order to be able to get access (p.121). In line with this, Wagner was asked to take up the chair position by the men of the party, who welcomed her into the men’s domain (p.121). For her, the sheer possibility for women to enter all levels of the party hierarchy (for example, Alice Weidel as party leader) is an indication that the AfD treats women and men equally.

Some participants argued that women even have certain advantages over men in entering several party spaces. Local AfD politician Lenz noted:

> I have the feeling that we few women, who are on all party levels, get even more appreciation. What we accomplish is very much seen and therefore women are welcome at all levels and they even seem to have advantages in elections.

Lenz’s words indicate that the minority position of women in the AfD makes women, as Puwar (2004a) notes in her own research, “much more visible and therefore they are noticed much more easily” (p.92). In line with this, Fischer (AfD) stated:

> I believe that women have a very good chance in our party, there are just unfortunately too few and just too few women have what it takes. […] Those women who run for positions, if they do it reasonably well, then they even have a women’s bonus that they are elected, because we know that we need women. We also need women for specific topics and therefore women who are strong […] have good chances.

Fischer’s reference to the women’s bonus indicates that women are favoured to receive certain visible positions in the party because the party wants/needs more women (‘feminisation’ strategy). This comment arguably contradicts the far-right women’s

objection to women's quotas because the women's bonus stands – like the women's quota – against the trope of meritocracy (discussed in the previous chapter). When Fischer stated that "we know that we need women", she indicated that women have a distinct advantage in receiving positions, an argument that Puwar (2004a) also identified in her research (p.92). Berlin parliamentarian Kristin Brinker posted an interview of her on August 1st, 2020, in which she stated: "surely as a woman you are also sometimes pushed forward." The women's bonus and the idea of being pushed forward suggest that women are not the norm in the party spaces and therefore have a more visible presence.

Influences outside the parties' control

The idea of meritocracy is also visible when Fischer stated that "women who are strong have good chances." In this subsection, I show how participants translate the idea of meritocracy into their experiences in the parties and into their reasoning of why there are fewer women despite allegedly equal access. Though Fischer made reference to a women's bonus, she still argued that women in the party must be particularly strong ("just too few women have what it takes"). The claim that there are not enough strong women willing to join the AfD is used by participants to make sense of the low number of women in the party, which is allegedly outside the party's control. Her words illustrate how women in the party have to perform very well in order to occupy spaces. As Ahmed (2006) points out inhabiting spaces that are not made for certain bodies is hard work (p.62), which explains why these women have to be strong as they are not 'naturally' occupying those spaces and act outside the directive norm (Puwar, 2004a, p.8). This inherent contradiction of stating that there is equal access to party spaces while at the same time arguing that women have to be strong and active is present in Puwar's research as well and she states that men can be mediocre while women have to be outstanding (p.93).

The claim that strong women can make it in the party is bound up with the idea that there are only spaces for the best people. Local AfD member Krüger argued:

> That is why every woman who does a good job, who is talented, has a chance to be elected to office. Since the beginning, we have had women at the top (Petry, Weidel…). Like everywhere else, mostly women with a certain bite.

The perception here is that if women are good enough, they are able to achieve high positions, like former party leader Frauke Petry. Downing (2018) illustrates this claim in

her analysis of statements made by the French far-right politician Marine Le Pen, who "argues for individual merit – for women competing on a par with men – in the political sphere, such that the best candidate regardless of sex should always be appointed to a given position" (p.373).

A second reason provided by most participants for the lower number of women in the parties despite this supposed equal access to space is media representation and social pressure from the public – this again feeds into the idea that only strong women are able to deal with the pressure to join the parties. Like most of my participants, local AfD member Becker noted, with reference to media representation, that "there are so many stereotypes [about us] […] Of course, we come off very badly in the media." Later in her interview, she referred to the social pressure created by the media, arguing that:

> in general, the space is there, yes. But we already have so many problems to find people anyway, because of social pressure […]. Women are always welcome, but you cannot find many, you also cannot find many middle-aged men, who are in their working life, because you really have to think it through. […] But the path is open for women, the social pressure is too high.

This line of argument lets the parties off the hook as it blames social pressure created outside of the parties. For Becker and other participants, the social pressure is executed, for example, by: family and friends, who exclude them because they join the AfD/FPÖ; by employers, who make them quit their jobs; or by left-wing activists, who throw eggs at their cars/houses. Some participants specifically mention the social pressure of being denounced as "evil Nazi" (Becker). In the light of Austrian and German history, the stigma of being Nazis seems to be the 'elephant in the room' in most interviews.

Schulz (AfD) clearly stated her anger about media representation and social stigmatisation of the party and its members:

> It does really annoy me, Ms Roy, when I think about it, I want more women but because of the environment and everything that happened against us recently [she mentions protests against the AfD etc.], we have a surplus of men and women are underrepresented.

While in this quotation, Schulz is clearly only blaming the wider environment, which includes media representation and social pressures, she also talked about male-dominated spaces, as I discuss below.

Finally, a third reason for the lower number of women in the parties is provided by Pichler (FPÖ):

> There are quite a few women in the party, I don't know the percentage now, but quite a few [...] so we are not a *Männerpartei*. [...] It's bullshit […] there are already women here. The men are in the majority, that's true, but they are also in the majority in other parties.

Later in her interview, Pichler went on to endorse the idea that society develops naturally throughout history as she stated that there were even fewer women in politics 50 years ago, thus mirroring the narrative that equality between women and men develops 'naturally'. She used the line of argument that it is 'normal' that men are in the majority in the FPÖ (and other parties); according to Pichler the higher number of men in the party does not mean that women are excluded from party spaces, it is just how it is in all parties.

"Space invaders" in male-dominated spaces

Despite the dominant claim that access to party spaces is equal for women and men, the topic of male-dominated spaces, which are dominated by masculine behaviour, was mentioned in some interviews. Having previously argued that women have access to all party spaces, local AfD member Schulz described the party as a "men's club": "You have to be able to assert yourself in this complete men's club, but you can also assert yourself with women's issues or as a woman." Using the term "men's club", Schulz made clear that men are the norm in the party and that women have to actively assert themselves and, in Puwar's (2004a) words, become "space invaders." While Schulz clearly did not deny that certain male-dominated spaces exist in the AfD, she also argued that she does not necessarily feel excluded from those spaces because she can assert herself as a woman. The identification of male-dominated spaces while simultaneously denying any form of exclusion was also identified by Rösslhumer (1999) in her interviews with FPÖ women (p.147).

Interestingly, Schulz contradicted herself with reference to exclusion, when she mentioned the barriers to her party membership: "I also said that it's hard for me because I'm the only woman [in the local parliament group] at the moment, so it's not so easy to be the only woman among all the men." That it is hard for Schulz indicates that even

though she has access to this space, she still has to performatively don a "political lion skin" (Puwar, 2021, pp.252-253; Pateman, 1995, p.6), which is tailored for men. Schulz conceded that "I am a woman but I can act like a man", which gestures towards that political lion skin, based on the "cultural fiction" of what a real man or woman 'naturally' is (Puwar, 2004a, p.80).

That men are the somatic norm within the political parties was also visible in the comments of other participants. Bergmann (AfD), for example, argued: "Women's work should be better 'rewarded' because it is precisely the highly motivated but rather 'quiet' women who are not noticed enough." Bergmann's words, which I also discussed in Chapter 4, show how women, who do not act according to the masculine norm of being loud and assertive, are excluded. Here, Ahmed's (2006) argument that spaces are shaped by the habitual actions of those who dominate the spaces (p.129), is exemplified, because the quiet behaviour of some women is not in line with the habitual action of the party's men and does not fit into the party spaces. Exclusionary processes take place in the parties, then, even they may not be identified as such.[145]

In other instances, the idea of male-dominated spaces and masculine behaviour is relativised through additional comments which seek to downplay their significance. Fischer (AfD), for example, noted: "We are also a party that has a relatively high proportion of older men and I think they still have their *Schützenfest* [traditional festival of the shooting club] from the 80s or 70s in their memories." Festivals, such as the *Schützenfest*,[146] are often associated with masculine behaviour as well as with whiteness. There are different forms of and knowledge about masculinity and masculine behaviour (Connell, 2005, p.4; p.37). Here I refer to a normative masculinity, which includes the norm of toughness ("no sissy stuff") (p.70) indicated through the uniforms and guns, which are paraded by the members of the shooting club during the festival. Raewyn Connell (2005) argues that "definitions of masculinity are deeply enmeshed in the history of institutions" (p.29); the *Schützenverein* as a traditional institution in Germany takes

[145] In the previous chapter, I discussed career politician Bauer's (AfD) narrative about women's equality, she argued that women need to learn to act like men to be successful, which is clearly mirrored in some of the stories about women in the party spaces.
[146] These festivals are organised by local *Schützenvereine* (shooting clubs), whose history reaches back into medieval times, when these clubs were part of a town's defence mechanism. In the nineteenth century *Schützenvereine* were part of the national movement in Germany (Krüger, 2013, p.1588) and today – even though in decline – they still hold up some of the old traditions, including shooting as sports. Even though women are now allowed into many of the clubs (less so in the 70s and 80s), the dominant picture of a *Schützenverein* is still male dominated, for example, men in uniforms with their rifles over their shoulder.

part in this process. Here again it is important to note that, as Dubslaff (2021, p.18) argues, political culture in Germany (not just in the far right) is built on male-dominated traditions and practices and Lang and Sauer (2013) argue that the central features of the political system are very similar in Austria, which includes the male-dominated culture. Fischer goes on to acknowledge that these older men sometimes say stupid things; however, she then downplays this behaviour with the comment "this is how they grew up", which indicates that this is just how it is.

In her interview, Schmidt (AfD; 20s/30s) made reference to laddish behaviour:

> I have not experienced misogyny either. Okay, so if you're a young woman like me, then you get called a *Mädel* (girl), but I can deal with that, it doesn't bother me so much, but as I said, otherwise I haven't had any bad experience.
>
> Sometimes they [men in the party] are making a rude joke or something like this. And they say: yesterday I met a woman who had mega big breasts [...] this is a little bit chauvinistic, but they would never really harm a woman.

In stating that she can deal with chauvinistic comments and that she otherwise had no bad experiences with men in the party, she indicated that she does not appreciate the comments but that they do not really bother her. She also relativised her claim about the men's misogyny by stating that "they would never really harm a woman." Schmidt is clearly ignoring the ways in which language itself can do harm – her definition of harm is reduced to physical harm. Puwar (2004a) argues that spaces dominated by men can lead to clubbish/laddish behaviour, where rude jokes are just part of the behavioural code, as can be found, for example, in fraternities (p.85). Fischer and Schmidt's accounts therefore at once describe and downplay the misogyny of the men's behaviour; for them it just seems to be how it 'naturally' is.

Career politician Schäfer (AfD) was the only participant to explicitly state that men's networks constitute a clear disadvantage for women. She stated:

> The disadvantage I think it is like in businesses. I also observed it there that men are networking and work together and women work against each other, there is no cooperation among women [...] the few women even fight each other. [...] I have the feeling there are some men who

> do not want women in the party. And the internal attacks against women are different, they are accused of having an affair. I think it is probably the same in other parties.

The observation that men work together indicates that women are excluded from these networks, there is clearly no space for women's cooperation in Schäfer's branch of the party. That there are different gendered norms for women and men in the party becomes clear when she stated that women are accused of having affairs as part of power struggle inside the party, which sexualises them and ignores their political roles. Schäfer's account clearly draws a picture of women being 'out of place' in the AfD but also in other parties, which resonates with Ahmed's (2006) argument that bodies, who occupy a place in a space, which accommodates a different body to their own, feel 'out of place' (p.12). Schäfer stated in her interview that she was given her position in the party because the men in the party branch needed a woman in a senior position ('feminisation' strategy). However, she clearly did not get a space within the male-dominated networks and therefore feels 'out of place'.

Despite Schäfer's critique here, when I asked her if she would like the role of women in the party to be changed, she said:

> I actually never thought about this, because I always took my own path. I also do not know if it would help if the women would network and support each other, because the men are in the majority and I have the experience that you cannot discuss this [women's networks].

Schäfer's account is contradictory in parts because she first identified the disadvantages she has as a woman in the party and then argued that she "always took her own path" and therefore had not thought about what it would mean to change women's situation in the AfD – another example of the individualisation of women's experiences. She clearly criticised men's networks but does not challenge them. Schäfer does not believe that the establishment of women's networks would help. Her earlier statement that the few women in the party fight each other illustrates the misogynistic and essentialist trope of backstabbing women, which I briefly discussed in Chapter 4. Her comment that women's networks cannot even be discussed "because the men are in the majority" will be further examined in the next section.

Women's networks as counter spaces

One possible strategy to cope with male-dominated spaces is to create women's networks as a counter space which can widen discursive interactions (Fraser, 1990, p.67). FPÖ member Moser talked to me about the IFF (the FPÖ's women's organisation):

> It is important that this initiative was established, because there are many women who prefer to talk to women about specific topics and because women clearly also have different perspectives than men […] I think the perspective of women is very important […] We incorporate our ideas.

Moser, who like the other FPÖ members did not explicitly discuss the male-dominated nature of the party spaces, illustrated in her description of the IFF that women struggle to assert themselves into the party. As Klammer and Goetz (2017) have shown a masculine culture pervades the FPÖ. The party recruits most of its staff and party members from *Burschenschaften*, highly masculine and white institutions that date back to the 19th century and often claim that they need to defend themselves from 'feminisation' (pp.83-84). Instead of questioning the masculine norms of the FPÖ Moser discussed how women have different perspectives and that it is therefore easier for them to talk in women's spaces. As Sarah Childs and Miki Caul Kittilson (2016) point out, one argument for women's networks within political parties is that they can provide a 'safe space' from which women can communicate their demands and ideas for policies (p.605) – a 'safe space' which seems especially necessary in the FPÖ's masculine culture, which is dominated by men from *Burschenschaften*.

The opportunity to be able to communicate demands through a women's network also came up in Huber's (FPÖ) interview. Asked why she thought that the IFF is necessary, she replied:

> Necessary is probably not the right description [for the IFF]. It is, first of all, good and enriching that we are connected throughout Austria and that we work together to sell our women's policy issues to men or women.

Though Huber rejected the idea that the IFF is necessary, she still argued that the organisation has advantages. One reason why FPÖ women may have talked less about male-dominated spaces in their interviews is because of their access to a women's network, which provides them with the means to communicate their ideas to the party

leadership. Academic literature on gender and networking more broadly has illustrated that when women face exclusion from men's networks, they often establish women's networks as counter spaces (Bierema, 2005, p.208). FPÖ members Moser and Huber use the collective nature of the network to communicate their visions for the party ("We incorporate our ideas." "[…] we work together to sell our ideas.").

Of my FPÖ participants, only Gruber did not support the IFF. But this was not because she is against women's networking; rather, as she stated, "it would be much more useful if all women in the party are just connected as women in the FPÖ" because having an extra organisation like the IFF, which women have to join actively, is according to her too complicated and ineffective. One reason for Gruber's rejection of the IFF could be that it is a formal network that was put in place by the party leadership in the 1990s to make the party's image more women friendly but not to challenge its masculine culture (Rösslhumer, 1999, p.45). Networks can be formal or informal; with informal networks arising from the grassroots and therefore being less regulated (Alsop, 2015, p.33). In suggesting that women in the FPÖ should automatically be connected as women of the party, Gruber is recommending more individual initiatives on the part of women party members, similar to networks of their male counterparts. Another possible reason for Gruber's perception of the IFF could be connected to the varying importance of the IFF in the different Austrian federal states. While the IFF is very active in some federal states, it is barely existing in others (Sanders et al., 2019, p.141). The overall wish or need of my FPÖ participants for networking demonstrates that women are certainly not the norm in these other networks.

That the IFF barely challenges the men's networks in the party and that it does not criticise masculine culture becomes clear in the Facebook post of former member of the Upper Austrian Landtag, Anita Neubauer, about the IFF's summer *Stammtisch* (August 14th, 2020):

> FPÖ women are visible: We stand for practical women's politics and togetherness without revanchism and *Geschlechterkampf* [the battle between the sexes]. I am looking forward to a nice evening in a friendly atmosphere.

"Nice evening" and "friendly atmosphere" here are further suggestive of the IFF as a 'safe space' that provides a convivial atmosphere for women. The evening itself is presented as an opportunity for social networking, which allows the women to interact on a personal

level. As I previously discussed, some women join both parties because of their wish to join a community of like-minded people. Other scholars have illustrated that women often prefer homophilous networking (only with women) for the fostering of personal relations (Alsop, 2015, p.33). While the focus here clearly lies on personal relations, there is also an overlap with political goals as Neubauer mentions "practical women's politics."

Furthermore, in the previous chapter I discussed how women's organisations within male-dominated parties must try and avoid the label of 'man-haters'. That Neubauer wrote here that the IFF is against *Geschlechterkampf* demonstrates what Puwar (2004a) describes as "the fragility of the masculine claim to public space" which is "disturbed by the arrival of the abject" – here women (p.14). Neubauer needs to ensure men that the IFF is not a threat to them and that women are not, in Puwar's words, a contamination of the space (p.17). Interestingly, Scrinzi (2014a) shows with her research that, in contrast to my FPÖ participants, some LN members overtly point out sexism in the party. She argues that this is facilitated through the LN women's organisation (p.9), which however does not seem to be the case for the IFF's role in the FPÖ. My participants only indirectly discuss sexism in the parties.

Unlike the IFF, the AfD's women's organisation FridA is relatively insignificant – most AfD women in senior positions are not part of it (Sanders et al., 2019, p.139). While none of my AfD participants mentioned FridA, some of them did talk about informal networking for women. That these are the same women who talked about the importance of solidarity between women shows a coherence in their stories.[147] Career politician Bauer stated: "In general, we [the women] are in contact with each other and, of course, we also stick together and exchange ideas […] And sometimes you have a few inhibitions when so many men sit in the room." Here, Bauer emphasises the importance of women's networking on account of the difficulties that women encounter in spaces dominated by men. This mirrors Moser's (FPÖ) arguments on the significance of the IFF, again underscoring how when women feel 'out of place' they tend to have inhibitions (Puwar, 2004a). Bauer's words indicate furthermore the need for a supportive professional relationship between women. And in stating that women "stick together", she paints a very different picture of women to that painted by Schäfer of women fighting each other. For Bauer, this kind of networking is instrumental as women should benefit each other in a party (Casciaro et al., 2014, p.709). Though she is already in a senior

[147] See Chapter 4.

position in the party, occupying a seat in parliament, she identified the inhibitions for women created by networks constructed around 'maleness' – something that has also been identified in research about women and networks in workspaces (Alsop, 2015, p.33).

Fischer (AfD) stated that "women's networking is close to my heart", claiming that she wanted to create more space for women in the party through new networking possibilities. That she did not mention FridA here demonstrates the organisation's marginal role. Like Neubauer, she also discussed the benefits of social networking, especially when the party is under attack by the media: "I am really lucky, I get along with women […] we talk and meet for hiking or anything and mutually encourage each other." Fischer also showed awareness about the difficulties for women when it comes to networking:

> This is partly quite difficult in a conservative party, because they [men] start to panic, they are not different to those in other parties. [They think:] 'If they [the women] are networking then I do not get my position' or whatever. But I manage that quite well because I sell things by profession.

Fischer made reference to men's fear that women might occupy/invade positions that are 'normally' reserved for men. In other words, the presence of women leads to a challenge to men's dominance (Ajanovic et al., 2015, p.81). As in Neubauer's post, Fischer identifies "the fragility of the masculine claim to public space" (Puwar, 2004a, p.14). The arrival of women in political space leads to fear and disorientation for men. As Ahmed (2006) argues, "bodies can take up spaces that do not extend their shape, which can in turn 'reorientate' bodies and spaces" (p.61). In other words, the deviation of the somatic norm can lead to changes in the spaces, which those who are the somatic norm may fear. Fischer also commented that "men hunt together, women alone." Her words illustrate that many women are not part of the networking efforts and that men are able to use the networking style they are familiar with. Fischer chose the word "hunt", which is closely associated with traditional masculinity, to tell me that men are better connected and support each other.

Several AfD participants clearly do not see the need for women's networks. When I specifically asked Koch (AfD) about an AfD women's network in the part of East Germany she is from, she wrote: "In many parties, there are fewer women and that is the same in the AfD. […] I think currently this is also not necessary, because women's issues

can be discussed with men in the AfD." Koch did not know of any such networks, arguing that they are anyway not needed. One argument against women's organisations is that they might keep women's issues and interests away from the party leadership (on that, see Childs and Kittilson, 2016, p.605), which could be one reason for Koch's rejection of women's networks.

Bierema (2005) demonstrates in her research about women's networks in professional settings that some women "did not see the value of a women's network" as they seemed to be assimilated in the masculine culture (p.215). A similar perspective is provided by Schmidt (AfD), who is aware of the women's network in her AfD branch in East Germany, stating: "It is basically important to network, but to explicitly network with other women is not important for me, for me it is crucial to be connected to everyone." Schmidt's comment illustrates how certain women might fear becoming disconnected from men in the party and therefore losing access to the leadership and to decision-making. Schmidt and Koch's words both show that they are using instrumental networking to create relations with anyone (men or women) who offers opportunities and benefits for them and their topics. As Connell (2005) argues, women leaders like Margaret Thatcher did not gain power through the use of women's networks but through their inclusion in men's networks (p.204), which goes some way towards explaining scepticism towards women's networks here.

In this section, I have discussed how participants narrate their access to space within the parties. Even though most of them claim that all spaces are open to them, their narratives show that the situation is much more complicated than this. Many of my participants' comments suggest that women do not quite belong in the spaces of their parties or, for that matter, in political spaces in general, indicated, for instance, through comments about a room full of men and the inhibitions this creates for women. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, women who 'invade' male-dominated space are not the somatic norm and their entrance into the space is contradictory as they are insiders (whiteness) and outsiders (gender) at the same time (Puwar, 2021, p.254). In my interviews, most participants clearly rejected the label *Männerparteien*, which, I argue, endorses the 'feminisation' strategy of the parties, which includes the promotion of individual women and the absence of any formal barriers for women to enter the party. However, access to spaces is never neutral and my participants' narratives clearly demonstrate that masculine behaviour and norms (even though often downplayed) restrict women's movement in the parties' spaces. While many participants subtly or directly

mention masculine norms in the parties, they use essentialist narratives and for the most part do not challenge gender binaries or point out sexism. For example, when they criticise masculine behaviour, they at the same time argue that this is just how it 'naturally' is. For all FPÖ and for certain AfD participants, women's networks offer a 'safe space', where they can act more freely.

"We have a very important role": Women's different roles in the parties

In this section, I discuss the four main roles that women seem to inhabit within the parties (the nurturer/carer, the hardworking/dutiful women, *Vorzeigefrauen*, the masculine/ unmarked politician), as identified in my interviews. My participants' roles are enacted in the spaces discussed above, like Ahmed (2006) argues all "actions take place in space" (p.1). Schulz (AfD) explained to me: "And I always tell myself I'm happy, I have both. I am a woman and I can act like a man." Her words demonstrate very well how different roles can be performed in different situations and spaces. While Schulz emphasised that she is a woman (her 'natural' role), in certain occasions she can act like a man in order to be able to take part in male-dominated spaces. She seems to see the necessity in changing her role, which she indicated with "I'm happy, I have both." Among other things, this demonstrates how women in far-right parties are actively constructing their roles (Meret et al., 2017, p.124). However, I argue, this leads to a fragmented form of agency which provides some room for manoeuvre within the given norms, but which nonetheless requires a careful strategic negotiation between different gendered scripts (Davids, 2011, p.165).

Puwar (2004a) argues that women are judged for their gendered roles in politics, and they have to navigate the masculine norm for politicians with different forms of femininity (p.93). The different gendered roles are connected to the gendered symbolism of the historically constructed separation of the public (men's) and private (women's) spheres (p.79). The presence of a woman's body in the public (political) sphere disrupts the partition, however, at the same time it still often reproduces it, for example, with women's political roles being anchored in traditionally 'private' roles like the nurturer and mothers (p.14). When I make reference to 'acting like a woman or a man' in this chapter, I am referring to my participants' understanding of naturalised stereotypes of gendered acts. I agree with Puwar that gendered acts are never natural; they only appear to be so due to their continuous repetition (p.80). Women members of the AfD and FPÖ repeat different gendered norms, which include feminine and masculine

(unmarked/political) behaviour.[148] Those continuous repetitions can however lead to changes as "bodies never quite comply with the norms" (Butler, 1993, p.xii).

The nurturer: Mediators and caring women/mothers

The role of the nurturer, which is rooted in the private sphere, is one of two stereotypically feminine roles that I identified in my interviews. It takes different shapes, including a spectrum of (acceptable) femininities (Lang, 2022, p.197). One of those nurturing roles embraces the alleged 'softness' of women's perspectives which, some participants argued, make the party softer. For example, local AfD member Kramer said:

> I would ask every woman to become a member so that the party gets a more feminine side, a softer side. That would certainly also do the party's creativity good.
>
> I am certainly also someone who occasionally takes a [male] party colleague to the side and says, well, now it's also enough here and now you get your feet back on the ground and do your factual work.

Women, as Kramer sees it, bring softness to the male toughness; an idea that is further illustrated through her description of herself as a counterbalance to men ("bringing them back on their feet"). Koch's (AfD) words are a further example of that counterbalance: "I am a balance between men in the parliamentary group and the city council." The nurturing feminine role is here equated with softness and creativity. The idea that they as women in the party are a counterbalance reflects the notion that women and men are complementary to each other, discussed in Chapter 4.

In her research on women politicians in the AfD and FN/RN, Meyer (2019) identifies women's role as the softener and mediator (p.80). As previously discussed, Meyer explores the publicly presented roles of women politicians and how the parties want to present the roles of their women members. The role of the softener and mediator, which is part of most participants' stories, overlaps with the parties' preferred image of women members. The association of softness with femininity is in line with the belief of many in society that women are more peaceful (Sanders et al., 2019, p.137; Lang, 2017, p.72). Berlin AfD parliamentarian Kristin Brinker mentioned in the interview she posted, discussed above, that her mission is to make the AfD more feminine and softer, which

[148] I illustrated in the previous chapter that most (not just conservative and far-right) people grow up with binary ideas about femininity and masculinity, which offers idealised roles for women and men. Acting in accordance with the normative roles is hereby positively sanctioned (Sanders et al., 2019, pp.30-34).

includes getting “messages across charmingly.” This role is in line with the parties’ ‘feminisation’ and ‘de-demonisation’ strategies (Sauer, 2020, p.26).

Implicit within this construction of being softer and feminine is the idea that if they (as ‘soft’ women) are in the party, the party cannot be racist as they are “just normal women” (Fischer, AfD). Krüger (AfD) expressed this when she wrote that people who know her say: “If she [Krüger] is in there, it cannot be a ‘Nazi party’”, which she affirms again with the words “they are right about this.” Meyer (2019) argues that women in far-right parties often have the role to normalise the unthinkable (p.80). Even though the AfD is a racist party and my participants’ use racist narratives themselves, the party is normalised by the women’s presence as they, for example deliver “messages across charmingly.”

Closely connected to the role of the ‘softener’ is the role of the good and caring woman.[149] The alleged ability to care is coded as a stereotypically feminine characteristic. Moser (FPÖ) and Schmidt (AfD), both in their late 20s/early 30s, explained their roles in the parties as a continuation of their caring character that has existed since school. Moser remarked: “I also stood up for others at school, and this has prevailed”, and Schmidt: “In school as a child, I already interceded for those who were bullied.” That Moser and Schmidt both refer to their caring behaviour in school might be connected to their age and the fact that school for them is recent past. Additionally, they cannot use narratives of the caring mother because neither has children. Schmidt did however explain that she would probably care too much for a child, through doing so, she established that her capacity to care is larger than usual. Dietze (2020) argues that far-right parties support women’s participation in the parties due to women’s alleged capability to care which is performed as strong femininity (p.157). While Moser and Schmidt both present themselves as caring, they also indicate that they fought to protect others, which shows a heroic self-presentation through the performance of strong femininity – in the vein of a lioness.

Other participants expressed their alleged caring role through telling stories, which illustrate that their main role in the party is to take care of people’s worries. For example, Koch (AfD) stated that “as a city councillor, I can take care of the citizens’ concerns”, and career politician Huber (FPÖ) wrote that she wants “to achieve the best

[149] This role was already part of the women’s narratives about their paths to membership, for example, when they talked about caring for their children’s future.

for the people." In line with those claims in the interviews, member of the Bavarian Landtag Kathrin Ebner-Steiner's (AfD) team tweeted on her account on June 1st, 2020:

> If you look at our and Mrs Ebner-Steiner's work and proposals, you will certainly not have failed to notice that Mrs Ebner-Steiner is not sitting in a bubble at all but is committed to standing up for the weaker members of society and against injustice. Best, Team KES.

The image constructed here is that of the good and just politician, who stands up for those who are too weak to act for themselves. This is a role Rösslhumer (1999) identifies in her research with FPÖ women (p.99). As discussed in Chapter 3, Mulinari and Neergaard (2014) and Scrinzi (2014a) also classify the narratives of women in the Swedish and Italian far right as rooted in the rhetoric of caring for the weak, which counterbalances the negative media representation (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2014, p.44), about which my participants also complaint. While this rhetoric includes the notion of 'nice' women, it also embraces the role of the 'fighting' women (p.51), who stands up for others (just not for all others).

The narrative about the feminine caring role is closely connected to the notion of motherhood and futurity discussed in Chapter 3. For some participants and career politicians on social media the 'urge to act' translates into their account of their role in the party, Ebner-Steiner posted on July 19th, 2020:

> And this is also part of the truth: Yes, as a mum of four with a demanding job, it's certainly not always easy. However, the life experience I am gaining as a mother can only be an advantage for all my plans in life. The important thing is to pursue your passion, then you can do anything – because I am happy to commit myself to the future of my children. […]

In line with Dietze's (2020) argument that far-right women often equate being a mother with being a good politician (p.157), Ebner-Steiner's motherhood is here defined as her source of life experience and expertise. In other words, her 'private' role as a mother translates into her role as politician.

Lenz (AfD) also used the connection between being a mother and a politician, even though she is not a mother herself. Describing herself as "*Parteimutti*" (party mum), she deployed a script from the traditional 'private' space for women (the home and the

family) and used it in the party-political context (Puwar, 2004a, p.97). In her research on one far-right woman from Mexico, Davids (2011) identified motherhood as the archetype for femininity (p.163). And as Meret et al. (2017) argue, the political participation of far-right women is often framed as an extension of the caring role as mothers, which is a culturally approved model of women's leadership (p.129; p.134).

Nurturing roles also came to the fore when some participants talked about their feminine expertise and identified specific topics for which their expertise is supposedly useful, showing again their belief that "women just have a different perspective" (Moser, FPÖ). For instance, Krüger (AfD) wrote: "Women often have different focus areas than men. If women want to change something, for example in family politics, then they need to become active." In line with my findings, Lang (2022) argues that some women are stressing their womanhood to assert their expertise on specific topics (p.194). For Krüger, family politics is one example of a topic on which women have different (maybe even better) expertise than men. Krüger's words here could again be connected to the alleged nurturing character of women who are therefore responsible for family issues. Her narrative is clearly built on a biologically essentialist understanding of womanhood. Lang (2022), Meyer (2019) and Sanders et al. (2019) argue that there is a spectrum of acceptable femininities and feminine roles in the far right in Germany and Austria. In this section, I identified that the nurturer is one of those acceptable feminine roles for far-right women in the AfD and FPÖ.

The dutiful and hardworking woman

Another common theme within my participants' interviews and social media accounts concerns the second stereotypically feminine role: the dutiful and hardworking woman. Doreen Schwietzer, an AfD member of the Saxonian Landtag, posted on Facebook on May 29th, 2020: "Do you know why the best people always suffer? Because they always give everything and never ask for anything. And nobody sees that." Schwietzer's quotation encapsulates this second role, which is dominated by hard work and sacrifices. Local AfD member Krüger wrote:

> I never recommend myself for tasks and roles but let myself be recommended for those and then check whether I can and want to accept a task. […] Important are active members […] members who sacrifice time and I personally sacrifice a lot.

Krüger described herself as not being interested in a party career or leadership position and not wanting to get involved in power struggles. In stating that she never recommends herself for roles/tasks, she demonstrated that she never asserts herself and never asks for anything if she is not told that she is needed in a specific role, thus projecting a humble self-image. Additionally, she presented herself as always hardworking, which her comment on sacrifices illustrates. In line with these characteristics, FPÖ politician Moser told me the following about her role in the party: “So, for me, no matter what function I hold, whether I’m just a member or a delegate or a district councillor, I always do my job the same way.” Doing her job the same way, for Moser, refers to her hard work in the party, which is not dependent on her current position because she is always dutiful to her party, hereby implying that she is not in the FPÖ for her career but for the party’s cause. In her research, Rösslhumer (1999) identifies that women in the FPÖ often name characteristics like diligence, engagement and hard work to describe their roles in the party (p.121). The characteristics described in this section are also stereotypically feminine traits (for example, being humble). However, the participants themselves do not always explicitly make the connection to their femininity, unlike participants talking about nurturing roles in the previous section.

For some of my participants dutifulness and hard work are connected to staying in the background and being modest.[150] Bergmann, an AfD member since the party’s founding, explained: “Many hardworking women work in the party but tend to stay in the background. Whether they do not dare to come forward is not known to me.” She continued: “Within the scope of my possibilities, I am trying to advance the party.” Bergmann’s words suggest that women do their work dutifully without being in the spotlight. She described her role modestly when she said that she is working in the scope of her possibilities, also indicating that she is hard working herself. Similarly, Huber (FPÖ) wrote: “It is true that women more likely need to be asked, because they do not consider [taking up positions] by themselves (this is how it was for me) and then they need to realise that they dare to do it.” Huber described her own experience as a woman to underline her statement that women need to be asked because otherwise they might not consider taking a role in the party.

Modesty was also presented by local AfD member Wagner, who described herself as a “small wheel” in the party trying to “move something.” Her role includes, among

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[150] Rösslhumer identifies a similar narrative in her work (p.117).

other things, joining party conferences, local *Stammtische* and supporting the party in election campaigns with distributing flyers. Weber (AfD) termed activities surrounding election campaigns (for example, flyer and poster distribution) hands on activities – these activities were mentioned by a majority of participants and were also part of social media accounts. Member of the Brandenburg Landtag Birgit Bessin tweeted on May 24th, 2020: “Off to distribute flyers in Teltow-Fläming and afterwards #AfD protest for #basic rights and #freedom in #Luckenwalde at 3pm.” Distributing flyers and participating in protests are depicted by Bessin as a simple but important task which a member of parliament should fulfil. In another post on June 14th, 2020, Bessin revealed that she distributes flyers at the weekend with her family, which allows her to present herself as both hardworking but at the same time spending time with her family and fulfilling her ‘private’ feminine role. Hamburg member of parliament Olga Petersen (AfD) posted similar stories. She often posted selfies of her at work, for example writing speeches, practicing speeches and in parliament but she also posted about her time with her children (for example, Twitter May 26th, 2020, and July 26th, 2020).

Some participants also told me that they took their positions in the party out of necessity, thereby further stressing their dutifulness. The women who told this story do not define their roles as taking place in the background however; they only came forward, they claim, because no one else was there. For instance, Pichler (FPÖ) stated:

> I am chairwoman of the local branch and local councilwoman because it was like this: the FPÖ lost a lot of votes in 2015 and many people left the party. I took over, because no one else was there, or no one was suitable to take over.

Only coming forward because no one else does, overlaps with Xydias’ (2020) research, in which she argues that women in the AfD present their membership or positions in the party as a necessity, claiming that they had to be persuaded to take on roles (p.118). Similarly, Richter (AfD), founding member of her local AfD branch took up the leadership because no one else wanted it. Xydias (2020) argues that AfD women identify themselves as dutiful and faithful to one party, which is a feminised narrative (p.120). The way my participants Pichler and Richter told their stories illustrates characteristics of faithfulness, which, according to them, were not shared by many of their fellow members, who either left the party or who were not willing to take positions.

For Koch (AfD), who also described herself as hard working and diligent, the same story extends to non-leadership roles. She wrote: “I also realised that the party lacks grassroot members, because as a member and supporter you have to expect many disadvantages and reprisals.” Koch’s role takes place in grassroot spaces of the AfD because this is where, according to her, support is needed. Coming back to Doreen Schwietzer’s post on Facebook, the stories, depicted above, clearly create a narrative of giving everything and not necessarily getting anything back.

The Vorzeigefrau

The third role I identified in my interviews is the role of the *Vorzeigefrau*. The German word *Vorzeige-* can be translated as ‘showcase’. According to Lang (2022), far-right actors including political parties like the AfD and FPÖ benefit from women’s participation (p.192), which closely connects the role of the *Vorzeigefrau* with the ‘feminisation’ strategy applied by the parties. As Sauer states (see Chapter 1): “This ‘feminisation’ strategy or strategy of ‘de-demonization’ allows right-wing parties to counter or relativize the image of being men’s parties and to attract female voters” (p.26). The ‘feminisation’ strategy relies, for example, on a small number of women, who are promoted or made visible by the party; their main purpose is hereby to improve the image of the party by merely being a visible party woman, to attract more women (voters and members) and to combat the notion that the parties are *Männerparteien* (Sauer, 2020, p.26; Simpson, 2019, p.304).

Local AfD member Lenz identified the advantages she provides for the party as follows: “I think for the external presentation of the party I am quite well suited as a small, young, sociable woman with a university degree.” Lenz is clearly aware of her potential to change public perceptions of the party. She identified several traits that make her presentable to the outside, including her appearance, age, character and education. The majority of participants referred at some point to the effect that they have on people outside the party, who would not have expected to have a woman like them in a far-right party.[151] A women like them, thereby refers to their ‘likeable’ characteristics, in Lenz’s case being “small, young, sociable” and educated. The description as small and young creates an unthreatening image, which helps her to present the party in a better light.

[151] While I do not mention any FPÖ member in this section this does not mean that the idea was absent from their accounts. The narrative was simply not as dominant in the FPÖ members’ interviews as it was in the four AfD participants’ interviews mentioned in this section. Huber (FPÖ), for instance, said that she exemplifies many things for other women.

Only Lenz and several other AfD participants defined the token role as one of their important roles within the party, with Lenz even stating: "I actually quite like my role as the *Vorzeigefrau* of our local branch." She combined this idea with the role of the hard-working/dutiful woman, similar to those in the previous section, arguing that she is not easily replaceable for the party. In other words, she seems to use her dutifulness as well as *Vorzeige*traits to secure her position in the party. I argue that she uses personal room for manoeuvre within the boundaries of the party's norms (Davids, 2011, p.165) and, in doing so, often also gets what she wants from the party. Lenz explained:

> As the only woman in the local branch and in the city council group, I have the role of the small, hard-working, friendly, sometimes *bis auf's Messer diskutierende* [endlessly (almost aggressively) discussing] '*Parteimutti*'. But that's why people listen to me, and most of the time they take my advice, too.

Lenz's self-presentation indicates a careful strategic negotiation of different traits and functions. Her understanding of her role illustrates, as Lang (2017) argues, that far-right women are not only *Vorzeigefrauen* because that would imply that they are puppets of the party without their own agency (p.75). Lenz's role as *Vorzeigefrau* seemingly allows her to take up different functions which combine stereotypically feminine traits (small, friendly, *Parteimutti*) with stereotypical masculine traits. For example, "*bis auf's Messer diskutierend*" suggests an assertive communication style. In their research on far-right women in Scandinavia and France, Meret et al. (2017) identify that far-right women often have to look tough and assertive but at the same time have to show their caring and friendly feminine 'nature' in order to be accepted as politicians and women. Meret et al. term this contradictory role expectation the double bind of femininity (p.125). However, Lenz's story shows that she actively seems to play with these different expectations.

Klein (AfD) described her main role in the party in connection with her young, feminine and attractive appearance: "Because I really do not look bad, I am often contacted and asked if I can help out, because women are gladly seen." Klein told me that she supports the party through distributing flyers and holding signs during protests or election campaigns. She is aware that the party contacts her for such events because she is perceived as attractive, or as she modestly framed it 'really not bad looking'. Meyer (2019) argues that attractiveness is an asset in far-right parties like the AfD (p.8). Klein's comment on attractiveness also functions as a cultural signifier for 'goodness'. The connection of 'beauty' and 'goodness' is deeply rooted in Western culture and is, for

example, pervasive in the German fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm (19th century). Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz (2003) analysed these fairy tales and argue: "Often there is a clear link between beauty and goodness, most often in reference to younger women, and between ugliness and evil" (p.718). They conclude that these fairy tales, where this link is dominant, are still told today (for example, Snow White).

In contrast to Lenz, Klein did not mention any other roles or how she might use her status as *Vorzeigefrau* to secure her own position in the party. However, she observed: "That strengthens you in some ways, when you are invited everywhere and also have something to do with the member of parliament, but I don't have a direct role there." Klein noted that the invitations to different party events provide her with more confidence and contacts with members who have access to decision-making spaces (for example, AfD parliamentarians and senior members). Earlier in the interview, she mentioned that she currently is mainly active in the youth organisation JA. Her encounters with senior members of the AfD and her role as *Vorzeigefrau* might therefore benefit her in the future and provide her with access to party spaces.

Not all participants attributed their role as *Vorzeigefrau* to stereotypically feminine characteristics. Schwarz (AfD) compared herself to a *Hahn im Korb*, which can be roughly translated as a 'rooster in the henhouse',[152] indicating that one man is among many women who all give him attention. However, she replaced the noun *Hahn* (rooster) with *Huhn* (hen) to indicate that she is one woman among many men. Schwarz described her feelings about being the only woman as follows: "I feel like I am in good hands here with the men, with the old white men." Her words suggest that she enjoys her role as one of the only women in her local AfD branch. She made reference to a dominant discourse in male-dominated spaces – the idea that old white men are disadvantaged through the arrival of women and non-white people (Puwar, 2004a, pp.13-14). Here, I want to draw a parallel to Puwar, who argues that women's experiences in public spaces that are defined by "sheer maleness" are showing that they are conscious of being 'space invaders' but enjoy being 'accepted' in those spaces (p.7). Schwarz demonstrated that she feels good in the space, her whiteness allows her access, but she also indicated that she does not quite belong as a woman through her phrase *Huhn im Korb*.

Schwarz's role as *Vorzeigefrau* was further amplified through her answer to the question of why she had participated in the interview. She explained to me that a man in

[152] The direct translation is 'rooster in the basket'.

the party told her: "That would be great if you as a woman say something about yourself and about women in the AfD." Her reason for participating in my interview is clearly connected to her role as *Vorzeigefrau* and she further emphasised that she wants to show me that "I am a completely normal person, completely normal woman." Schwarz's move from "person" to "woman" here is an interesting clarification as, in general, she did not refer to her femaleness/being a woman in the interview. In saying first that she is a "normal person", she implies an ostensibly 'gender free' role; an idea that will be discussed in the next section.

Finally, the role of the *Vorzeigefrau* is connected with the role of women role models in the parties.[153] Fischer (AfD) mentioned one of her role models in the party: "It was especially Frauke Petry [former party leader], who really impressed me." Mentioning other women in the party here demonstrates the effect that women role models, often *Vorzeigefrauen* themselves, can have on other women in the party. Mariana Harder-Kühnel (AfD), a member of the German Bundestag and spokesperson, among others, on family and women's issues, tweeted on July 21st, 2020:

> My lovely friend @WMuhsal visited me yesterday in "my" #Gelnhausen [town in Hesse, Germany]. We have known each other since 2014, after a long cooperation in the federal committee on 'family issues',[154] we are planning some new projects together […] She is an amazing woman, who expects her 5th (!) child.

Harder-Kühnel's description of Muhsal, an AfD politician and former member of the Thuringian Landtag, positions Muhsal as a role model who is able to do her political work and at the same time have four children and be expecting her fifth, emphasised with an exclamation mark. The tweet is accompanied by a picture of the two women who are in their 30s and 40s. The picture makes the tweet more relatable, because it visualises the presence of young 'normal' women in the party, therefore feeding into the 'feminisation' strategy. As Bitzan (2017) argues, there are several role model functions for women in the far right, which include political leaders and officeholders and women who position their far-right activities around their motherhood. These role models allow the party to

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[153] This mirrors participants' tendency to talk about strong individual women to argue that equality between women and men has been achieved.

[154] That they both have mainly worked on 'family issues' shows how women politicians often work in fields where they allegedly have a 'natural' feminine expertise in, as discussed above.

attract women with different ambitions as long as they share the same far-right beliefs (p.73).

The (masculine/unmarked) politician

The final role prevalent in certain interviews entails stereotypically masculine traits and is accompanied by the idea that 'gender does not matter' in the parties. Some of the participants told stories that suggest that they fulfil the normative behaviour of a politician. The masculine is the somatic norm which is hidden behind a 'gender free guise' (Puwar, 2004a, p.15) where masculinity is the unmarked term (Connell, 2005, p.70). Local AfD member Wolf explained to me that if you are in the AfD "as a woman or as a man, it does not matter." Similarly, FPÖ politician Moser stated:

> I think we [women in the party] have a very important role. With us, everyone is equal. We do not make any distinction [between men and women]. We are colleagues, we all get along very well, we discuss things with each other.

Wolf and Moser both allude to the idea that equality has been achieved, discussed above, transferring this idea to their parties where it allegedly does not matter if you are a man or a woman. Schuster-Craig (2021), in her research on the performative politics of AfD women leaders, argues that AfD women convince themselves that 'gender does not matter' (p.141). The idea that gender does not matter, stands in opposition to statements about women providing the parties with their feminine perspectives, which Moser also made.

As previously demonstrated, most of my participants do not, or not exclusively, use the role of the masculine/unmarked politician, but almost all of them refer to women in the AfD as particularly strong, determined and tough. Those are masculine gender stereotypes (Meret et al., 2017, p.141), which Scrinzi (2013) also identified among the LN women, who, she argues, "conform themselves to the masculine self-representation forged by the male leadership of the party" (p.6). The hybridity of masculine and feminine gender stereotypes, visible in my interviews, shows that, as in Puwar's (2004a) research, women are judged for how they 'do' their gender (stereotypically feminine behaviour) but also how they perform in politics (unmarked/masculine behaviour). These conflicting roles lead to balancing acts between feminine and masculine roles (p.93). However, my participants' different approaches and the varying intensities with which they fulfil these roles illustrates the possibility for agency.

This balancing act and the adoption of stereotypically masculine behaviour were illustrated in AfD career politician Schäfer's interview: "I grew up this way […] I am often the only woman, I therefore probably have a different tone, or I already learned to fight my way through early in life, but the party has a certain *Schärfe* [sharpness]." Schäfer referred to her 'different' tone in comparison to many other women. In using the word 'different' she makes no explicit reference to gender. But she is clearly referring to a masculine tone, which she has learned in the masculinised institutions she has been part of since school and which she uses to fight her way through with toughness. Schäfer's narrative here mirrors the previously discussed narrative that strong women can make it on their own, which was prevalent in most interviews and is entangled with (unmarked) masculine roles in the parties. In Sauer's (2020) words, Schäfer and other participants use their own form of political masculinity (p.26). However, it became clear that Schäfer struggles, when she referred to the *Schärfe* of the party. As my discussion of Schäfer's narrative on her struggle in the male-dominated party space in a previous section of this chapter made clear, she evidently has to try hard to fight her way through the *Schärfe* of the male-dominated AfD – despite her 'different' (masculine) tone. Additionally, Schäfer is a member of an East German branch of the AfD which is more radical than other branches and therefore the norm of masculinity might be more pronounced. For example, Björn Höcke the leader of the AfD in Thuringia (East Germany) propagated in 2015 that a forceful masculinity needs to be rediscovered so that men can be manful again (Sauer, 2020, p.29).

Like Schäfer, local AfD member Schwarz, who, as previously discussed, defined her role as *Vorzeigefrau* without using stereotypically feminine traits, talked about the tone she applies in the party. She told me: "I can just open my mouth, I do not need to mince words, I do not need to be super considerate or friendly. I can just say what I think, and this is appreciated." Schwarz's description of her communication style in the AfD stands in contrast to participants who stated that they as women with their feminine side bring softness to the party. She here rejects the characteristics of being friendly and considerate, often associated with women, and illustrates that her own form of masculine communication is appreciated by other party members.

Schulz (AfD) also claimed that she uses a sharp communication style. She explained to me that she sometimes must assert herself in the men's club, and "then I say, 'now quiet here or stop', like a dominatrix and then it is also good." During the interview she described herself as a woman, who can act like a woman or a man. In the above quote

she described herself as a dominatrix, which is the role of a woman, but defined by stereotypically masculine traits like toughness and dominance. Unlike Schwarz, she does not seem to enjoy the toughness and argued that if there were more women in the party, she would not need to act like a dominatrix or a man: "Then I could approach topics differently, more subtly and more creatively." Schulz's different descriptions of her role show that she navigates her role in the different spaces of the party, able to adopt new roles if the situation/space changes, for example if more women would join the party. I argue that Schulz's narrative is the clearest example of fragmented agency because she rearticulated different gendered scripts, but with the combination of all her roles, she diverts from several norms. For example, with saying that she is a woman but can act like a man, she diverts from the essentialist idea that women and men have complementary differences. However, in some ways she indicates that there are complementary differences when she mentioned "most men are not able to act like women."

Unlike Schulz, local AfD member Wolf actively rejected the stereotypically feminine traits of being considerate and friendly. She told me the following story about what happened to her and her husband when they went to an AfD event: "My husband was surrounded by nine of these people from the Antifa. […] What did I do? I tore their masks off and said, if you are doing something to my husband, then you will deal with me." In recounting this anecdote, Wolf depicts herself in the heroic role of protecting her husband, which reverses the traditional right-wing trope and widespread gender belief of the strong man saving 'his' weak woman from danger (Sauer, 2020, p.25). She flagged her rudeness as one of her further traits when she apologised for her rhetoric in the interview, stating: "I am sometimes spontaneously rude […] [laughing] my husband throws his hands up in horror." Wolf's husband was in earshot during our telephone interview and reminded her a few times to use a more appropriate tone, which most likely meant that he wanted her to use a softer tone. Wolf is rebelling against the stereotypically feminine behaviour of friendliness and softness. However, with her husband in earshot, her story is still safely contained within the masculine framework in which her husband monitors and partly steers her behaviour.[155] Both Schwarz and Wolf are the clearest examples of participants who defined their roles without connecting them to stereotypically feminine behaviours, instead mobilising masculine traits. My findings confirm Lang's (2022, p.194) observation that many far-right women use their

[155] After the interview, I received an email in which she apologised for her harshness. However, I assume the email was written by her husband because, during the interview, I found out that the email conversation I had before the interview was written by her husband and not by her.

womanhood to define their roles, but others do not address or actively avoid talking about their womanhood, as is the case for Schwarz and Wolf.

On some of the career politicians' social media accounts, I also observed stereotypically masculine language and characteristics as well as a lack of reference to their womanhood. One example of the use of masculine language is a post of Nicole Höchst, a member of the German Bundestag, after she was elected to be the AfD candidate in her constituency at the next federal election. On August 17th, 2020, she wrote: "Thank you for the trust. I will go into battle with you! I am already excited about the election campaign […]." Her post was accompanied by a picture of her with five men from her local party branch, illustrating that women can be in leadership positions despite the "sheer maleness" of the party. In using the word 'battle' to refer to the upcoming election campaign, she made clear that she is ready for a long and tough fight. Höchst did tap into masculine language of war in her post to illustrate her determination and willingness to fight. Her rhetoric stands in contrast with Scrinzi's (2014a) findings for the LN membership, in which she identified women using domestic metaphors and most men military metaphors or references to their skilled managerial jobs (p.8).

One example of a career politician who did not address her womanhood in any of the posts that I observed is Alice Weidel, member of the German Bundestag and AfD leader. Even when she posted or tweeted about issues concerning women, for example the women's quota, she made no reference to her own gender to underline her expertise as other career politicians and some of my participants did. Interestingly, Schmidt (AfD), who, as previously discussed, does not believe that women are made for leadership positions because they are too emotional, argued that Alice Weidel is one of the exceptions: "This does not mean that every woman is doing this [acting from gut feelings], there are also some who are completely rational. I for example believe that Alice Weidel is atypical for a woman." For Schmidt, Weidel is a good politician because she is not a 'typical' woman and therefore can take on a role that men normally occupy. Schmidt's idea of Weidel supports Weidel's own projection on social media where she presents herself as a politician who avoids any stereotypically feminine characteristics, fulfilling the unmarked (masculine) norm of a leader. I argue that this is connected to the widespread belief that power is coded masculine, which entails that women in leadership roles often have to use a masculine leadership style (Meret, et al., 2017, p.128). The masculine roles taken by some women members of the AfD and FPÖ resonate in interesting ways with the narrative that feminists allegedly want to be more masculine

than men, discussed above. This illustrates contradictions in the narratives, because participants fear to lose their femininity but at the same time (have to) take up stereotypically masculine traits to assert themselves in the party. These contradictions demonstrate that far-right women have to negotiate their roles in the masculinist party structure (Sauer, 2020, p.26), which can lead to conflicting narratives about those roles.

In this section, I have demonstrated that women have to navigate their gendered roles as women as well as their roles as politicians/party members, which are based on masculine norms. I argue that AfD and FPÖ women take part in the construction of their roles through their navigation of different feminine and masculine traits, which does not mean that they go to the closet every morning and decide whether to put on the clothing of the (masculine) politician or the clothing of a woman (Butler, 1993). Most of my participants described roles that can be situated on a spectrum of stereotypically acceptable femininities (Lang, 2022, p.197). Here I identified two roles: the role of the nurturer (including mediators, carers and mothers) and the role of the dutiful/hardworking woman. The role of the *Vorzeigefrau* suits the parties' 'feminisation' strategy, which does not mean that women are puppets of the party. As I demonstrated, this role can be utilised by women members themselves to gain importance. Finally, the unmarked/masculine role showed that some of my participants defined their roles around the somatic norm while at the same time defying it with their sheer presence.

Conclusion

In this final analysis chapter, I have discussed women's narratives on the allegedly equal access to party spaces and their roles in the parties, some of which were very familiar to me. My examination of the women's stories illustrated that there are several overlaps and commonalities with regard to women's experiences across political parties and other public spaces. This is something my participants themselves noted. For example, Schäfer stated: "I think it is probably the same in other parties." Through my application of Puwar's (2004a) concept of 'space invaders', I demonstrated that many of the experiences of far-right women are not distinct, as Puwar identified similar stories told by white women from all different political parties in the UK. As Krimmer and Simpson (2019) argue, "Western civilization is deeply marked by a long history of misogynist prejudices against women in positions of power" (p.1). Even though I am currently situated at the Centre for Women's Studies, which is far from a male-dominated space, many other spaces I have encountered throughout my life have been male dominated and my feelings of having to work harder and follow a masculine norm are comparable to what some of

my participants described. Nevertheless, like my participants I am a white cis woman who has – among others because of my whiteness – access to more spaces than many people do, for instance gender nonconforming people and/or those from racialised minorities.

I want to conclude with a discussion of the distinctiveness of the narratives discussed in this chapter. I argue that all the narratives support an essentialist understanding of gender, and overall they do not destabilise the gender binary even though some narratives divert from it in using different gendered scripts depending on the spaces and situations that participants are operating in. Even when inequalities are mentioned my participants connect these narratives to the idea that spaces can bracket out social inequalities and that gender does not matter, which stands in tension with the focus on gender binaries, in many of my participants' accounts. Additionally, when the masculine culture of the party is criticised, this criticism is at the same time relativised and essentialised. Even though a masculine culture pervades many other political spaces, I would argue that masculine culture in the AfD and FPÖ is based on more extreme and exclusive ideas of what it means to be a man, which can be seen in the previously discussed speech of Björn Höcke who wants to rediscover a forceful masculinity.

Variations in the intensity with which participants used masculine or feminine role descriptions shows room for agency. At the same time, the different roles, discussed by participants, demonstrate that women in the parties have to navigate gendered expectations and judgements for their gendered acts. For example, in the previous chapter on feminism I discussed how important the preservation of a certain kind of femininity is to most of my participants, which is reflected in their stories on their feminine attributes. At the same time, participants have to fulfil the role of politicians/party members which tends to be dominated by masculine behaviour. Finally, it is important to stress that I am not judging these women for their conflicting roles – those contradictions are part of women's experiences when entering masculine spaces and they also uncover the way in which gendered roles are never 'natural' but are constantly repeated performances of cultural scripts of femininity and masculinity.

Conclusion

In this project, I have shown how and why women become members of the AfD and FPÖ and how they navigate their roles within the spaces of these antifeminist *Männerparteien*. I am indebted to feminist scholarship on Austrian and German far-right discourses on gender, women and (anti)feminism (for example, Goetz and Mayer, 2022; Dietze, 2020; Falter and Stern, 2019; Lang, 2017), which provides invaluable context for understanding these far-right women's narratives. Through my focus on women's own narratives, I was able to go beyond exploring far-right public discourses on women and analyse how and why women *themselves* come to understand and make sense of their experiences in the far right in particular ways. I suggest that only by talking to women members is it possible to understand the many different facets and stories that women use to make sense of their membership.

Addressing my three research questions, I illustrated that there are multiple ways for women to become members, to view feminism and gender, and to navigate their roles and spaces in the parties. By drawing on interview research with far-right women in other national contexts (for example Blee, 2018; Mulinari and Neergaard, 2017; Scrinzi, 2014a), I have contributed to Austrian and German scholarship on the far right and gender, which lacks contemporary interview research and therefore additionally in turn lacks an insight into the complex and diverse stories of women members of far-right parties. Through my narrative analysis of interviews, I forwarded an understanding of the contradictions and diverse narratives of individual membership stories which are not based on straightforward explanations for far-right support.

I have argued throughout my thesis that women's support of the far right is not out of the ordinary. In other words, women's support should not be sensationalised or framed as abnormal; indeed, these women are not acting against their own interests because, as my participants' stories show, the far right is not against *all* women. The AfD and FPÖ claim to support the 'real' interests of women, by which they refer to the interests of white *cis* women, who fulfil certain gender norms; however, these norms are not just restricted to the traditional gender role of women as caring mothers. Far-right parties use ambivalent messaging about women's roles to gain the support of women who fulfil traditional gender roles and those who, in part, divert from those roles and fulfil more 'modern' roles for women, including being a politician. With this in mind, far-right discourses on gender offer a stable identity for cis women and cis men and the comfort of knowing that these gender norms exist counteract some of my participants' fears of a

‘complicated world’. Nevertheless, by drawing upon feminist research about far-right women in Austria and Germany (for example, Rommelspacher, 2011; Bitzan, 2000; Rösslhumer, 1999), I showed through my interview data that not all women join the far right because of its claim to support women’s ‘real’ interests. Other topics, like immigration, are more important for certain women and some join the parties *in spite of* and not *because of* their discourses on women.

One of my key arguments is that there is no clear-cut distinction between the views held by many in the ‘centre’ of society and the far-right’s views, especially on immigration, feminism, and gender. My participants’ self-representation as ‘normal’ women is, in this respect, not farfetched. However, this does not mean that I agree with the normalisation of their far-right ideologies. My thesis provides an insight into how women make sense of their party membership, which is crucial because the more women support the parties the more it helps those parties to be seen as more acceptable and normal to the wider public. The majority of participants referred at some point to the positive effect they have on people outside the party, which supports the argument that women are still seen as more *friedfertig* in the dominant public view (Lang, 2017, p.72). Women’s support for these far-right parties therefore leads to an increase in and normalisation of racism, antifeminism and other exclusionary practices. Indeed, my thesis significantly uncovers and criticises this strategy of normalisation.

Contributions to feminist research on far-right women

Far-right women’s stories

My findings provide a unique insight into far-right women’s stories in Austria and Germany. In exploring my first research question (How do women narrate their paths to active membership in the AfD or FPÖ?), I identified three major narratives within the women’s accounts. The first narrative concerns the ‘othering’ of perpetrators of sexual violence, where participants recounted their experiences or their abstract fear of sexual violence perpetrated by mainly Muslim ‘others’ as a main reason for joining a far-right party. The second narrative, ‘taking the red pill’, saw participants making sense of their membership with stories in which they finally grasped reality and therefore ‘naturally’ joined the AfD or FPÖ. This narrative took different forms, and I used the metaphor of the ‘red pill’ to refer to different personal experiences (for example, living in the ‘orient’ (Krüger, AfD)) or specific political or social events (for example NYE in Cologne 2015/16 (Braun, AfD)), which functioned as pivotal moments when my participants described being able to ‘see and understand’ the ‘reality’ of the situation for the first time.

The final narrative was the 'urge to act', used by all participants and in part resulting from the two previous narratives. Here, women's 'racialised' fear of sexual violence and/or their newly found understanding of reality led to the urgent feeling of having to act so as to change this reality. All three narratives were embedded in participants' individual experiences and life stories, which, I suggest, contributes an invaluable new perspective to research on far-right women in Austria and Germany; a perspective that could only be gained through the utilisation of interviews. Interview data in contrast to publicly available (social) media data provides insights beyond political, socio-economic and cultural explanations for membership and explores key moments and contradictions in the paths as well.

By addressing my second research question (What are far-right women's narratives on feminism and gender?), my thesis has shown that far-right women's narratives, while indeed an amplification, are in line with pervasive (negative) perceptions of feminism in society as well as with wider societal gender logics (Blee, 2020, p.426). By drawing on feminist scholarship on postfeminism (Gill, 2018; Scharff, 2012; Budgeon, 2011; McRobbie, 2009), I analysed my participants' contradictory narratives on feminism and gender, illustrating that far-right women simultaneously include feminist and antifeminist ideas, which is typical of postfeminist discourses. While most of my participants reject feminism overall, some seemed to defend the idea that there is a 'right' kind of feminism which, I argued, resembles liberal feminist ideas and ignores structural inequalities. Overall, my analysis has shown that far-right women's views about women's roles and feminism differ significantly from each other. Some women support traditional gender norms for women, whereby motherhood is the most important role, and other women use the liberal feminist idea that women can do whatever they want if they work hard enough. This idea included an individualistic approach to feminist issues but also solidarity between (strong) women.

Despite their different views, all participants argued that women and men are equal but that there are certain 'natural' differences between them. My research sheds light on far-right women's *own* narratives, investigating how members make sense of the contradictions within the parties' and their own discourses. For example, some of the women told me that 'women can do everything they want', but at the same time they seem to agree with the parties' discourse that women and men are 'naturally' different. The majority of my participants seemed to feel terrorised by those who defy the gender binary, but simultaneously some of the women themselves 'defied' the gender binary with

their claims that they themselves can 'act like men'. To borrow Bornstein's (2006) words, I argue that it is those who impose a 'natural' gender system (including my participants) who are terrorising those who do not fulfil such norms (p.236), which in part includes the women themselves.

There is a clear mismatch between the deeply essentialist and traditional views on gender roles, supported by many participants and the parties, and their claim of being culturally superior to Muslim 'others' because of having supposedly already achieved equality, which Dietze (2019) labels 'sexual exceptionalism'. Those participants who emphasised the 'natural' differences between women and men most vigorously also enthusiastically described the 'other' culture as male-dominated and 'against women's rights'. Whilst many participants directly blame feminists for ignoring the alleged danger posed by Muslim cultures, two participants directly mentioned their support for German feminist Alice Schwarzer, who is among those feminists who perpetuate an anti-Muslim discourse. Drawing on Farris (2017) and Hark and Villa (2020), I argued that the overlap between feminists and the far right illustrates a femonationalist convergence, showing the contemporary entanglements between sexism, (cultural) racism and feminism.

With my third research question (How do far right women make sense of their roles and spaces in these male-dominated parties?), I respond directly to the question of possible frustration on the part of women members with masculine party structure raised in feminist research (Sanders et al., 2019). This is a question, which can best be answered with interview data, because most women do not share their frustration with the parties publicly to avoid backlash. However, with in-depth and anonymised interviews it was possible to further elaborate on the complexities and contradictions of women's roles in male-dominated parties and I was able to ask follow-up questions, which catch different angles than publicly available data. In the light of these women's narratives on gender and feminism, I was intrigued about their perceptions of party spaces and their roles in the parties. In how far did they endorse these ideas on gender when it came to their own roles and did they divert from these essentialist ideas? I argued that all participants seem to have an essentialist understanding of gender. And while they may partly divert from gender norms in their understanding of their own roles, overall they do not destabilise the gender binary. Schulz (AfD), for example, argued that women must be able to assert themselves in the 'men's club', which she is able to do because she can 'act like a man', but at the same time she emphasises the complementary differences between women and men.

Drawing on Meret et al.'s (2017) research on far-right women leaders, I uncovered the double bind of femininity and being a woman in the far right which indicates that women as politicians are supposed to act both 'tough' and 'caring' at the same time. It was clear from my participants' narratives that women at all levels of the party needed to find a balance between being perceived as feminine *enough* (fulfilling stereotypical characteristic like being *caring*) and masculine enough (asserting themselves in these male-dominated parties). This explains why women's description of their roles seemed fragmented because they are torn between the masculine norms of the spaces they are acting in and the gendered scripts for women that they otherwise have to follow.

By drawing on Puwar's (2004a) theory of 'space invaders', I demonstrated that the stories about women who have to assert themselves in the parties' male-dominated spaces uncover that they are not the norm. The party women have to negotiate the masculine norms surrounding those spaces in order to be considered 'successful'. One way in which my participants dealt with these contradictions was to downplay the significance of male-dominated spaces and rituals, which was connected to the idea that this is 'just how it naturally is' – an essentialist understanding of the gendered limitations of space. Other participants said that they do not feel excluded by the (masculine) party structures because they – as strong women – are able to be part of all spaces, which mirrors discourses of liberal feminism. Overall, participants used depoliticised and neutralised stories about party spaces, 'as if' gender does not matter. But the persistent contradictions in participants' narratives illustrated that the negotiation of their different roles in the parties led to frustration and strategies such as endorsing stereotypically feminine roles and using supposedly unmarked (masculine) roles to deal with the contradictory requirements.

Overarching findings

By drawing on Hall and O'Shea's (2013) conceptualisation of 'common sense' knowledge, I demonstrated that participants made sense of their experiences and worlds with using 'common sense' as 'everyday thinking' and popular and easily available knowledge. An example of this is the description of certain social developments and events as 'madness', as applied to immigration policies and feminist activism. My participants depicted their own political stances and individual decisions as obvious choices based on common sense. The crux here is that narratives built on common sense are presented as the opposite of unreasonable or extreme because they are depicted as a "product of nature rather than history" (p.8).

I argue that the consistent usage of common-sense framing in the interviews is especially significant in the context of the FRG, in which a discourse of a German historical guilt for the horrific crimes of the National Socialist era has been prevalent since the 1960s. People who downplay or deny the historical guilt and who use right-wing extremist ideologies are socially condemned through this discourse (Art, 2006). In other words, the avoidance of being called right-wing extremist is especially crucial in the FRG. For future research, it would be interesting and important to analyse how women's narratives might have changed since the AfD has been officially investigated as a *Verdachtsfall* (suspected case of right-wing extremism), which might increase far-right women's need for framing their activism as 'good' common sense. Most of my participants did not talk about Germany's responsibility for Nazi crimes or otherwise downplayed any historical guilt. However, their silence about the Nazi past was accompanied by clear efforts to present themselves as good and caring people, who supposedly cannot be Nazis. In that way, National Socialism has been the 'elephant in the room' during the interviews. I illustrated the connection between the participants' usage of common sense and the parties' communication strategies. This entails the idea that they are the only ones telling and seeing the truth and who know what is 'good and right'. My participants are of course oversimplifying the political context here, which leads to many contradictions and conflicting discourses. For example my participants, echoing their parties, depict the Muslim 'other' as an obvious threat against women's rights, based on their racist 'everyday thinking'. In contrast, they support the idea that traditional gender roles are common sense and 'natural'; an idea which I argue threatens women's rights. In line with this common-sense framing, and building on a long tradition of metaphors of sickness, certain participants used such metaphors to describe the present moment. For example, changing gender roles and feminism was perceived as 'sick' (or 'mad') and in need of a 'cure'.

The title of my PhD thesis "We are just normal women" reveals a major common thread throughout my analysis and refers to two different issues: (1) the women's self-presentation as 'normal', which is supported by the parties; and (2) the significant overlap between far-right women's views and the mainstream views of wider society. In most cases, participants represented themselves as 'normal' women who just followed their common sense in contrast to everyone who does not agree with them. In this context, 'normal' refers to the idea that they are not extreme, Nazis or unacceptable but that they are 'good people' (1). In addition to their self-representation as normal, I argue that their

support for the far right is not ‘out of the ordinary’ in a context where many in the ‘centre’ of society share (some of) my participants’ views on immigration and gender. I specifically illustrated this overlap in my analysis of their narratives about feminism and gender, which are, for the most part, exaggerated views of widely endorsed gender logics within society (2). While my participants are normal women, who should not be sensationalised, I do not normalise their ideologies.

Describing oneself as normal and good results in depicting ‘others’ as negative, abnormal (often ‘sick’) and bad, which connects the thread of ‘normal’ women to the dominant narrative of ‘othering’ in my interviews. Ahmed (2014) argues that those who are part of hateful organisations describe themselves as ordinary (normal) and constitute themselves as under threat by imagined others (p.43). Additionally, everything which is not perceived as ‘normal’ leads to fear, which explains why fear is prevalent in most of my interview data as well. This manifested, for example in the negative emotional response to the arrival of refugees; the urge to act because of the alleged threats posed by immigrants and/or left-wing politics, and (of course) feminism. In my interviews, anxiousness about feminism can either be explained through participants’ fear of the ‘genderless’ human (losing femininity and masculinity, as elaborated by antifeminist Rosenkranz, 2008) or through their fear connected to postfeminist discourses which describe feminism as in opposition to being self-responsible and autonomous individuals and therefore as limiting for ‘strong women’.

Additionally, I identified contradictions within and between participants’ narratives, illustrating how women use multiple, often conflicting narratives and ways of making sense of their membership. Nevertheless, all these contradictory narratives are situated within the Austrian and German far-right context. Contributing to scholarship on the far right, I illustrated that contradiction is inherent to far-right discourse, manifesting in tangible ways in women members’ narratives. For example, the AfD and FPÖ’s ambivalent statements about women’s roles and rights become more concrete when women members have to navigate the parties’ antifeminism and their own ideas of women’s equality, which in some cases include liberal feminist concepts. My analysis illustrated that, as Scrinzi (2017a, p.875) argues, interview data can uncover social divisions in parties, which include contradictory views and interests, which the far right normally tries to obscure in their publicly available media data.

Finally, my overall research findings complement but are also distinct from research in other national contexts like Sweden and Italy and I contribute an additional

national context to feminist interview research with far-right women (for example, Mulinari and Neergaard, 2017; Scrinzi, 2014a). As Scrinzi (2012) argues, European far-right parties overlap with regard to crucial parts of their ideologies and agendas. However they are shaped by their distinctive national contexts, which differ in "social strata, immigration and colonial history, immigration policy, social policy and gender regimes [including family structures, see Chapter 4]" (Scrinzi, 2012, p.86). The far rights' shared ideologies and their different national contexts also lead to overlaps and differences between the far-right parties and between their members' narratives and a comparative analysis of those could be a future research project. For example, international discourses of the anti-gender movement generate similarities between far-right parties and their members, as can be seen in the comparison of my and Mulinari and Neergaard's (2014) participants, who argue that feminism went too far. Additionally, the othering of feminism and the inherent cultural racism can be observed in the Austrian, German, Italian and Swedish cases (as well as others), in which the allegedly inherent values of the Global North have to be secured from the 'Other'. Like me, Scrinzi (2022) and Mulinari and Neergaard (2014) define those discourses as not alien to mainstream values in Italy and Sweden. However, there are also context-specific topics with regard to the anti-gender rhetoric, which in the case of Austria and Germany is, for instance the focus on gender-inclusive language.

Similar to my analysis of AfD participants, in the Swedish context, Mulinari and Neergaard (2014) identify SD women's active denial of racism, which they connect to the systematic exclusion of the SD by other parties (only until 2022) and its negative media representation. In Germany, the fear of being called a Nazi is clearly feeding into the denial of racism, which explains why the narrative becomes even more significant in my research. However, in Scrinzi's (2014a) research, LN women did not seem to foster this narrative, which is likely to be explained by Italy's lack of historical acknowledgment of its fascist past. Natasha V. Chang (2008) remarks that "unlike Germany, Italy never underwent a formal de-fascistization process and never had a chance to acknowledge collectively or even to begin to come to terms with its past" (p.106). Already Silvio Berlusconi's hard centre-right coalitions in the 1990s and 2000s depended on alliances with right-wing extremist parties, which led to a normalisation of the far right in Italy (p.108). This explains why Italian far-right women do not need to deny their racism as actively. The far-right women in Italy can therefore be better compared with the FPÖ

participants, who are members of a well-established far-right party and who also did not feel the need to actively distance themselves from racism.

Methodological approach

My research contributes to ongoing scholarship on the far right by extending the analysis of far-right women's views, attitudes, and experiences beyond the examination of public narratives, such as those on social media accounts and in public speeches (for example, Haas, 2022; Sprengholz, 2021). Interviews add detailed and nuanced information on the ways in which women understand and narrate their experiences in relation to joining and being active in far-right parties. The stories of women leaders in these parties have been discussed in research (for example, Lang, 2022; Sprengholz, 2021, Meyer, 2019), but how women members at lower levels negotiate their roles in the male-dominated AfD and FPÖ has to date not been discussed. Those women, who are grassroots members, often do not have a public social media presence and do not give public speeches or interviews. By focusing on the narratives of women who are active in the parties but do not necessarily hold leadership positions, I add a new perspective to Austrian and German research on far-right women.

My research has illustrated that interview data provides a different perspective and insight than publicly available (social) media data. My own social media analysis showed me that such analysis grants only occasional glimpses into women's stories, in channels dominated by party propaganda. Here therefore narratives were less likely to diverge from the parties' discourses. AfD and FPÖ women politicians share their political views and their parties' ideologies in public discourse. However, their individual reasons for joining the parties, their paths to membership and their possibly diverging views are mainly not publicly communicated. Through one-to-one in-depth interviews I was able to explore with the participants their paths to membership, to tease out key moments and turning points in their histories and how the participants make sense of their experiences. Public self-presentation is often well prepared and narratively straightforward. However, my research indicates that the explanations for individual membership are not, because reasonings and life paths are permeated with contradictions and turning points. Individual stories are more tangible than publicly available data and help to avoid a scholarly approach that ends up sensationalising the women. Finally, in research on far-right women leaders based on their public communication, contradictory role expectations for women have been uncovered (for example, Lang, 2022; Meyer, 2019; Meret et al., 2017), which my research supports as well. However, my interviews show that there is an

additional level of complexity for individuals, who have to adapt to different roles in context of their day-to-day membership. Even though most of them claim that all spaces are open to them, their narratives show that the situation is much more complicated and that they have to negotiate their roles and spaces within the parties.

Despite its unique insights, the ethics of undertaking interview research with the far right is contested in Austria and Germany (for example, Feustel, 2019). In a nutshell, conducting interviews has been rejected as a method based on the idea that talking to far-right members legitimises and normalises their ideologies (for example, FIPU, 2021, p.23). However, I agree with the view that social science research (and feminist research in particular) aims to understand people's perceptions, everyday experiences and sense making of their worlds. In the context of research with far-right party members, this does not mean that far-right aggressions are reproduced (Ammicht Quinn, 2019, p.148). My research helps to create an understanding of far-right women's narratives but it neither legitimises nor normalises far-right ideologies.

I have analysed women's narratives using the tools of feminist narrative research, which helped me to investigate how women construct and express their understandings of their realities and how they make sense of the "chaotic mess" of individual experiences (Presser and Sandberg, 2015, p.2). The personal narratives that women told me during the interviews illustrated how they make sense of their individual paths leading to membership as well as their experiences inside the parties, which are both embedded in the wider social context. My analysis was informed by several theoretical concepts: Hall and O' Shea's (2013) concept of 'common sense' helped me to make sense of the women's use of language and I illustrated the significance of this concept especially in the German context; Using feminist scholarship on postfeminism (for example, Scharff, 2012), I applied a new lens to investigate far-right women's narratives about gender and feminism and illustrated how those narratives are embedded in societal gender logics; Farris' (2017) theory of femonationalism and Dietze's (2019) concept of 'sexual exceptionalism' provided an analytical framework for analysing the participants' narratives on the 'othering' of feminism. Finally, applying Puwar's (2004a) theory of 'space invaders' to my interview data, I showed that women are not the norm in the parties. In this way, my research significantly contributes to debates about (far-right) women in politics.

On doing feminist research with 'unloved groups'

Conducting research with an unloved group came with many emotional and methodological challenges. I want to briefly reflect on some of the main challenges and my coping strategies which can inform future research.

The biggest challenge for me was the constant fear of stigmatisation: every time someone asked me what my research is about, I was eager to make clear that I am not far right myself. As Blee (2018) states, research with an 'unloved group' includes the fear that the political stigma of participants is rubbed off on the researcher (p.388). In the German-speaking context, the rejection of interview research with the far right was an additional hurdle because it increased my fear of stigmatisation even further. I experienced a direct confrontation at a conference where my research solely was criticised based on my method (with no discussion or inquiry about the content). However, my fear encouraged me to thoroughly ensure that my research does not provide a platform for the far right and to critically reflect on all my writing constantly. While this practice should be part of every (feminist) research, it is even more important in this context. My analysis was based on participants' words, but I critically engaged with the words and did not just reproduce them.

Fear is an uncomfortable feeling. But as Back (2002, p.59) argues, research with an 'unloved group' should be uncomfortable to keep the opposition and ethical and political challenges in mind. It was uncomfortable to listen to racist and antifeminist stories. There were times when I struggled to cope with my data's content. While I had the intention of writing in my reflexive journal throughout my PhD to reflect on this struggle, I only managed this during the social media data collection and interview period. I often had to force myself to write in the journal as I was exhausted after each interview and every time I browsed social media. I suggest that the necessity to conduct interviews online or via the telephone due to the Covid-19 pandemic proved unexpectedly beneficial to the research. Conducting the interviews from home made it easier to deal with the emotional exhaustion after each interview. As mentioned previously, I often retreated and listened to a feminist podcast after an interview to remember the reasons for my research and my feminist vision; a process which could be described as my detoxification.

My opposing views towards the parties' ideologies did not mean that I did not find some aspects familiar and ordinary, which also led to uncomfortable feelings. For example, when participants talked about their lives without referring to their ideologies, I could find parallel experiences in my own or my friends and family's lives. Though

uncomfortable, this illustrated that while the women held reprehensible views, they are not some alien life form and are not completely different to those holding opposing views. Direct contact and interaction with far-right women were crucial for my research, because I wanted to avoid making assumptions and simplifications which would have led to distorted caricatures of women members. Nevertheless, when some participants raised the hope that my research would show that they are 'normal' and friendly women, I was aware that my research actually illustrates that while they are 'normal' women, crucially their views are part of a toxic far right which I do not want to normalise.

Finally, while I clearly stated my opposition to their parties prior to the interviews, I was not confrontational in the interviews as I assumed that confrontation would lead to defensive usage of slogans and propaganda and a withdrawal from talking about their own experiences. My aim was not to change their minds, but to explore their stories and therefore I listened and did not challenge. The way participants presented themselves and their stories to me is part of how they make sense of their membership in front of someone who openly opposes this membership.

Limitations of this research

Like all research, my research has its limitations. One of the main shortcomings is the fewer numbers of Austrian and East German participants, which led to an overrepresentation of West German narratives. The underrepresentation of Austrian and East German women has made it harder to comment on or draw conclusions about local and regional reasons for membership. Given the concentration of the AfD's support in the former East, more regionally specific narratives would have provided useful perspectives on the East German context. Furthermore, as discussed in the introduction, the AfD's branches in the East have a reputation for even greater extremism.

A larger number of Austrian narratives would have provided a deeper insight into diverging reasons for joining the FPÖ as well-established party in comparison to the young AfD. In light of the different Austrian historical response to their Nazi history, more Austrian interviews might have offered a good basis for comparisons between the AfD women's strategies to present themselves as normal women, who are not Nazis, and the FPÖ women's narratives. The reason why I included the FPÖ despite only having access to four interviews was the lack of any other research inquiring far-right women's individual stories in Austria. Even four in-depth interviews provide a valuable insight into the women's experiences, perspectives and expectations, which I did not want to dismiss. Moreover, because of Goetz's (2019a) critique of how research about the far right and

gender is rarer in Austria than in Germany, I did not want to exclude Austria from this research.

I took all reasonable steps to recruit participants but exhausted the access and did not manage to reach my planned 32 interviews. However, my 25 interviews provide an in-depth understanding of participants' narratives. I never aimed to provide a complete picture of all women's experiences in the parties but a closer-up exploration of some women's path to membership, narratives about feminism and gender and their spaces and roles in the parties.

Finally, my research of course did not include the narratives of men in the party.[156] Including their narratives would have provided the opportunity to compare and evaluate differences between women and men's narratives. Scrinzi (2014a) criticises the fact that most studies only focus on women and therefore enforce a gender-dichotomy. While I agree that the comparison of women and men's narratives in the parties can – as Scrinzi's research shows – provide a valuable insight to gender-specific motivations (p.2), research which focuses on women members' narratives and experiences (especially in the Austrian and German context) is rare and needs to be conducted in-depth. Research on women's narratives can thus be a starting point for future comparisons. However, I feel less equipped to interview men who support an antifeminist and misogynist party. This is not because I believe that far-right women are more acceptable than far-right men, but that I think that the power dynamics in the interview would be unbearable for me.

Final thoughts and notes on counterstrategies

I started this thesis on a hopeful note. With Lola Olufemi's (2020) words, I imagined a better feminist future where "we are liberated from the gender binary's strangling grip" and where "no person has to navigate sexism, racism, disabilism [sic] or homophobia to survive" (p.9). Sometimes it is hard to hold on to this vision when you are confronted with a world in which antifeminism, antisemitism, racism and violence against trans and nonbinary people are part of everyday life; a world in which Italy has its first far-right prime minister since World War II who at the same time is Italy's first woman prime minister; a world in which Sweden has a right-wing government which is supported by the far-right party Swedish Democrats; and a world in which abortion rights are under severe threat in many countries. The FPÖ was in government when I wrote my research

[156] Due to the parties' essentialist discourses on gender, non-binary and trans people are barely (openly) members of both parties.

proposal in 2018/19 and the AfD the biggest opposition party in the *Bundestag*. Whilst this has since changed, both parties still have substantial support in their respective populations. The FPÖ's support is growing again after the initial loss following a corruption scandal in 2019. In October 2022, the AfD had reached approximately 15 percent in opinion polls on voting intentions, which shows a massive increase of support (Uebelacker, 2022).

I began my research journey as a reaction to a world in which the above has become normality, and with the vision that this does not have to be. In this context it is important to think about counterstrategies against the consistent presence and further rise of the far right, their racism and antifeminism. My analysis can inform those strategies, for example, in its uncovering of the manifold contradictions and flaws in these women's narratives. The interviews illustrate the entanglement of racism, sexism and (anti)feminism and therefore show that counterstrategies always need to be antiracist as well as feminist. My findings emphasise the need for unified oppositions among those who oppose and are threatened by the ideologies of the far-right parties.

In interviewing far-right women, who are not necessarily in leadership positions, I showed that those women are not more 'peaceful' than the men in their parties. The parties' and the women's argument that if they ('good' and 'normal' women) are in the party, the party cannot be extreme and racist, has to be uncovered as flawed. The analysis of women's narratives explores how women members contribute to racist and antifeminist discourses, which should never be normalised. Denial of racism and other contradictions in narratives need to be uncovered to show the clear patterns of racism behind it. In other words, projects against right-wing extremism, that include political education, can be informed by the exposure of the racism (and its denial) that underlies far-right members' narratives and in so doing can counteract their normalisation.

Additionally, my analysis helps to avoid the tendency in scholarship and public discourses to sensationalise far-right women, as it depicts their ordinariness. The representation of far-right women as exceptions outside of mainstream society, falsely separates them from wider society and ignores how widely embedded right-wing extremist views, for example anti-Muslim racism and essentialist ideas about gender, are in wider society (Freiheit et al., 2022, p.64). Political education about anti-racist feminism and feminist antiracism needs to be supported to counter racist and antifeminist discourses and to prevent more women *and* men developing far-right attitudes and acting on them. Here it is always important that we, as antiracist feminists, make clear that our feminism

is not just about what we are against but also what we are for (Ahmed, 2014, p. 178). My motivation for conducting this work is what I as a feminist am for, because ‘what I am against’ is not inescapable. Imagine this: A world where we have overcome far-right ideologies.

Appendix 1: Information sheet

Information Sheet (Interviews) (German version below)

Who am I?

My name is Nicole Roy and I am a PhD student at the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of York in the UK. I am a German citizen, who is interested in women's support for the parties AfD and FPÖ in Germany and Austria. I conduct the research from a perspective of someone who does not support the parties myself, but I am curious to find out why you are supporting the party.

What is the research about?

With my research I want to explore your stories, the stories of women, who join and actively support the AfD and the FPÖ. I hope we can – through the interviews – create an understanding of your reasons and stories.

Why do I conduct the research?

I want to understand how you make sense of your party membership and agency in the party. I would like to understand your membership in a fairly manner without caricaturing it. Your party is often described and stigmatised by the public as being male dominated and not women friendly, therefore I want to explore it through the lens of women – through your lens.

Your party also had electoral successes and the number of women participating in parties like the AfD and FPÖ is rising. Academic studies on your parties often do not consider women at all, which creates a lack of data and a lack of perspective, a gap which I want to fill with your help.

Who should be included in the research?

Women who are actively supporting the AfD or FPÖ. You can be a politician, a women member of the parties, who supports election campaigns, local branches of the party etc.

Why should you participate?

I am honest that I am not supporting your party myself, which of course raises the question why you should consider participating in the research anyways? My research is mainly based on interview data, which means that the data are your stories. I will depict your stories as accurate as possible and through your lens. This gives you the chance to tell your story. I will provide you with an overview of the main outcomes of my research in German. The English version of my complete PhD thesis will be available as well.

What does it involve?

Your participation involves a one-to-one interview with me, which can take between 1-2 hours depending on your available time and the length of your story. The interview

will be recorded on skype. The interview can be conducted to any convenient time for you. We both should be in places, where the privacy of the interview is ensured.

How is anonymity secured?

The research outcomes will be anonymised and are confidential, in other words I will use pseudonyms for all the participants and also avoid any identifiable characteristics e.g. direct locations and concrete positions in the party. Please let me know if you think that somethings you tell me would identify you, so that I can ensure that you stay anonymous.

How can you withdraw?

The participation in my research is voluntary and you can withdraw anytime during the interview and up until 3 months after the interview.

What happens next?

The interviews will be part of my PhD thesis and might also be included into future publications, however as stated above your anonymity will be secured. The anonymised data will also be archived in a research data archive in the UK. The audio recording will be safely stored until transcribed and then erased, the transcripts are anonymised and saved for possible future publications, and all data protection guidelines will be fulfilled.

More Information

My research received the ethical approval of the University of York Ethics Committee.

Any concerns?

If you have any questions or concerns you can contact either myself or the head of my department: Prof. Dr. Victoria Robinson - vicki.robinson@york.ac.uk

If you would like to learn more about the Centre for Women's Studies, you can find us online at https://www.york.ac.uk/womens-studies/

For information regarding ethics, please contact: University of York Ethics Committee Chair (ELMPS): Professor Tony Royle - tony.royle@york.ac.uk

Informationsbogen (Interviews)

Wer bin ich?

Mein Name ist Nicole Roy und ich bin Doktorandin am Zentrum für Frauen Studien an der Universität York in Großbritannien. Ich bin deutsche Staatsbürgerin und interessiere mich für weibliche Unterstützung für die Parteien AfD und FPÖ in Deutschland und Österreich. Ich unterstütze die Parteien selbst nicht, aber ich bin daran interessiert rauszufinden, weshalb Sie Ihre Partei unterstützen.

Wovon handelt die Studie?

Mit meiner Forschung möchte ich Ihre Geschichten, die Geschichten von Frauen, die aktive Mitglieder in der AfD und FPÖ sind, erkunden. Ich hoffe, dass wir zusammen – durch die Interviews – Ihre Geschichten und ihre Gründe für Ihre Mitgliedschaft ergründen können und damit den Wissensstand erweitern können.

Warum führe ich die Studie durch?

Ich möchte verstehen, wie Sie Ihre aktive Unterstützung und Ihr Handeln für die AfD oder die FPÖ verstehen und erklären. Ich will auf eine faire Art und Weise verstehen, ohne Ihre Mitgliedschaft zu karikieren. Ihre Partei wird in der Öffentlichkeit oft als Männer dominierte Partei, die nicht frauenfreundlich ist, beschrieben und stigmatisiert. Genau deshalb möchte ich durch die Perspektiven von Frauen, durch Ihre Perspektive, Ihre Geschichten in der Partei erkunden.

Ihre Partei hat Wahlerfolge und die Zahl von Frauen in ihrer und ähnlichen Parteien in Europa steigt. Akademische Studien berichten allerdings oft nicht über Frauen in Ihrer Partei, wodurch eine Lücke an Perspektiven entsteht, die ich mit Ihrer Hilfe füllen möchte.

Wer wird in diese Studie mit einbezogen?

Frauen die aktiv die AfD oder die FPÖ unterstützen. Sie können zum Beispiel eine Politikerin sein oder ein Mitglied, welches die Partei im Wahlkampf unterstützt und aktiv auf lokaler Ebene z.B. in Kreisverbänden ist.

Warum Sie in Erwägung ziehen sollten an der Studie teilzunehmen?

Ich bin aufrichtig und lege offen, dass ich die Partei selbst nicht unterstütze. Dadurch kommt natürlich die Frage auf, warum Sie es überhaupt in Erwägung ziehen sollten an meiner Studie teilzunehmen. Die Studie baut hauptsächlich auf Interviewdaten auf. In anderen Worten, die Daten bestehen aus Ihren Geschichten. Ich werde Ihre Geschichten so akkurat wie möglich durch Ihre Perspektive darstellen. Dies gibt Ihnen die Chance Ihre Geschichte zu erzählen. Ich werde Ihnen die Hauptergebnisse meiner Studie auf Deutsch zukommen lassen und die englische Version meiner kompletten Doktorarbeit wird auch zugänglich sein.

Was umfasst Ihre Teilnahme?

Ihre Teilnahme umfasst ein Interview, welches von mir mit Ihnen unter vier Augen durchgeführt wird und 1-2 Stunden dauern wird. Die genaue Dauer ist von Ihrer zur

Verfügung stehenden Zeit und der Länge Ihrer Geschichte abhängig. Ich werde das Interview über Skype aufnehmen. Wir können das Interview zu einer von Ihnen gewünschten Zeit durchführen. Die Orte, an denen wir uns beide während des Online Interviews befinden, sollten genug Privatsphäre liefern, sodass wir ungestört reden können.

Wie wird Anonymität sichergestellt?

Die Ergebnisse der Studie werden anonymisiert und sind vertraulich. Dies wird sichergestellt durch die Nutzung von Pseudonymen für alle Teilnehmerinnen. Ich werde auch andere erkennbare Charakteristiken wie zum Beispiel genaue Standorte und konkrete Position in der Partei abändern. Bitte lassen Sie es mich wissen, falls Sie mir etwas erzählen, was sie direkt identifizieren würde, sodass ich sicherstellen kann, dass ich diesen Teil Ihrer Geschichte auch anonymisiere.

Wie können Sie Ihre Teilnahme zurückziehen?

Die Teilnahme an meiner Studie ist freiwillig und kann daher jeder Zeit zurückgezogen werden. Das ist während dem Interview und bis zu 3 Monate nach dem Interview noch möglich.

Was passiert als nächstes?

Die Interviews sind Teil meiner Doktorarbeit und werden auch möglicherweise in zukünftigen Publikationen auftauchen, allerdings wird die Anonymität Ihrer Daten immer sichergestellt. Falls sie zustimmen werden die anonymisierten Daten in einer Forschungsdatenbank in Großbritannien archiviert. Die Tonaufnahmen werden an einem sicheren Ort gespeichert bis diese transkribiert sind, danach werden Sie gelöscht. Die Transkripte sind anonymisiert und werden für mögliche zukünftige Veröffentlichungen gespeichert. Alle Datenschutzrichtlinien werden eingehalten.

Weitere Informationen

Meine Studie wurde von der Ethikkommission der Universität York genehmigt.

Weitere Fragen?

Falls Sie weitere Fragen haben, können Sie mir diese jederzeit stellen oder Sie können die Vorsitzende meiner Fakultät kontaktieren: Prof. Dr. Victoria Robinson - vicki.robinson@york.ac.uk

Falls Sie mehr über das Zentrum für Frauenstudien erfahren wollen, können Sie den folgenden Link nutzen: https://www.york.ac.uk/womens-studies/

Falls Sie Fragen zur Ethikkommission haben, kontaktieren Sie den Vorsitzenden Professor Tony Royle - tony.royle@york.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Consent form

Consent Form (Interviews)

This form is for you to state whether or not you agree to take part in the study. Please read and answer every question. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher (Nicole Roy – nr872@york.ac.uk).

Have you read and understood the information sheet about the study?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about the study?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you understand that the information you provide will be held in confidence by the researcher?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you understand that instead of your name a pseudonym will be used, and no identifying data will be published in the study and future research?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you understand that you may withdraw from the study for any reason at any time and up until 3 months after the interview?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you understand that the information you provide may be used in future research?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you agree to take part in the study?	Yes ❒ No ❒
If yes, do you agree to your interviews being recorded?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you agree that the anonymised data is used in resulting publications?	Yes ❒ No ❒
Do you agree that the anonymised data is saved in a research data archive?	Yes ❒ No ❒

Contact: University of York Ethics Committee Chair (ELMPS): Professor Tony Royle - tony.royle@york.ac.uk

Your name (in BLOCK letters):

____

Your signature:

____

Interviewer’s name:

____

Date:

Einverständniserklärung (Interviews)

Auf diesem Formular können Sie Ihre Teilnahme in meiner Studie bestätigen oder ablehnen. Bitte lesen Sie sich alle Fragen durch und kreuzen Sie an ob Sie zustimmen. Falls Sie weitere Fragen haben oder Sie weitere Informationen benötigen, zögern Sie bitte nicht und fragen Sie mich. (Nicole Roy nr872@york.ac.uk)

Haben Sie das Informationsblatt zu meiner Studie gelesen und verstanden?	Ja ❒	Nein ❒
Haben Sie die Möglichkeit gehabt Fragen zur Studie zu stellen?	Ja ❒	Nein ❒
Verstehen Sie, dass die Informationen, die Sie bereitstellen, vertraulich behandelt werden?	Ja ❒	Nein ❒
Verstehen Sie, dass anstelle Ihres Namens ein Pseudonym verwendet wird und keine erkennbaren Charakteristiken genutzt werden?	Ja ❒	Nein ❒
Verstehen Sie, dass Sie Ihre Teilnahme jeder Zeit (jederzeit bis 3 Monate nach dem Interview) zurückziehen können?	Ja ❒	Nein ❒
Stimmen Sie zu, dass Ihre anonymisierten Informationen in zukünftigen Studien genutzt werden können?	Ja ❒	Nein ❒
Stimmen Sie zu, dass Sie an der Studie teilnehmen?	Ja ❒	Nein ❒
Falls ja, stimmen Sie zu, dass das Interview aufgenommen wird?	Ja ❒	Nein ❒
Stimmen Sie zu, dass Ihre anonymisierten Informationen in zukünftigen Veröffentlichungen genutzt werden?	Ja ❒	Nein ❒
Stimmen Sie zu, dass Ihre anonymisierten Daten in einer Forschungsdatenbank in Großbritannien gespeichert werden?	Ja ❒	Nein ❒

Kontakt: Universität York Vorsitzender der Ethikkommission: Professor Tony Royle - tony.royle@york.ac.uk

Ihr Name:

____

Ihre Unterschrift:

____

Name der Interviewerin

____ Datum:

Appendix 3: Interview guide

0. Bitte beschreiben Sie sich. (Please describe yourself.)

Fragen zur Mitgliedschaft (Questions about membership)

1. Warum sind sie Mitglied der AfD/FPÖ geworden? (Why did you become a member of the party?)
2. Erzählen Sie mir bitte ein bisschen mehr über Ihre Gedanken und Handlungsprozesse, die zu ihrem Beitritt geführt haben. (Please tell me more about your thought processes and actions, which led to your membership.)
3. In welcher Phase ihres Lebens waren Sie als Sie der Partei beigetreten sind? Hat diese Sie beeinflusst? (In which phase of your life were you when you joined the party? Did this phase influence your decision?)
4. Ist Ihnen die Entscheidung des Beitritts leicht oder schwer gefallen? Warum? (Was it an easy or difficult decision to join the party? Why?)
5. Falls Sie jemals an der Partei zweifeln, weshalb zweifeln Sie? (In case you ever have doubts about the party, why?)
6. Was würden Sie gerne an der Partei ändern? (What would you like to change in the party?)
7. Falls Sie jemals eine andere Partei unterstützen würden, welche wäre das? (If you ever would support another party, which one would that be?)
8. Welche gesellschaftlichen und politischen Themen sind Ihnen in der Partei besonders wichtig? (Which social and political topics are especially important for you in the party?)
9. Welche Aktivitäten und Initiativen würden Sie sich noch von der AfD/ FPÖ wünschen? (Which activities and initiatives would you like to see in the AfD/FPÖ?)
10. Warum glauben Sie ist ihre Mitgliedschaft wichtig für die Partei? (Why do you think your membership is important for the party?)
11. Wie würden Sie Ihre eigene Rolle in der Partei beschreiben? (How would you describe your own role in the party?)
12. Wo sehen Sie ihre Rolle in der Partei in der Zukunft? (How do you see your role in the party in the future?)
13. Inwiefern passen ihr persönliches Leben und ihre Parteimitgliedschaft zusammen? (How do your personal life and party membership fit together?)
14. Wie fühlen Sie sich als aktive Unterstützerin der Partei? (How do you fell as a member of the party?)
15. Wie stehen Ihre Familienmitglieder und ihr Freundeskreis zu Ihrer Mitgliedschaft? (What do your family and friends think about your membership?)
16. Wie werden Sie in der Öffentlichkeit wahrgenommen, wenn Sie über Ihre Parteimitgliedschaft sprechen? (How are your perceived in public when you talk about your membership?)
17. Die AfD erwähnt falsch verstandenen Feminismus in ihrem Parteiprogramm und ich wollte fragen, ob sie glauben dass es auch richtig verstandenen Feminismus gibt? Wie sieht dieser aus? (only AfD: The AfD mentions *falsch verstandenen* feminism in their policy programme, and I wanted to ask you whether you believe there is also an adequately understood feminism and what it would look like? / Die FPÖ spricht in ihrem Wahlprogramm 2017 von der gelebten Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter, was bedeutet das für sie? (only FPÖ: The FPÖ (election programme 2017) talks about lived equality between the *Geschlechter*, what does that mean to you?)

Fragen zu Frauen in der Partei (Questions about women in the party)

1. Können Sie den Raum, den es für Frauen in der Partei gibt, beschreiben? Was ist Ihre Einschätzung hierzu? (Can you describe the Raum (space) for women in the party? What is your perspective on this?)
2. Was würden Sie gerne an der Rolle von Frauen in der Partei verändern? (What would you like to change regarding the role of women in the party?)
3. Warum sollten Ihrer Meinung nach mehr Frauen die AfD/FPÖ unterstützen? (Why do you think more women should support the AfD/FPÖ)
4. Was würden Sie anderen Frauen sagen, um sie zu überzeugen in die Partei einzutreten? (What would you tell other women, to convince them to join the party?)

Appendix 4: Social media profiles

Social media account holder	Links
Alice Weidel (AfD) – Bundestag	https://www.facebook.com/aliceweidel/ https://twitter.com/alice_weidel
Beatrix von Storch (AfD) - Bundestag	https://www.facebook.com/BeatrixVonStorch/ https://twitter.com/Beatrix_vStorch
Corinna Miazga (AfD) - Bundestag	https://www.facebook.com/CorinnaMiazgaMdB https://twitter.com/corinnamiazga
Dr. Birgit Malsack-Winkemann (AfD) - Bundestag	https://www.facebook.com/MalsackWinkemann
Joana Cotar (AfD) - Bundestag	https://www.facebook.com/afd.joanacotar https://twitter.com/JoanaCotar
Mariana Harder-Kühnel (AfD) - Bundestag	https://www.facebook.com/M.Harder.Kuehnel https://twitter.com/m_harderkuehnel
Nicole Höchst (AfD) - Bundestag	https://www.facebook.com/hoechstmdb/ https://twitter.com/Nicole_Hoechst
Ulrike Schielke Ziesing (AfD) - Bundestag	https://www.facebook.com/UlrikeSchielkeZiesingAfD https://twitter.com/ulschzi
Birgit Bessin (AfD) - Landtag Brandenburg	https://de-de.facebook.com/birgitbessin/ https://twitter.com/BirgitBessin
Carola Wolle (AfD) - Landtag Baden-Württemberg	https://www.facebook.com/Carola.Wolle/ https://twitter.com/CarolaWolle
Claudia Papst-Dippel (AfD) - Landtag Hessen	https://www.facebook.com/claudia.papstdippel
Corinna Herold (AfD) - Landtag Thüringen	https://www.facebook.com/Corinna-Herold-1614039335501117/
Dana Guth (AfD) - Landtag Niedersachsen	https://www.facebook.com/Dana-Guth-257112034782869 https://twitter.com/Dana_Guth_AfD
Doreen Schwietzer (AfD) - Landtag Sachsen	https://www.facebook.com/SchwietzerMdL
Dr. Anne Cryon (AfD) - Landtag Bayern	https://www.facebook.com/AnneCyronAfD/
Dr. Christina Baum (AfD) - Landtag Baden-Württemberg	https://www.facebook.com/Dr.Christina.Baum1/ https://twitter.com/DrChristinaBaum
Dr. Kristin Brinker (AfD) - Landtag Berlin	https://www.facebook.com/DrKristinBrinker https://twitter.com/Kristin_Brinker
Iris Dworeck-Danielowski (AfD) - Landtag Nordrhein-Westfalen	https://www.facebook.com/IDD.AfD https://twitter.com/IDD_NRW
Iris Nieland (AfD) - Landtag Rheinland Pfalz	https://www.facebook.com/iris.nieland.afd https://twitter.com/IrisNieland
Jeanette Auricht (AfD) - Landtag Berlin	https://www.facebook.com/j.auricht/

Kathi Muxel (AfD) - Landtag Brandenburg	https://www.facebook.com/MuxelOderSpree/
Kathrin Ebner-Steiner (AfD) - Landtag Bayern	https://www.facebook.com/Ebner.Steiner.Katrin https://twitter.com/KEbnerSteiner
Lena Duggen (AfD) - Landtag Sachsen	https://www.facebook.com/Duggen.Lena https://twitter.com/DuggenLena NOW https://twitter.com/KotreLena
Lydia Funke (AfD) - Landtag Sachen-Anhalt	https://www.facebook.com/FunkeKommuna
Martina Jost (AfD) - Landtag Sachsen	https://www.facebook.com/MartinaJostAfD
Nadine Hoffman (AfD) - Landtag Thüringen	https://www.facebook.com/NadineHoffmannAfD/ https://twitter.com/NHoffmannAfDTh
Olga Petersen (AfD) - Landtag Hamburg	https://www.facebook.com/Olga.Petersen.AfD/ https://twitter.com/OlgaPetersenAfD
Tosca Kniese (AfD) - Landtag Thüringen	https://www.facebook.com/Tosca.Kniese.AfD/
Dr. Dagmar Belakowitsch (FPÖ) - Nationalrat	https://www.facebook.com/DBelakowitsch/ https://twitter.com/BelaDagmar
Dr. Susanne Fürst (FPÖ) - Nationalrat	https://www.facebook.com/drsusannefuerst/
Petra Steger (FPÖ) - Nationalrat	https://www.facebook.com/stegerpetra/
Anita Neubauer (FPÖ) - Landtag Oberösterreich	https://www.facebook.com/LAbg.a.D.AnitaNeubauer
Elisabeth Dieringer-Granza (FPÖ) - Landtag Kärnten	https://www.facebook.com/elisabeth.dieringergranza
Evelyn Achhorner (FPÖ) - Landtag Tirol	https://www.facebook.com/E.Achhorner/
Marlene Svazek (FPÖ) - Landtag Salzburg	https://www.facebook.com/Marlene.Svazek https://twitter.com/svazek
Ursula Stenzel (FPÖ) - Landtag Wien	https://www.facebook.com/stenzeluschi/
IFF Bez Perg	Initiative Freiheitlicher Frauen Bez. Perg | Facebook
IFF Wels Stadt Land	https://www.facebook.com/IFFWels
IFF Burgenland	https://www.facebook.com/bgldiff
IFF Freistadt Oberösterreich	https://www.facebook.com/people/IFF-Freistadt-Initiative-Freiheitliche-Frauen/100069190570287/
IFF Kärnten	https://www.facebook.com/iFF.Kaernten/
IFF Linz	https://www.facebook.com/IFFLinz
IFF Oberösterreich	Initiative Freiheitliche Frauen Oberösterreich | Facebook
IFF Salzburg	https://www.facebook.com/IFFSalzburg/
IFF Steiermark	https://www.facebook.com/iFFSteiermark/
IFF Voralberg	https://www.facebook.com/FreiheitlicheFrauenVorarlberg

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(I decided to use authors' first and last names.)

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