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The London School of Economics and Political Science

QUERDENKER

*Local Intellectuals, Far-Right Populism and the Politics of
Aesthetics of Kulturnation in Germany*

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A thesis submitted to the European Institute of the London School of
Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, September 2020

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ABSTRACT

Scholarly and public debates generally envision the far right as a populist, irrational and anti-intellectual movement. Driven by economically left-behind voters it is seen as diametrically opposed to rational and educated, bourgeois liberal democracies. In Germany, this is echoed in the vision of a liberal-democratic cultural nationhood or *Kulturnation*, a country of poets and thinkers, that is imagined as a bulwark against the far right. Yet, envisioning themselves as *Querdenker* – original thinkers – a growing number of German intellectuals, once celebrated as representatives of *Kulturnation*, have recently embraced the populist far-right *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* and the PEGIDA movement. Why and how do well-off educated bourgeois intellectuals and institutions formerly seen as exemplifying *Kulturnation* embrace far-right populism? Why and how is the populist far right appealing to academics, artists, writers and their educated bourgeois audiences?

To explore these questions this thesis analyses ethnographic data gathered among Dresden's intellectual and educated bourgeois milieu between 2016 and 2018. Employing Jacques Rancière's concept of the "politics of aesthetics" and symbolic boundary theory it argues that Dresden's intellectuals use the aesthetics of *Kulturnation* not to counter, but to reproduce, substantiate and legitimize far-right populism and racism. As producers and interpreters of shared cultural symbols, local writers, artists and academics draw on the racist heritage implicit in *Kulturnation's* politics of aesthetics to ideationally articulate and spatially prefigure an explicit white identity that resonates with educated bourgeois and far-right populist audiences. As a concept of nationhood that is perceived as post-racist, *Kulturnation* helps to design a shared white identity while veiling its biological underpinnings. The findings demonstrate that the far right is not a "populist other" that is essentially distinct from rational post-racist visions of national identity. Rather, Dresden's intellectuals make visible unmarked racial and irrational dimensions in liberal-democratic discourses on national identity.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I started the PhD journey four years ago many asked me if the topic of intellectuals in the far right was really that relevant and if I was sure that this phenomenon would not pass. Four years later, the very discussions I followed both before I left for my fieldwork in Germany and while conducting it have reached academia. Navigating an increasing polarization both in the fieldwork and in academia was a great challenge that I also managed to face thanks to the support and productive critique of my supervisors, my partner, my family, my friends and the great academic colleagues I got to know at the European Institute (EI) and beyond.

First of all, I want to thank my supervisors Esra Özyürek and Simon Glendinning for their unwavering support from the beginning to the end. I am grateful for Simon's help in making sense of Heidegger, especially at the beginning of my research. Esra's incredible responsiveness during the preparation, conduct and assessment of my fieldwork, her advice on what questions to ask, what details to pay attention to and her pushing me to think further when I thought I figured out an explanation were essential to this thesis. Most importantly I want to thank both Esra and Simon for believing in the project and for having supported a very interdisciplinary approach that tries to bring together the very abstract of philosophy with the concrete everyday life. This feeling of support and trust enabled me to question paths that led nowhere, even when taking discovering them had cost time and energy. It helped me to take independent decisions and to grow as an independent young researcher.

Beyond my supervisors, the EI was a great place to realize my project. Here I want to express my gratitude especially to Jonathan White for always being interested and open to read my work in progress, Waltraud Schelkle for her amazing work and critical comments as a doctoral programme director and Florence Samuels for her administrative and technical support. I also want to thank the EI's administrative team in general for being so responsive and supportive in organizing events and grappling with forms and bureaucracy.

I also was lucky to be part of a great cohort of students who, as part of the EU 550 seminar, provided extremely helpful feedback on my work in progress. Here I want to thank especially Marta Lorimer, Sean Deen, Tahir Rashid, Yonatan Levi, Dustin Voss, Hjalte Lokdam, Kira Gartzou-Katsouyanni, Lars Miethke, Shahin Vallee and Katerina Glyniadaki for their feedback, comments, advice and for being such a supportive cohort. I also want to thank Eray Cayli, Cristobal Garibay-Petersen and Elia Pusterla for reading and providing feedback on early drafts of chapters. Last but not least, I am deeply grateful to the LSE for granting me such generous financial support without which this project would have been impossible.

Beyond the LSE the support, advice and feedback of academic colleagues I met through my research, such as Cynthia Miller-Idriss, Jenny Wüstenberg, Christina Morina, Ben Nienass, Jonathan Bach, Elizabeth Stewart, Chiara De Cesari, Özgür Özvatan, Alexandra Lewicki, Bernhard Forchtner, Jan Kubik, Lorenz Narku Laing, Fabian Virchow and David Art, helped me to tackle the interdisciplinary dimension of this project. I also want to thank the reviewers of my three journal articles for their constructive comments.

I would not have been able to finish the PhD without the feeling of making London my home. Here I am especially grateful to all the friends I made during my time in London, above all Selina Tso, Grace McLoughlin and Pascal Roelke who were also keen to discuss my research

with me and gave feedback on some of the chapters and earlier papers that were part of the project.

For the success of my fieldwork I am especially indebted to the Kröning family in Dresden for housing me during the first days of my fieldwork, for helping me to understand Dresden's local culture and for providing me with contacts in Dresden. In Leipzig, Susann Otto and Thomas Stein supported me with advice and warm hospitality on my trips from London to Dresden.

I would not have been in the position to start a PhD without my parents who always supported me, who nurtured curiosity and critical thinking and a passion for culture and politics in me. Their unconditional support for my decision to pursue a PhD and their sincere interest in my research gave me strength in times of doubt. Without them, I would not be where I am today.

Lastly, and most importantly, I want to thank Liliana for having moved to London with me to start a new and uncertain future in a city she had never been to, and for her support when I struggled and complained, doubted and despaired. I would not have been able to complete this project without her open ears for the worries and anxieties of an early career researcher in precarious and polarized times. Thank you for sharing this journey with me with unconditional love, as a friend with shared passions and curiosity, as an honest critic of my work and as a companion in exploring London and travelling in Europe when I needed to take distance from my research.

It is about the existence of German culture (...) and the question if in 50 or 100 years there will still be a German culture (...). Or if we will be only a pathetic rest-being, Restdasein, like (...) North American indigenous people (...) living in reservations. This may sound like an exaggeration from today's point of view. Yet this vision is not unfounded but a real danger if you look at the demographics (...). And while all the other parties (...) have agreed to abolish Germany as a Kulturnation (...) the AfD is here to fight against its vanishing.

- Marc Jongen, Philosopher, German MP, AfD speaker of cultural affairs, 2017

(Bednarz, 2020)

INTRODUCTION: *Querdenker* in Dresden – Intellectuals Between Populism and White Nationalism

On a cold January morning I make my way to Loschwitz, a small affluent suburb in Dresden, Germany's easternmost metropole and capital of the state of Saxony. Embedded in the Elbe River valley, Loschwitz consists of a mixture of half-timbered houses and late 19th century buildings and is connected to the rest of Dresden by the iconic "Blue Marvel", a 19th century truss bridge and major sight of the city. Once a fisherman's village, Loschwitz was absorbed by an expanding Dresden in the late 19th century. Above it all loom the mansions of *Weißer Hirsch*, Dresden's wealthiest area and home to Saxonian political, economic and cultural elites. Over the centuries, Loschwitz has developed a reputation as an artist's colony. Once the home to Germany's national poet Friedrich Schiller, the area emerged as the heart of an artistic and intellectual scene in the 1980s and housed the illegal parties and galleries of non-conformist anti-socialist intellectuals. Seemingly untouched by crisis and globalization it is one of the preferred neighbourhoods of Dresden's educated bourgeoisie and visiting tourists. Its rich history, art scene and the natural beauty surrounding it have turned Loschwitz into an embodiment of Germany's positive self-image of a cultural nation, a *Kulturnation*.



Figure 2: View from the "Blue Marvel" bridge to the Elbe valley (photo taken by the author).



Figure 1: Streets in Loschwitz with the neighbourhood Weißer Hirsch in the background (photo taken by the author).



Figure 6: Table with the latest publications, including far right magazine Tumult (photo taken by the author).



Figure 5: BuchHaus Loschwitz (on the left) with the adjacent cultural centre KulturHaus Loschwitz (photo taken by the author).



BuchHaus Loschwitz

Heute vor 23 Jahren - erster Arbeitstag in der eigenen Buchhandlung (Foto: Franz Zadníček)

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Figure 3: Picture showing Dagen and Bormann during their first day of work in their newly opened bookshop in 1995 (photo shared on Facebook, 3 March 2018, screenshot).



Figure 4: Dagen and Bormann in their bookshop (photo published by Buchort, screenshot taken by the author).

As I walk through the neighbourhood, Loschwitz's artistic past is echoed by art galleries, antique and vinyl shops, coffee houses, artisan merchants and the destination of my walk: the *BuchHaus Loschwitz* (*Loschwitz House of Books*). Being a German from a left, white, educated bourgeois middle class family the neighbourhood's and bookshop's alternative and non-commercial aesthetics fill me with an uncanny feeling of familiarity. As a child of parents who developed their political identity through West Germany's post-war New Left, I would visit similar independent bookshops and neighbourhoods that mixed cultural heritage with an

alternative, non-commercial local character on family trips. Behind the counter stands an unshaved man with long hair. He turns out to be Martin Bormann, husband of Susanne Dagen and co-owner of the bookshop. Together they founded the shop in the early post-reunification years and turned the run-down house into one of the preferred bookshops and cultural spaces for artists, writers and Dresden's educated bourgeoisie. In the months before my fieldwork, the couple had gained prominence as outspoken supporters of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), Germany's far-right populist party, and "*PEGIDA-Versteher*", a term used to describe sympathizers of Dresden's far-right populist movement. "They brand us as *Wirrköpfe*, muddleheads. But we are *Querdenker*, original thinkers" Bormann claims in our first conversation that day, referring to the way he and his wife are portrayed by the media.

Used since the 18th century (DWDS, 2020a) the term "*Querdenker*" is closely linked to the vision of *Kulturnation* and is often used in the public discourse to refer to innovative artists, writers and intellectual dissidents whose ideas are not understood or accepted (Duden, 2020; Grimm and Grimm, 1854; Merkel, 2013; Wulff, 2011). Not only Dagen and Bormann see the shop in this tradition; in 2015 and 2016 the shop received the German bookshop prize (BKM, 2015, 2016). Awarded by the German government it is the highest social recognition a "independent bookshop" can receive. At the 2016 award ceremony, Germany's minister of culture and centre-right Christian Democrat Union (CDU) Monika Grütters stated that bookshops have a central space in Germany. As "cultural intermediaries" they provide local spaces of "cultural diversity" and "rebellion" of the *Kulturnation* against a globalizing and digitizing book market. She grants bookshops a central *political* significance as spaces for *Querdenker* who prevent "democracy [being] put to sleep by intellectual inertia, a lack of creative arguments and political laziness" (Grütters, 2016).

As the prize shows, independent bookshops are central to an officially promoted political aesthetics of a liberal and democratic Germany defined by a unique cultural nationhood. For Grütters and many Germans, bookshops and neighbourhoods like Loschwitz represent the essence of a positive nationalism, a licit national vision of Germany as a cultivated and democratic member of the Western civilization (Shoshan, 2016). Protected by the state minister of culture, a post established by the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1998, *Kulturnation* has been declared the "most valuable myth that we have" (Dorn, 2018) opposed a past tainted by totalitarian and racist dictatorships. The exceptionalist vision of Germany as a nation of poets, thinkers and *Querdenker* that, "more than other countries," has been

“permeated with culture and philosophy”¹ is put forward by politicians from right to left to reflect a tradition of enlightenment, educated bourgeois democracy, a liberal public sphere and pluralist society (Die Grünen, 2018; Gauck, 2017) bound not by race but a shared culture. As “spiritual petrol stations of the nation”,² libraries and bookshops have come to embody a cultural education, or *Bildung*, that provides the prepolitical *grounding* of Germany’s liberal-democratic politics (Menke, 2018: 7–12) and prevents a slipping back into Germany’s racist past. Two years after receiving the prize, the Loschwitz bookshop has indeed become the space for a “cultural rebellion”. Yet, not as Grütters imagined it. Instead, it has turned into the hub of a diverse network of artists, writers and intellectuals who don’t oppose but support far-right populism.

Why do well-off educated bourgeois intellectuals and institutions like Dagen’s bookshop embrace far-right populism, a movement that is widely seen as anti-bourgeois, anti-intellectual and driven by the economically left behind? How did spaces that until recently were celebrated as embodying licit visions of a German *Kultur* come to support the far right’s illicit nationalism? Why and how is the populist far right appealing to *Querdenker*, intellectuals, artists, writers and their educated bourgeois audiences, many of which so far have no links to the far right?

In this thesis I rely on ethnographic data gathered between 2016 and 2018 to argue that a Dresden-based milieu of self-described *Querdenker*, artists, writers and intellectuals draws on the aesthetics of *Kultur* not to counter, but to reproduce, substantiate and legitimize far-right populism. Drawing on Jacques Rancière’s theory of the “politics of aesthetics” as well as symbolic boundary theory, I show that instead of being a bulwark against the spectres of the past, *Kultur* forms a symbolic repertoire and mimetic archive for the articulation of a German notion of white supremacy in the present day. By claiming to defend the *Kultur* against non-white immigration, Islam, globalization and “cultureless” elites these intellectuals draw on notions of race and culture that are deeply entangled in the *Kultur*’s genealogy to speak to educated bourgeois *and* far-right populist cultural anxieties. To underline their role in creating an alternative vision of *Kultur* they draw on the tradition of *Querdenker* who

¹ A vision that Germany’s former Christian Democrat interior minister, Dresden-based politician and self-declared fan of Dagen’s bookshop, Thomas de Maizière, formulated in 2017 as part of his “Theses on *Leitkultur*” (de Maizière, 2017), that attempted to define Germany’s guiding cultural values. This included, for example, the statement that “Germany is not ‘Burka,’” using Islam and the Muslim veil as a negative “other” to define a national self.

² A widely used quote attributed to the former SPD chancellor Helmut Schmidt (Klingemann, 2019; Richter, 2012).

think against “the mainstream” by remembering past intellectual movements that mediated between popular discontent and educated bourgeois distinction and that emerged in the context of a colonial Europe in the 19th century.

In this introduction I briefly review the literature on the far right to show that its tendency to paint the far right primarily as a populist and/or anti-intellectual movement not only obscures the intellectual dimension in its recent rise, it also externalizes notions of white supremacy onto the political margins occluding the entanglements between mainstream and far-right visions of nationhood. In section two I propose an alternative approach by conceptualizing intellectuals as central agents in the aesthetic definition, symbolic boundary making and local activist prefiguration of an alternative white *Kulturnation*. As educated bourgeois *Querdenker* they mediate between populist movements and intellectual elites creatively remembering the past to construct a white identity in the present. Section three turns to the specific German context and provides a brief genealogy of *Kulturnation* to show how it emerged as a political myth that has been shared across political systems by populists and intellectual movements while blurring notions of culture and race. A special emphasis is put on the role of ideas, intellectuals and bookshops during those periods that today form a symbolic repertoire for Dresden’s intellectuals and their visions of *Kulturnation*. In section four I introduce the contemporary use of *Kulturnation* as a positive self-vision in Germany’s official political discourse. I then look at the ways the contemporary German far right has sought to respond to this vision and how far this relates to transnational trends of the far right. I conclude that in a context in which Germanness is still largely defined by being white, the persisting and largely unchallenged notions of white supremacy that are entangled in the official politics of aesthetics of *Kulturnation* provide the far right with a symbolic repertoire to construct a superior white identity that provides a shared platform for an educated bourgeoisie and far-right populists. The final two sections present the case choice, methodology, the risks and limitations of far-right ethnography and the outline of the thesis.

1. The Myth of the Anti-Intellectual Far Right

Not only in Germany does the term “far right” often still evoke images of angry skinheads, neo-Nazis and irrational hate. Public and academic debates on far-right politics have generally been marked by three broad narratives. First, following a widely shared normative liberal

conception that defines politics as rational and pragmatic (Bottici, 2007: 1–16), mainstream political science has dismissed far-right politics and its explicit use of aesthetics as essentially irrational (Mazzarella, 2019: 51; Ostiguy, 2017: 73). Therefore, the far right has come to be primarily envisioned as populist and anti-intellectual (Betz, 1994; Mudde, 2016; Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 2017). Second, this normative exclusion has been paralleled by a reading of far-right populism through the lens of class politics. Here far-right populism has been envisioned as an anti-elitist phenomenon primarily driven by socio-economic anxieties (Arzheimer, 2015; Berbuir et al., 2015; Manow, 2019). Finally, this coincided with the trend to portray racism as exceptional to European societies (Goldberg, 2009: 181) and as an essential marker for stupid, irrational, undemocratic politics (Figure 7; Chin et al., 2009: 21) that can be externalized to the far-right margins (Messerschmidt, 2010: 52) and thus depoliticized.

Taken together, these three narratives have enabled a liberal democratic politics to define itself as rational, cultivated and post-racist and thus essentially different from the far-right margins of society. This vision has permitted not only the veiling of the myriad ways liberalism, connected to European nations self-understanding as white, it is itself entangled in a white identity politics that silences non-white, non-male and non-straight voices (Mazzarella, 2019: 48). It has also come to obscure the crisis of mediation of “post-political” liberal politics that undermined “a direct and immediate presencing of the substance of the people” (Mazzarella, 2019: 49).

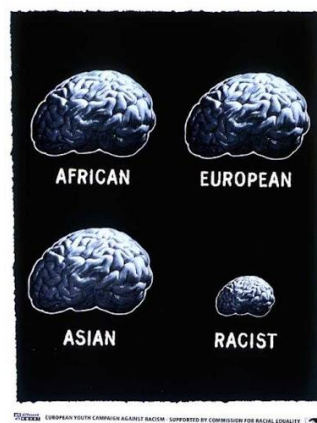


Figure 7: 'Racist Brain', part of a European Youth Campaign Against Racism supported by the Commission For Racial Equality, developed at Saatchi & Saatchi UK (1996; photographed by author in a Dresden Museum).

As a result, even those taking far-right intellectualism and aesthetics seriously (Carter, 2017; Freeden, 2017) have ignored the role of intellectuals and aesthetics in “real politics” and local political activism. Distinguishing abstract far-right ideas from concrete party politics and activism, scholars have instead conceptualized far-right intellectuals as a free-floating “New

Right” (Casadio and Masterson, 2014; Kaplan, 1980: 49; Taguieff, 1993: 3–22) distinct from party-political far-right populism (Salzborn, 2016) and pragmatic political concerns (Goschler, 2008: 3; Schildt, 1998: 20). Simultaneously, the research on political aesthetics has focused on the political margins looking at subcultures of the far left (Hebdige, 1979; McKay, 1996), while radical right attempts to modernize its visual language (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014) and discourse (Ruzza and Fella, 2009; Wodak, 2015), to incorporate far-left aesthetics in far-right activism (Bruns, 2016; Zúquete, 2018) or to mainstream far-right symbols (Miller-Idriss, 2017).

Yet, the links between far-right intellectualism, aesthetics and politics are stronger than the recent literature on far-right populism suggests. After World War II, links between far-right intellectuals, movements and parties persisted (Goschler, 2008; Schildt, 1998). Intellectuals played a central role in the conservative and far-right political renewal in the 1960s and 1970s (Müller, 2000: 8; Slobodian, 2019). Since its founding in 2013, the AfD has developed from a party with an economic ordoliberal focus into a white nationalist party (Bender and Bingener, 2015; Göppfarth, 2017) with strong links between the populist AfD, social movements like PEGIDA and the intellectual New Right (AfD, 2018). Its reach into culture and civil society has been institutionalized by the *Desiderius-Erasmus-Stiftung*, the official party foundation (Weiland, 2018). Central New Right intellectuals, including the bookshop owner Dagen, comprised its initial board of trustees. Finally, the AfD and PEGIDA not only have economically left-behind supporters also but wealthy and educated supporters (Hansen and Olsen, 2019; Lengfeld, 2017; Manow, 2019: 70–99; Vorländer et al., 2015). The cultural racism that is driving this support is not restricted to the far right but reaches into the mainstream (Decker et al., 2018). Far-right populist parties and movements thus “constitute a radical variant of views found in wider society” rather than being unconnected to the liberal mainstream (Pilkington, 2016: 11).

The normative vision of politics as purely rational, the class-based analysis of the far right as a phenomenon of the economically left behind and the externalization of racism onto the political margins have led to a notion of far-right populism that relies on a clear dichotomy between populism and intellectualism, intelligence and racism, cultural aesthetics and rational politics. The idea that there is a rational politics void of irrational and racialized aesthetics has itself become a pervasive self-constituting myth for a contemporary liberal-democratic politics in Germany and beyond (Bhopal, 2018). It is a myth that not only veils the more subtle ways prepolitical and irrational aesthetics underpin all politics (Bottici, 2007: 5–7), it also occludes

how these aesthetics can form a shared symbolic repertoire for the populist far right *and* an educated bourgeoisie. In the case of Germany, this does not mean that AfD or PEGIDA are intellectual phenomena. Rather, it suggests that a rigid separation between “far-right populism” and “New Right intellectualism”, between illiberal anti-intellectuals and liberal intellectuals or between post-racist democrats and racist anti-democrats is difficult to uphold and obscures the entanglements between far-right and official visions of *Kulturnation*.

2. *Querdenker* and the Political Aesthetics of White Nationhood

To analyse the phenomenon of Dresden’s far-right intellectuals and their educated bourgeois audiences this thesis could equally follow a normative classist or rationalist approach by defining intellectuals either as class-based critics (Edward, 1996: 5–6; Gouldner, 1979: 83–85) and defenders of political power (Shils, 1958) or as free-floating and detached from politics (Mannheim, 1993; Parsons, 1939). To avoid the reproduction of the above binaries I instead focus on the more general role of intellectuals as ideologists and activists producing the nation (Suny and Kennedy, 2001). Doing so enables me to highlight the role of political aesthetics in providing a common ground for political action crossing boundaries of class, “rational politics” and “irrational populism” as well as abstract ideology and concrete local activism.

I thus conceptualize intellectuals as producers and interpreters of cultural symbols (Lamont, 1987: 167–169) that provide a shared repertoire for educated bourgeois and far-right populist aesthetics of nationhood. Consisting of symbolic boundaries that bring together educated bourgeois and populist audiences, these aesthetics organize social exclusion based on race (Lamont and Lamont, 2009; Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 168–169). For Jacques Rancière, such a boundary-making can be understood as part of the politics of aesthetics of nation-building. Also, the politics of aesthetics describe the establishment of a “system of self-evident facts” that makes sensible, visible and audible “the existence of something in common” (Rancière, 2004: 7) producing a prepolitical *common sense*³ (Redfield, 2003: 11). By rendering certain things sensible and others insensible, politics of aesthetics determine who participates in politics and who does not. Based on this self-evident inclusion and exclusion of what forms the basis for a *community*, politics of aesthetics induce “novel forms of political subjectivity”,

³ Common sense is to be understood here literally, i.e. as a shared sensual experience of what is good, beautiful, bad or ugly, etc.

community and collective politicization (Rancière, 2004: 4). As a pre-political process, these aesthetics address the question of “who is who” that precedes the political question of “who gets what” (Starr, 1992: 294; Westheuser, 2019) by aesthetically forming a coherent group out of heterogenous groups of people (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Tilly, 2015).

Rancière distinguishes three ways through which political aesthetics drive the political becoming and transformation of a community. First, through the surface of *depicted signs* in the literature and art that is produced by the community. Second, through the *spaces* that serve as a form of theatre in which the community represents itself. And finally, through the *performance* of a community *based on* these signs and *in* the spaces of representation. Together, these three modes enable the community to represent the “sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organisation” (Rancière, 2004: 4).

Through their artistic and ideational expertise and the intellectual aesthetics they represent, writers, painters and academics are central agents in this process. As studies of intellectuals in Mexico and Romania have shown (Lomnitz, 2001; Verdery, 1991), they are not only essential to the creation and distribution of social meaning and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1988; Bourdieu and Bourdieu, 1993; Gagnon, 1987; Lipset, 1963: 333), but also equally play a central role in the aesthetic (re)production and/or challenging of aesthetics of nationhood (Charle, 2015: 8; Lamont, 1987: 173; Lomnitz, 2001: 197).

Mimesis and Poiesis

To design and legitimize alternative aesthetics of nationhood intellectuals depend on the imitation and reproduction of hegemonic aesthetics (Hall, 1979: 333) and the selective remembering of “disparate cultural elements, selected historical memories, and interpretations of experiences” (Suny and Kennedy, 2001: 2–3). These alternative aesthetics are neither *repetitions of* nor *abrupt ruptures from* hegemonic ones. Rather, they are recursions defined by “processes of partial reinscriptions” of past, present and future imaginaries and their arranging “in new and unexpected ways” (Stoler, 2016: 34) and through “unpredictable transformations” (Mazzarella, 2017: 9) for present and future purposes (Herzfeld, 2005: 24). As “mimetic archives” these past, present and future imaginaries are “embedded not only in the explicitly articulated forms commonly recognized as cultural discourses but also in built environments

and material forms, in the concrete history of the senses, and in the habits of our shared embodiment” (Mazzarella, 2017: 8).

The successful production, or what I call in this thesis *poiesis*, of alternative, transformative aesthetics of white nationhood is here interdependent with a defensive mode of imitation, or what I will call here *mimesis*, of hegemonic aesthetics of nationhood. As widely accepted aesthetics of nationhood the latter serve as myths for nations’ “ontological self-perpetuation” linking an “eternal essence” to ephemeral cultural and political elements (Herzfeld, 2005: 21) and providing a shared narrative that provides meaning to political experiences and activities (Bottici, 2007: 177–200). Uncontested supposed common traits and experiences (Bryson, 2005) are aesthetically highlighted to symbolically delineate a national common sense (Verdery, 1991: 214) that forms the basis for a hegemonic representation of nationhood (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 168–169). This highlighting goes together with the silencing of inconvenient and anomalous elements (Suny and Kennedy, 2001: 2–3) that threaten to undermine the national common sense (Stoler, 2016: 269–304).

In the German context, *Querdenker* can thus be understood as those counter-intellectuals and “mimetically gifted readers” (Mazzarella, 2017: 146) who creatively activate mimetic archives to challenge contemporary hegemonic liberal-democratic visions of *Kulturnation* by making visible and reasserting the racial underpinnings inherent in them. As *Querdenker*, they thus represent the simultaneous hegemonic and counter-hegemonic character that characterizes far-right populism (De Cesari and Kaya, 2019: 16).

Local Intellectuals

To make their abstract aesthetics of nationhood resonate with particular local contexts (Bonikowski, 2017; Lomnitz, 2001: 171–191) intellectuals have relied on different forms localism and often embracing a populist language against a “system” within and threats from without (Charle, 2015: 132; Foucault, 1980: 126; Lipset and Dobson, 1972: 148). Appealing to national authenticity, intellectuals elevated “mundane forms of collective practice” into a “sublime political yearning” (Holmes, 2019: 70) rendering “meanings particular to special social groups (...) universal and ‘given’ for the whole society” (Hebdige, 1979: 9). By couching their national vision in the local and elevating local spaces to embodiments of the nation, intellectual have lent that vision “social immediacy” and “cultural intimacy” (Herzfeld,

2005: 2–3) necessary for it to be accepted. As part of an educated bourgeois middle class that mediates between the local and the national, lower classes and elites, local intellectuals can today claim to be immediate representatives of the people, embodying the bypassing of “mediating and moderating institutions and procedures in pursuit of an immediate, redemptive and affect-intensive presencing of popular sovereignty” that characterizes contemporary populism (Mazzarella, 2019: 47). As intellectuals are embedded in local politics and culture they can emerge as “authentic,” that is immediate mediators who not only “express but rather directly (...) embody” the people (Mazzarella, 2019: 48). Drawing on local popular mimetic archives that are based on “shared histories, memories and forms of life” (Mazzarella, 2019: 53), they creatively change between *mimesis* and *poiesis* for the reworking of the past and the simultaneous production of “symbolic lexicon and material culture of national and ethnic identification” (Molnár, 2017: 148) in the present. Defying the Nazi aesthetics usually associated with the far right by introducing far-right ideas through banal aesthetics and civil society such local activism can significantly contribute “to the rise of new forms of radical nationalism” (Molnár, 2016, 2017: 147).

Yet, intellectuals not only design the signs and spaces of nationhood; as local activist members of a mediating educated bourgeoisie who claim the intellectual leadership of populist movements they also prefigure alternative aesthetics of nationhood by *performatively* bringing the people they claim to represent into being (Mazzarella, 2019: 48). Generally used with reference to New Left and alter-globalization movements (Breines, 1989; Epstein, 1991), the concept of prefigurative politics (Boggs, 1977) describes a political practice that aims to remove the “temporal distinction between the struggle in the present and a goal in the future” (Maeckelbergh, 2011: 4). Prefigurative politics create a desired future in present social relationships (Sitrin, 2006: 4). In this thesis I use the concept of prefigurative to make sense of the local activism of Dresden's far-right milieu. Here the local face-to-face level is important, as participation in shared public spaces cultivates a sense of political community that both draws on and constitutes aesthetic reservoirs of common sense, meaning and “forms” of acting and being (Eliasoph, 1998: 11, 21). By creating alternative public spaces intellectuals not only create alternative aesthetics of public life but “the public itself” (Eliasoph, 1998: 17). Nationalist local activism thus automatically prefigures a national community. However, as this thesis shows, in the case of Dresden this prefiguration in space often did not live up to the grand designs of its intellectual activists.

What emerged as a central element in Dresden's intellectual and activist politics of aesthetics is the idea of *Kulturturnation*. In Germany, *Kulturturnation* has been a central element of a positive aesthetics of nationhood. Since its emergence in the 19th century, it has served as a symbolic repertoire for intellectuals and *Querdenker* to simultaneously challenge and reproduce the meaning of German identity. Entangling biological and cultural notions of race, *Kulturturnation* has emerged the signifier for an assumed national essence that facilitated the ontological self-perpetuation of different political systems and countercultural movements in German history. Today, as the different chapters of the thesis will show, Dresden's intellectuals draw on the symbolic repertoire of *Kulturturnation* to aesthetically rethink, spatially envision and prefiguratively perform an explicitly racialized national identity. In doing so, they engage in the *mimesis* of the racial being implicit in hegemonic aesthetics of *Kulturturnation* to legitimize the *poiesis*, the explicit racial becoming and the racial becoming explicit in an alternative far-right aesthetics of *Kulturturnation*.

“Bricklayers” of a Racial Becoming

I conceptualize this process of racial becoming as an aesthetic “project” of ethno-poiesis that connects what race means in particular discursive and symbolic practices with “the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning” (Omi and Winant, 1994: 56) Race is here thus defined “neither as a biological fact nor as an illusion but as a real social classification that supplies a meaningful worldview and set of strategies to those who embody that category” (Hughey, 2012: 5). In this context drawing symbolic boundaries “involves the construction of a collective white identity” that is based on shared cultural symbols. Race, in this context, is not simply a rigid “set of ideas or understandings” but a constructed category that “represents, more broadly, a way (or a set of ways) of being in the world, of living, of meaning-making” that differs across space and time (Goldberg, 2009: 152) and that is a “fluid, transforming, historically specific concept parasitic on theoretic and social discourses for the meaning it assumes at any historical moment” (Goldberg, 1993: 74). The construction of race here relies on the activation of mimetic archives to construct new and unexpected forms of racialized essentializations. As a racialized way of being, whiteness becomes visible in identifications of a particular way of culture that is constructed by weaving culture into colour, being into body and blood into behaviour (Goldberg, 2009: 175). Portrayed as essentialized characteristics of a group, culture and

religion are here given a similar position as the biological notion of race (Shooman, 2014: 81). In this process of racialization, intellectuals can serve as the “brick-layers of racial foundations” (Goldberg, 2009: 4).

When looking at the German far right’s aesthetics of *Kulturnation* and the way local intellectuals use them to construct a white identity it is thus important to focus on the implicit racial heritage that is entangled in past and present hegemonic aesthetics (Roelofs, 2017: 365) of *Kulturnation* and shared beyond left and right, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, as well as East and West German conceptualizations of nationhood. The following section provides a brief genealogy of how throughout history *Kulturnation* served as a positive aesthetics that not only helped to legitimize political regimes and countercultures; as a *cultural* understanding of nationhood, it also helped to legitimize and construct a white racial identity that veils the *biological* assumptions underpinning it. In this non-exhaustive overview, I focus on those elements in the use of *Kulturnation*, and its relation to intellectuals, art and literature that today play a role in Dresden’s far-right intellectuals’ ideology and activism and that *Querdenker* remember to reinvent an acceptable racist culture in the context of the 21st century.

3. A Genealogy of *Kulturnation*

As social anthropologist Keisha-Khan Perry noted the “right-wing desire for a return to a recent (racialist) past must be understood within longer histories of racialization and white supremacy” (Perry, 2020: 2) that underpin both populist and intellectual politics. This section provides a genealogy of how in Germany the aesthetics of *Kulturnation* have been entangled with claims to intellectual leadership in the negotiation of national identity in times of perceived crisis and change (Kroll and Reitz, 2013: 18). As a German version of the western claim of the symbolic unity of culture and nation (Bhabha, 1990: 218), the intellectual imagining of *Kulturnation* has gone together with colonial-racist and populist tropes of cultural essentialism. Intellectuals have envisioned *Kulturnation* as threatened by a cultureless technocratic elite within and an uncivilized “other” without to sublimate these tropes into high cultural symbolic markers of essential difference. Today, Dresden’s intellectual milieu can draw on these aesthetics to design a common sense that blurs the lines between irrational and rational politics, populism and intellectualism, as well as culture and race.

From the 19th Century to World War II

The notion of *Kultur* as a political community based on shared culture and language, intellectuals as its agents and bookshops as the intermediary spaces embodying outlined by Germany's cultural minister Monika Grütters in her speech reaches back to the 19th century. Put forward by an emerging group of national intellectuals in the context of European colonialism and Napoleonic imperialism, the vision of *Kultur* was a reaction against perceived or actual threats from without and cultural crises from within (Weber, 2013: 444–448). Referring to *Kultur*, intellectuals excluded from political power styled themselves as leaders of a popular culture against competing elites, often by engaging in anti-Semitic othering (Ringer, 1969; Wittmann, 2011: 156). “Populist intellectuals” like Fichte and Herder (Berlin, 1977: 169) aestheticized popular traditions, symbols and myths as the origins of an authentic German spirit (Giesen, 1998: 7) and opposed them to an artificial, top-down culture (McGuigan, 2002: 10). Language especially was used to define racial groupings, leading also to the emergence of the concept of an Aryan race that was “inherited linguistically rather than biologically” and imagined the “wandering Jew” as “culturally incapable of speaking German properly” and thus being essentially incompatible with German culture (Goldberg, 1993: 71).

Bookshops emerged as important spaces, locally facilitating the national cultural *Bildung*, the forming and becoming of the people or *Volk*, against reactionary monarchies and thereby providing access to a dissident book market. They came to embody the *Kultur* as the spiritual space of the nation (Wittmann, 2011: 155–225) in a context when a political state was out of reach. *Bildung* was conceived as an aesthetic project of national becoming aiming to “reveal” the essential physical and cultural identity of the nation (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1990: 67–68). The biological identity of the people, its race, was seen as the basis for its spiritual essence, its culture, together forming a national political self-consciousness. The vision and political aesthetics of race and culture were thus intertwined to envision a homogenous national people (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1990: 70; Nancy, 1986) and formed the basis for the myth of *Kultur* as a marker of essential difference.

Between the foundation of the German nation state in 1871 and World War I *Kultur* legitimized imperial colonialism and cemented visions of a superior culture carried by an educated bourgeoisie whose self-conception was built against a Jewish, Muslim and non-white “other” (Anidjar, 2003; El-Tayeb, 2001; Keskinikliç, 2019). Closely linked to the emergence of a global bourgeoisie in the context of a Europe-dominated colonial

globalization (Dejung et al., 2019), notions of superior cultural nationhood were also shaped by discourses of colonial racism, anti-Semitism (El-Tayeb, 2011; Nduka-Agwu and Hornscheidt, 2014) and illiberalism (Dejung, 2019: 269). Intellectuals and the educated bourgeoisie were central in the imagination of Germany as part of a culturally superior, rational white Europe (Bonds and Inwood, 2016; Eze and Eze, 1997; Mills, 2005) driving history (Saini, 2019: 1–9). These intellectual elites defined their superiority against an “uncultivated”, “ahistoric” and “apolitical” colonized “other” (Balibar, 1990: 286–287; Hesse, 2011: 45–58) as well as European underclasses whose education and civilization they claimed to lead (Dejung, 2019: 254–258). The adherence to science and rationality was just as central as notions of western civilization and Christendom in the racial becoming of a superior whiteness that was defined and represented by the European educated bourgeoisie. To consolidate a European hegemony, members of the European and German educated bourgeoisie formed an ideological and aesthetic community that claimed leadership in the sublimation of national popular cultures and the civilization of “primitive others” (Drayton, 2019: 346–347). Central to the ideological legitimisation of this community was the imagination of a liberal universalism that in fact expressed the particular self-vision of an emerging white European middle class against the colonial “other” and competing actors in national power struggles (Dejung, 2019: 255).

Romantic notions of homeland, *Heimat* and local identity emerged as metaphors for the nation (Confino, 1993) that were defined against exoticized colonized non-Europeans (Bechhaus-Gerst, 2017). Mediating between “social groups above and below” (Drayton, 2019: 343) as well as the local “*Heimat*” and the exotic “*Fremde*”, the educated bourgeoisie significantly contributed to the construction of universal notions of superior European whiteness on the basis of its particular visions of class, race and culture (Drayton, 2019: 346–351). In this context, liberalism also increasingly came to be seen by parts of the educated bourgeoisie as a “luxury that European elites no longer could afford” and that should be overcome by a return to Christian roots, antiquity and authoritarian leaders (Dejung, 2019: 269). The potential end of slavery and colonization was seen as a threat not only to European dominance but also to an imagined white race either by suicide or through “global racial wars” (Dejung, 2019: 269).

The Weimar Republic also sought legitimacy as a *Kulturnation*. A thriving literature, publishing and bookshop culture, founded in Germany’s cultural capital Weimar, contributed to the idea that “the sanctuary of German literature” could reconcile “spirit and power” in times

of crisis (Wittmann, 2011: 344). So-called “conservative revolutionary” thinkers drew on the tradition of *Kulturnation* to aesthetically counter the early republic’s modernity (Breuer, 2010: 11). Bourgeois intellectuals, writers and artists, proclaimed themselves as spiritual leaders and proclaimed a German and European identity crisis. To counter this crisis some called for a racially homogenized, classless national people (Jones, 2013) while others called on Islam to renew a German spirit (Baer, 2017; Motadel, 2019). Gathering in small circles these intellectuals embraced local forms of communal living and ideas of authentic rootedness (Breuer, 2010: 11–16). In this context bookshops emerged as central spaces for an emerging local political activism that brought together supporters and protagonists of partially racist reform movements, such as the *Wandervogel* and *Heimatschutz* (Wittmann, 2011: 308–309).

Kulturnation was equally essential to the Nazi’s attempt to reconcile modern technology and rationalism (Herf, 1986) with an idealized traditional society through a total aestheticization of politics (Ruppert, 2015: 31). Notions of race and culture were intertwined in a vision of *Kulturnation* carried by books and art (Schütz, 2015: 94; Van Linthout, 2011) and excluding opposing elites and a racialized Jewish “other” (Ruppert, 2015: 44). Many of these intellectuals saw themselves in the tradition of 19th century educated bourgeois notions of national aesthetics, art, culture and styled themselves as the spiritual representatives of the *Volk* (Ruppert, 2015: 43).

From West Germany ...

Despite its centrality in Nazism the myth of *Kulturnation* survived World War II and informed both East and West German nation-building. Between 1945 and German reunification in 1990, both German states legitimized themselves as cultivated post-fascist, post-barbarian states by calling on liberal and socialist traditions of *Kulturnation* (Fulbrook, 1999; Wüstenberg and Art, 2008).

In early West Germany, intellectuals and occupiers externalized illiberal and ethnic notions of nationhood onto the Nazi past (Mosse, 1964; Stern, 1975) and selectively embraced elements of the past to recast Germany as a rational, liberal and civilized *Kulturnation* (SA Forner, 2014: 4). National belonging was defined through economic strength (Maier, 1988) and a West European identity (Cohen, 2010). To avoid a totalitarian politicization of culture, intellectuals and their primary spheres of action, culture, art and literature ought to be “free-

floating”, autonomous and distinct from the sphere of politics (Harrison and Wood, 1992: 358; Hohendahl, 2014: 620–624). Abstract art and aesthetics were taught to be the superior embodiment of a modern Germany (Ruppert, 2015: 29) while figurative realistic art was perceived as running “the danger to represent a political tendency”, preserve exclusive “national symbols” and “draw cultural lines” (Segal, 2013: 69).



Figure 8: Alternative independent bookshop Autorenbuchhandlung in west Berlin (published on Berlin from Within Blog, screenshot taken by the author).



Figure 9: Alternative New Left bookshop Red Star in Marburg, West Germany (photo by Roter Stern Marburg, published online, screenshot by the author).

The attempt to design a positive nationhood through an aesthetics of *Kultur* that embraced both western liberalism while silencing the Nazi past was challenged by New Left intellectuals who criticized the lack of working through the Nazi past and claimed that all forms of aesthetic production were socially and politically relevant (Hubert, 1992: 15; Plowman, 1998: 507). Bookshops emerged as key activist spaces (von Saldern, 2004: 167) and pillars of a leftist counter-public-sphere (Sonnenberg, 2016). As in the 1920s, this local bookshop culture was in part driven by a yearning for authenticity and was opposed to commercialization. Besides traditional German pubs and bookshops, old, educated bourgeois neighbourhoods formed “spaces of community-formation” (Reichardt, 2014: 572–625) linking 19th century notions of local authenticity to the goal of an anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist society (Sonnenberg, 2016: 20; von Saldern, 2004: 165). This yearning for authenticity underpinned the embracing of a neo-nationalism by parts of the New Left. Here, activists appropriated post-colonialist discourses to portray Germany as colonized by western powers (Betz, 1988: 129–133; Müller, 2000: 215) and subscribed to an ethnoculturally homogenous Germany (Chin and Fehrenbach, 2009a: 111). Embracing *Kultur* from the left, their aesthetics of nationhood recast essentialized notions of German identity and perpetuated colonial visions of an exoticized and uncivilized non-white “other” (Partridge, 2008: 662–663).



Figure 11: Bookshop owner of the alternative New Left bookshop Red Star in Marburg, West Germany, in the late 1970s (photo by Roter Stern Marburg, published on their website, screenshot taken by the author).



Figure 10: New Left pop-up bookshop with alternative literature in the 1970s (photo by dpa / picture alliance / Istvan Bajzat).

... To East Germany

As in West Germany, the myth of *Kulturnation* underpinned East Germany's German Democratic Republic's (GDR) efforts to legitimate itself as a state of culture, art and literature (Kaiser, 2016; Mau, 2019: 94; Wittmann, 2011: 404). The memory of non-communist Nazi victims was suppressed, anti-Semitism and racism neglected and Nazi perpetrators reintegrated into society (Herf, 2013; Olsen, 2015). The memory of communist resistance against Nazism was combined with the vision of a *Kulturnation* defined by local traditions and *Heimat* (Palmowski, 2009; Peitsch and Sayner, 2015) and combined with the idea of class (Fulbrook, 1999) and socialist progress (Kolinsky and van der Will, 1998).

Art and literature were to be bound in popular culture and a national tradition (Thomas, 2013: 128). Affirmative work was subsidized and alternative visions suppressed (Wittmann, 2011: 395–396). Art was to embrace a “teleological realist” style based on an anti-abstract, popular and figurative understanding (e.g. Figure 16). Affirming a “new social order” art was supposed to “establish pictorial identities for new social types” (Harrison and Wood, 1992: 358), not by depicting reality, but prefiguring an ideal socialist people (Rehberg, 2013: 24–25) revolving around the concept of “the worker” as the ideal type of the socialist way of life (Mau, 2019: 48). Literature was largely conceived to be part of the spiritual-cultural sphere of the state (Hörnigk, 1992: 30) and “a crucial weapon in the state’s propaganda arsenal” (Cooke and Plowman, 2003: xv).

The GDR's ideal of intellectuals followed the Gramscian notion of an “organic intellectual” that is politically rooted in class membership (Kaiser, 2016: 239–241; Thomas,

2013: 128). Intellectuals were seen as an essential part of the construction of a society of workers that suppressed socio-economic differences and attempted to establish a socially broadly accessible culture. The aim was to form an “intellectual proletariat” and “proletarian poets” by promoting cultural events and reading circles (including works of the bourgeois canon) at workplaces (Mau, 2019: 51). As in other socialist countries, intellectual political engagement in questions of national identity was the rule, not the exception (Bauman, 1987). In the GDR this took a specifically German form. Drawing on 19th century ideas of intellectuals as *Volkslehrer*, teachers of the people, intellectuals were to spiritually direct and form the masses. In turn, the ideal intellectual was presumed to express the popular will in an unmediated way (Boyer, 2005: 119–125) and to link socialist re-education to German national culture (Dornhof, 2001). To institutionalize the intellectual grounding in a culture of workers, every citizen who aimed to study first had to train in a working-class profession (Kerbel, 2016). To make highbrow culture accessible to all social strata “Cultural Palaces” or “Culture Houses” were built in most cities. They continued the 19th century tradition of so-called *Volkshäuser* (People’s Houses) and aimed to provide workers with spaces for social, educational and high cultural life (Hain et al., 1996).



Figure 14: Matthias Griebel, leading figure of the Dresden conservative bohemia posing in 19th century bourgeois clothes in front of a socialist-modernist building with the inscription “Socialism wins” (photo in Kaiser, 2017: 82).



Figure 12: Gathering in an illegal gallery in Loschwitz, Dresden (photo in Kaiser and Petzold, 1997: 145).



Figure 13: Matthias Griebel and members of Loschwitz’s conservative bohemia sitting on the banks of the Elbe River, the “Blue Marvel” bridge in the background, close to where Dagen’s bookshop is located today (photo in Kaiser and Petzold, 1997: 145).



Figure 15: Group of non-conformist artists gathering for a festival in an old mill close to Dresden (photo in Kaiser, 2016: 158–159).

Many intellectuals initially supported this politicization of culture. In the 1970s, however, a new generation of dissident intellectuals, writers and artists formed subversive cultural spaces (Michael, 1997), bookshops (Wittmann, 2011: 393–406) and illegal art galleries (Kaiser, 2016). This dissident milieu formed a bourgeois anti-socialist bohemia made up of left-leaning intellectual members of the families of the GDR’s functional elites (Schneider, 2013) and a conservative “rest-bourgeoisie” that had persisted official attempts of marginalization (Kaiser, 2016: 243–247). Facing repression, this group retreated to remaining educated bourgeois professions such as lawyers, doctors or the academy, churches, private and semi-private spaces and embraced alternative lifestyles often linked to local salons and galleries (Mau, 2019: 64).

Culturally these milieus and their spaces were oriented toward a 19th century, French bourgeois culture rather than contemporary western ideas. Participants dressed up in 19th century costumes and embraced an activism based not on explicit political claims, but on gestures of non-conformity widespread in totalitarian socialist states (Ost, 2005). Like its West German counterparts, these milieus were often located in 19th century bourgeois neighbourhoods, such as Berlin’s *Prenzlauer Berg* or Loschwitz in Dresden where a movement formed around the local historian (*Heimatsforscher*, chapter five) Matthias Griebel (Figures 12 and 14; Kaiser and Petzold, 1997: 157–163), today a close friend of Dagen and Bormann. These milieus turned these neighbourhoods into countercultural “bohemian biotopes” for utopian alternative lifestyles (Kaiser and Petzold, 1997: 148–148). Central to this milieu was the nostalgic protection of 19th century concepts of a white European educated bourgeoisie and its lifestyle (Figures 12–15) against a socialist state that was perceived as cultureless, “petit bourgeois” (Kaiser,

2016: 233–237) and “strong in terms of power but weak in terms of culture” (Mau, 2019: 64). Despite this opposition, the GDR’s official culture and the alternative bohemian milieu were characterized by a shared anti-modern “populist-realism” and “historicism” that was expressed in both art (Figure 16) and literature (Kaiser, 2016: 15–35, 64). Because of the direct links of Dresden’s educated bourgeoisie to this Loschwitz-based milieu, this period provides the primary mimetic archive for today’s far-right intellectual activism in Dresden.



Figure 16: Socialist realist art by East German painter Heinz Drache: “The people says ‘Yes’ to reconstruction,” 1952, *The Wende Museum Los Angeles*.

Despite their political antagonism, GDR dissidents and political elites shared an officially promoted notion of *Kulturnation* that was constructed as “commonalities based on descent” (Mau, 2019: 94) while veiling racism, anti-Semitism and far-right activism (Heinemann and Brück, 1992; Krüger-Potratz et al., 1991; Waibel, 2014) to portray the GDR as morally superior to the capitalist West. Through its ethnically and culturally more homogenous culture and its open embracing of nationalism East Germany was contrasted to a more pluralist and diverse West Germany and described as a “more German Germany” (Greiffenhagen and Greiffenhagen, 1994). In other, more explicit words, East Germany was defined as being more German because it was seen as more white. This self-valorization against a “systemic other” coincided with the spatial segregation (Göktürk et al., 2007; Hussain, 1991), the public perception of Arab and African socialist contract workers as “uncivilized” (Piesche, 2002; Spennemann, 1997; Waibel, 2012: 97–111). As a result, these so-called “*Vertragsarbeiter*” (contractual workers faced frequent violent attacks that were concealed by official discourse (Wolle,

1998). As in other East European countries, the primarily conservative counter-intellectuals (Konrád and Szelenyi, 1979) feared an “Africanisation” by cultureless socialist elites, the descent into “barbarianism” and the loss of a place in a civilized “European family” (Verdery, 1991: 2).

In sum, *Kulturnation* persisted as a central trope legitimizing both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic visions of Germanness in East and West. Both official and alternative intellectual discourses on German identity have tended to claim the legacy of *Kulturnation* as a synonym for a civilized European culture. Characterized by a wide cultural education, embodied by a vibrant bookshop culture and expressed by intellectual *Querdenker*, these aesthetics of *Kulturnation* perpetuated the notions of white superiority entangled with it. During the peaceful revolution of 1989, *Kulturnation* underpinned calls for a cultural and ethnic reunification (Ludwig, 1995: 106) while no space was given to the critical assessment of Germany’s colonial legacy or the recognition of non-white post-war immigrants (Chin and Fehrenbach, 2009a: 115).

Kulturnation thus provides a rich repertoire of entanglements between populism and intellectualism, culture and race, as well as hegemonic and counter-visions of nationhood. Today, it serves both official political visions and Dresden’s far-right intellectual milieu as a mimetic archive for their racial becoming via the aesthetics of *Kulturnation*. The following section introduces the contemporary context of German and far-right politics to show how the pre-political aesthetics of *Kulturnation* simultaneously legitimize licit and illicit visions of German nationhood.

4. Veiling the Wrong Kind of Nation, Designing the Right Kind of Right. *Kulturnation* as a Shared Symbolic Repertoire for Contemporary White Nationalism

As Grütter’s speech above shows, *Kulturnation* survived German reunification. Its aesthetics provide the background not only for today’s official vision of Germany, but also, and equally, for the far right and its Dresden intellectuals. It has become the German metaphor for the western myth that a modern liberal-bourgeois nation and civil society is constitutive for democracy and thus immune to illiberal and racist nationalism (Chin and Fehrenbach, 2009a: 111; Habermas, 1991; Molnár, 2016: 167; Putnam et al., 1994). Coupled with pride in economic achievement, commitment to the constitution (Habermas, 1990) and Germany’s

working through the Nazi past (Wittlinger, 2008) *Kulturnation* underpins the imaginary of a homogenous (Chin and Fehrenbach, 2009b: 22–23) liberal post-reunification nation (Fuchs et al., 2011). As in the past, it forms a licit national vision construed in distinction to Nazism and a “timeless” East German (Boyer, 2006; Glaeser, 2000) and non-European Muslim “other” (Chin and Fehrenbach, 2009b: 7) portrayed as not yet progressed to the liberal-democratic stage (Ewing, 2008; Özyürek, 2014, 2019). *Kulturnation* emerged yet again as a useful concept for a new national project that was based on descent and belonging in the attempt to immunize the political through nationalism (Mau, 2019: 148).

This attempt to use *Kulturnation* to form a shared identity among white East and West Germans not only muted political dissent over the way reunification was achieved; as part of a post-reunification national project it also went hand in hand with a politics of citizenship that perpetuates, reaffirms and cements racialized hierarchies (Lewicki, 2018: 502) and has led to a contemporary German racism that is predominantly aimed against Muslims (Attia, 2015), that continued to veil entanglements between past and contemporary racism (Partridge, 2010) and that contributed to the delegitimization of emerging intellectuals of colour (Nandi, 2015) as non-intellectual (Dübgen, 2014: 219, footnote 27) or Muslim fundamentalists (Chin, 2007: 130; Der Tagesspiegel, 2020; Rodríguez, 1999: 223). Portrayed as incompatible with traditions of *Kulturnation*, intellectuals of colour have been silenced or exoticized as inferior to *German* literature and art (Chin, 2003, 2007: 137; Chin and Fehrenbach, 2009b: 9). Intellectuals and educated bourgeois milieus, including the New Left, continued to view Germans of colour as essentially foreign (Partridge, 2010: 821).

Simultaneously, East German intellectuals were marginalized (Villinger, 1997) especially when it emerged that some were entangled with the GDR’s secret police (STASI) (Brockmann, 2006). They lost audiences, were disillusioned by capitalism (Graf, 2001) and alienated by yet another “system” (Bednarz, 2016: 4; Dornhof, 2001). Stigmatized as superfluous figures whose work was “tainted” by the GDR’s totalitarian past, they were often removed from their positions and replaced by West Germans (Bednarz, 2016; Bluhm and Jacobs, 2016). The artistic value of realist and figurative art was denied and seen as essentially totalitarian (Rehberg, 2013). East German literature and art were attacked as shaped by an ideological aesthetics, “Gesinnungsästhetik” (Schirmacher, 1990; Thomas, 2013: 131) and denounced as a residue of a pre-modern Germany. As a reaction many East German intellectuals refused to identify with post-reunification Germany. Specifically, anti-socialist intellectuals were shocked that “conservative values” in West Germany had been shattered by

the New Left (Kaiser, 2016: 236). Many East Germans retreated from politics and sought to find a space for themselves in the new society (Mau, 2019: 202).

More recently, the inflationary use of *Kulturation* in contemporary political discourse (DWDS, 2020b) has, paradoxically, gone together with a more general vision of culture and aesthetics as detached from rational politics (Cooke and Plowman, 2003: xvii; Redfield, 2003: 2). Intellectuals' public standing has declined (Baumeister and Horton, 2013: 7–8) as their role in politics has been questioned and their realm of activity confined to positivist science (Haller, 2017; Suny and Kennedy, 2001: 10). At the same time, bookshops, marginalized by large chains and online booksellers, lost their central place as politicized semi-public spaces (Wittmann, 2011: 464–467).

To design itself as a legitimate political movement the far right has tried to respond to these trends and to counter a hegemonic aesthetics of nationhood that portrayed the far right as the ultimate bearer of the racist and irrational politics of the past. At a time when claims of a biological racial identity have come to be marked as unacceptable (Jones and Smith, 2001; Shulman, 2002), referring to *Kulturation* has enabled the German far right to promote recently emerging transnational notions of white supremacy without referring to biological racism (Balibar, 1991; Taguieff, 1985; Wieviorka, 2002). By hiding its crude racism (Ruzza and Fella, 2009) in a language of culture (Wodak et al., 2013) the far right has embraced a “cultural racism” (De Cesari and Kaya, 2019: 12; Pinxten, 2006) that calls for an ethnopluralist coexistence (Spektorowski, 2003) but not a mixing of races – a shift that resonates with educated bourgeois and liberal notions of a white rational European civilization of Judaeo-Christian values (Balkenhol et al., 2016; Brubaker, 2017). The ideal of ethnopluralism intertwines biological visions of race with material status and historical destiny, echoing the educated bourgeois invention of a “white race” against a “system of imagined others” in the 18th and 19th centuries (Drayton, 2019: 357).

In this shift from biological to cultural racism, “pre-political discourses” on philosophy, art, architecture, memory, religion (Stolcke, 1995) and everyday topics linked to the family and personal life have become increasingly central to far-right mobilization (Holmes, 2019: 72). They are presented as parts of an organic order that unites an ethnic national people across classes and that is threatened by an externalized “political system” (Holmes, 2019: 72; Reisigl and Wodak, 2005) and “essentially different” immigrants and/or Islam (EW Said, 2003). Intertwining notions of culture and race (Lloyd, 2018) and connected to the still pervasive idea

that European nation states are essentially white nations, the 19th century concept of *Kulturnation* thus provides the far right with an aesthetic repertoire of implicit racialized meanings (Hughey, 2012: 11, 15) that informs the explicit racial formation of contemporary visions of whiteness (De Genova, 2016: 90).

In this context, far-right actors have emerged claiming to defend European and western culture against “decline” and “death” (Murray, 2017; Sarrazin, 2010; Zemmour, 2014) and a “great replacement” (Froio, 2018). Culture, literature, art and aesthetics have become central fields of far-right politics (Forchtner, 2020; Göppfarth, 2020b). Not only do far-right populist parties increasingly focus on cultural politics and policies in their parliamentary work (Butterwegge et al., 2018), in Germany, far-right politicians and movements such as the *Identitäre Bewegung* threaten theatres, galleries and museums by enacting so-called aesthetic interventions – activism to disturb cultural events they see as undermining white identity and pride. Their aesthetics envision non-white Europeans and immigrants as a “barbarian” threat to a civilized Europe, racializing European culture as essentially white (Figures 17 and 18).



Figure 17: “So that Europe does not become ‘Eurabia’!”, election poster by the AfD Berlin, photo by AfD Landesverband Berlin.



Figure 18: Photo of alleged refugees consuming alcohol on the stairs of an unknown war memorial that was circulated by far right Twitter accounts, here on 20 April 2018 with the title “symbolic picture of the era”.

In Germany this has helped the far right to design itself as a “right kind of right”, a New Right allegedly dissociated from past racism and fascism (Gessenharter, 1989, 2002; Weiß, 2017). Relying on a categorization by one of its central thinkers, Armin Mohler, the New Right has claimed to be not in the tradition of Nazism but in the tradition of the 1920s “conservative revolution” (Mohler, 1994). Except for the electoral success of some parties close to it and a

series of publications, the New Right's impact remained limited (Salzborn, 2016: 43–45). As it lacked ideological innovation and institutional support it was unable to dissociate itself from the old right while keeping a distance from the conservative CDU (Müller, 2000: 222–225).

Yet, since the foundation of the AfD and the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, the New Right's output has increased and an institutional infrastructure has formed carried by think tanks (*Institut für Staatspolitik* (IfS), *Bibliothek des Konservatismus* (BdK)), publishing houses (Antaios, Manufactum), social movements (PEGIDA in Dresden, *Zukunft Heimat* in Cottbus, *Frauenmarsch* in Berlin), youth organizations (Identitarian Movement), journalists, politicians and intellectuals who predominantly come from a humanities background. The IfS and Antaios are led by Götz Kubitschek, probably the most visible figure in Germany's intellectual far right. Based in a medieval mansion in the East German village of Schnellroda, the IfS mingles intellectualism with street activism and close links to the and the Identitarian Movement (Zúquete, 2018: 7–104). Since the AfD's election into the national parliament in 2017 the IfS has spread its influence into the German parliament⁴ and has been placed under closer observation by Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Wiedmann-Schmidt, 2020).

In addition to think tanks, important forums of exchange and new publications, some almost exclusively aimed at intellectual audiences, have been established. The IfS's bimonthly *Sezession* has been published since 2003 and, together with its blog version, has developed into a central far-right publication. *Tichys Einblick* represents the more moderate, ordoliberal faction of the AfD and emerged in 2016 from an internet blog by a former *Focus* journalist. *Tumult* started as a far-left publication in the late 1970s. Relunched in 2013, it reaches mainly an academic audience and is published in Dresden. *CATO*, published since 2017 under the influence of New Right veteran Karl-Heinz Weißmann and the BdK, is located in the bourgeois and former New Left neighbourhood of Charlottenburg in Berlin. BdK and *CATO* embody a New Right rooted in a West German tradition, not as distant from Germany's political institutions as the IfS or *Tumult*. As such, it is close to the Berlin-based newspaper *Junge Freiheit*, established in 1996, that is aimed at a broader audience. *Anbruch*, whose founder Tano Gerke has direct links to the IfS as well as the AfD leadership, is particularly aimed at an audience interested in heritage and conservative as well as far-right art. Finally, *Blaue Narzisse*

⁴ I attended Lehnert's presentation entitled „Mobilmachung – Waldgang – Weltstaat. Ernst Jünger's political philosophy”, given in the AfD's Bundestag offices on 6 June 2018. Other far-right organizations, such as *Ein Prozent*, have also presented in the Bundestag (Kamann and Naumann, 2018).

is a newspaper that emerged from a student newspaper and is aimed at a younger audience, and is led by Felix Menzel, its founder and a key figure in the German identitarian movement.

Blogs like Michael Klonovsky's *Acta Diurna*, David Berger's *Philosophia Perennis* and Vera Lengsfeld's *Achse des Guten* are equally popular among an intellectual readership. The intellectual support for far-right populism became most visible in the so-called *Erklärung 2018*, a petition in which far right and conservative intellectuals proclaimed their solidarity with movements like the PEGIDA (Broder et al., 2018). This support is equally carried by social media accounts, social activism and festivals such as the *Kyffhäuser* and *Wartburg Festivals*. Joint actions among different actors are often organized and financed by the network *Ein Prozent* co-founded by Kubitschek.

Consisting of radical and extreme elements (Mudde, 2002), the German far right can today be conceptualized as a social movement that includes “multiple arenas of contestation” (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro, 2018: 5). What unites these different groups is the conviction that white German and European culture is in a crisis reversible only through a reassertion of “‘European’-ness” against refugees (De Genova, 2018: 1777) and Islam (e.g. Sarrazin, 2018), the abolition of a Holocaust-related culture of guilt (e.g. Ley and Lichtmesz, 2018; Sieferle, 2017) and the protection against a moral universalism (e.g. Fritze, 2017) and against the EU (e.g. Rosenkranz, 2013). These elements form a common white supremacist platform (Mudde, 2007: 19) for which the different far-right actors mobilize broader support (Göppfarth, 2020c; Klandermans and Mayer, 2005; Virchow, 2017).

Dresden's intellectual far-right milieu is deeply embedded in the above networks. In recent years, Dagen's bookshop has not only become the local cultural meeting space for this milieu, it has also developed strong links to Kubitschek and to other far-right institutions. As the local embodiment of the official political aesthetics of *Kulturnation* it provides the far right with the symbolic repertoire for the formation of an explicitly racialized cultural identity that embeds the meaning of race in the “particular discursive practice” (Omi and Winant, 1994: 56) and narrative of a cultural nationhood of *Querdenker* that resonates with populist and educated bourgeois audiences. By adapting to a more general trend of racializing Islam as culturally incompatible with Europe, the German far right has been able to use the above alternative networks, East German grievances and West German claims of modern superiority to design an exclusive white identity against Islam as a shared “other”. In the following section I outline how my own implication in this shared repertoire was not only crucial to gaining access to

Dresden's far-right milieu, but also posed fundamental challenges. I will outline the benefits and limitations of following an ethnographic approach before explaining the choice of my case study and finishing with the contribution this thesis wants to make.

5. Ethnographic Research in the Intellectual Far Right

Methodology and Positionality

Recent ethnographic studies of the far-right and far-right populist movements in the United States (Blee, 2007; Ezekiel, 2002; Hochschild, 2016) and Europe (Dematteo, 2011; Hervik, 2019; Ost, 2018; Pasieka, 2016; Pilkington, 2016; Shoshan, 2016; Stacul, 2011; Thorleifsson, 2017) have shed light on populist identity formations outside party politics (Gingrich and Banks, 2006: 14). These studies show that engaging with individual actors at the local level sheds new light on the “cultural dimension” and “meaning given to the action by the social actors who bring these initiatives to life” (Toscano, 2019: 2).

Yet, as sociologist Nina Eliasoph states, ethnographers “must accept that they cannot avoid having relationships to, and making moral judgments about, the people they study. Instead of ignoring that relationship, as scientists tend to do, the best approach is to acknowledge it and build it into one's research plan” (Eliasoph, 1998: 278). What made my research particularly challenging was that the entanglements of race, culture, class and the local in the aesthetics of *Kulturnation* that are the focus of this study not only form the basis for a new far-right intellectualism. they also enabled me to gain access to Dresden's intellectual far-right milieu by providing a common ground and an uncanny familiarity that enabled me to navigate and understand the milieu. Yet, this common ground also posed challenges to the methodological ways of approaching such a close-up study of far-right intellectualism.

First, the choice of ethnography, anthropology's critical stance toward positivist political science approaches and its sympathetic focus on the local, popular and marginalized was recognized by my informants as dignifying their political efforts (Pasieka, 2019). This was a serious challenge as returning this sympathy would mean to “slide into blood-and-soil purity politics” (Mazzarella, 2019: 48). Anthropologists researching the far right have thus replaced sympathy with empathy to decipher motivations for far-right support (Gingrich and Banks, 2006; Shoshan, 2016).

This empathy was necessary to gain access to my informants, but inevitably led to developing friendly relationships with informants, who, for example, invited me into their homes and welcomed me with cake and coffee. During these very personal encounters I often faced informants with a similar interest in culture, architecture and politics that revealed that I was myself very much part of a shared symbolic repertoire that forms the core of this analysis. This uncanny familiarity I experienced during my first visit of the bookshop was a constant companion during my fieldwork. My own background in a white, educated, bourgeois culture made me accepted and acceptable in Dresden's far-right circles and let me understand cultural references and habits implicit in such a milieu. Being a German male, white, London-based ethnographer with a multidisciplinary background in anthropology, political theory and the humanities, born in West Germany and grown up in East Germany, provided me with a shared sociocultural "language", a common sense through which I could get in touch and communicate with my informants.

This common ground often made it challenging to understand how this shared identity could form the basis of a politics I deeply reject. As much as it permitted allowed me to gain a privileged access to the milieu, it was thus also a limited perspective. Yet, throughout this study, I will attempt to highlight this shared ground of whiteness, not only to provide a study of far-right intellectuals, but, rather, a study of the political and racial becoming of a white educated bourgeoisie in the 21st century. By using ethnography as a method that traditionally has been used by white colonial academics to construct a superior self and an inferior non-white "other", this study wants to turn this method against its original aim to "categorize the exotic" to deconstruct the essentialization of a white national self by Dresden's far-right intellectuals. In this process, questions of gender are important as will become visible especially in chapter six. However, the main focus of the thesis is on the entanglements of populism and intellectualism as well as culture and race in the racial becoming, which will limit the (male) perspective this study takes in terms of gender. I nevertheless will try to point out the importance of gender, especially in chapter six. However, the lack of engagement with gender is one of the strongest limitations of this study.

Finally, pursuing an ethnography of intellectuals is a challenge as it inevitably leads to an overlap between the analysis and the ethnographic data (Tuv, 2018: 27). A way to mitigate the potential limitations of this overlap is to put the intellectuals and their work into the context their everyday activism (Boyer, 2008). Focusing on the local and everyday, this thesis thus explores the face-to-face dimension of intellectual activism in the populist far right. Instead of

using online communication to circumvent traditional public spheres (Gattinara and Froio, 2019; Hatakka, 2019) the activism I encountered appeared as a counter-reaction to a virtual globalized world perceived as borderless, inauthentic, superficial and undermining solidarity and community. The intellectual milieu I experienced was not driven by the wish to destroy mediating institutions, but rather to establish alternative, “authentic” ones that aimed at the immediate presencing of “the people” via local intellectual mediators, their alternative public and private spaces as well as local activism outside party politics.

Yet, while scholars have recently tried to overcome the electoralist and external focus of far-right studies by looking at the party sector (Gattinara, 2020), most of these studies focus on social movements and radical subcultures. So far, little ethnographic attention has been paid to educated bourgeois and intellectual support for the far right. With few exceptions (Boyer and Lomnitz, 2005) the myriad studies on intellectuals or the educated bourgeoisie are mainly analyses of the written output of intellectual figures in the far right (Beiner, 2018; Sedgwick, 2019) or intellectuals and their more general role in national societies (for Germany see, e.g. S Forner, 2014; Kroll and Reitz, 2013; Müller, 2000; Ringer, 1969). So far there is no ethnographic study of far-right intellectualism and its educated bourgeois support. As a consequence, intellectuals are often seen as detached producers of ideas without situating them in the specific local context in which they work, live or the audiences and popular movements with which they interact. Yet, it is ethnography that may be best suited to understanding how abstract universals are vernacularized and, in turn, how “particular, provincial products of vernacular circumstances (...) become detachable from those circumstances” (Mazzarella, 2019: 54) and emerge as new universals.

This is also true for the far right, its intellectuals and the local contexts in which they operate, think and develop their ideas in close interactions with local audiences as well as national, transnational and global trends. As a mediating class, local intellectuals and local educated bourgeois audiences are situated at the intersection of the local and the national, local populist movements and parties, pre-political local aesthetics and their mimetic archives and their impact on political and racial becoming. An ethnographic approach thus allows an analysis of both the ideology and its everyday performance among Dresden’s far-right intellectuals. It sheds light on local and day-to-day political aesthetics as it forefronts “individual activists” as “individuals with real lives” (Ezekiel, 1996: xxxv) and explores how intellectual activists “produce knowledge and learn (...) through involvement in social action” (Choudry, 2015: 8). As it pays attention to how “taken for granted” aspects of “common sense”

and culture become the object of politicization (Eliasoph, 1998: 10; Mazzarella, 2019: 54) it is an ideal method to analyse how the aesthetics of *Kulturnation* are redesigned and performed by far-right intellectuals in Dresden.

Data and Case Choice

The fieldwork was conducted in November 2016, November 2017, between January and July 2018 and in December 2018. It focused on Dresden but was complemented with visits to far-right intellectual institutions and private homes in Schnellroda, Berlin and Hanover. Dresden was chosen as the main site as it is a major German city where far-right street movements, educated bourgeois and intellectual networks and politics are strongly developed and intertwined with national networks. After reunification many West Germans moved to Dresden, some of whom found their place in far-right intellectual networks. Furthermore, Dresden is not only the city of PEGIDA. it is also the only major German city where the AfD (19.8%) emerged as the strongest party in the 2019 European elections (Dresden, 2019). As Saxony's capital and with more than 500,000 inhabitants, Dresden has always been a city with a vibrant intellectual scene that has come to be seen as the embodiment of the German *Kulturnation*.⁵ As such, it is thus representative of a broader emerging politicization of parts of Germany's educated bourgeoisie in East and in West Germany in the context of the polarization of German politics specifically following the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. Through the increasing influence of Dresden's local intellectuals in local, regional and national politics, they have, even if small in number, gained influence in contemporary debates on German nation-building based on the racialization of Islam that is shared by left- and right-leaning white intellectuals in East and West Germany.

The data collected consists of about 40 formal semi-structured and informal unstructured interviews, numerous participant observations and the analysis of documents that either reflect important events that occurred during my fieldwork or are publications that played a role in the intellectual networks. The theory and framing emerged inductively to avoid a priori definitions pre-excluding symbolic contexts of far-right activism. I let my fieldwork guide me to the central spaces, places and aspects of activism. As I already knew about the centrality of

⁵ When the Grüne Gewölbe, one of Dresden's most known museums was robbed in November 2019, culture minister Grütters stated that this robbery "strikes into the heart of our Kulturnation" (Grütters, 2019).

bookshops in the German cultural self-understanding, I decided to make Dagen's bookshop the central access point from where I explored the surrounding circles and activism. It was mainly through Dagen that I gained access to these other circles, many of which are private or semi-private and accessible only via direct contacts. Here I tried to take detailed notes and make observations about the local surroundings, the spaces, as well as the private homes that provided the settings not only for my participant observations, but also my interviews. The interviews were mostly open ended and often developed into more informal conversations. In these interviews I made sure that all participants told me how they came to support the far right, how they were politicized and how they analysed the contemporary political situation. Many interviews were tape recorded, but often the most interesting conversations happened before, after or in more informal contexts. In those cases, I took fieldnotes either during the situations or right afterward.

These interviews and fieldnotes are not limited to far-right intellectuals. To understand the local context, I interviewed representatives of left intellectuals, former AfD-supporters, municipal institutions and opponents to Dagen and the milieu surrounding it. In the selection of the interview data used, special attention was given to life stories. The interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed and I assigned pseudonyms to unknown activists before organizing the data with Nvivo 11 software. Finally, this study also draws on the history of ideas underpinning the local intellectual activism to illuminate the local, national and transnational intellectual genealogies Dresden's local intellectuals draw on, including some of the key thinkers these intellectuals follow, their own intellectual works, as well as the cultural and political tropes that fed into their concrete local political and racial becoming.

The abundance of the data collected cannot be represented. Many conversations and observations will be left out. For clarity, I focus on three circles I gained access to during my fieldwork: Dagen's bookshop and its "Loschwitz circle"; the "Radebeul Circle" situated in the Dresden suburb of Radebeul and grouped around the figure of Sebastian Hennig, a local artist and writer; and finally, the "Pirna Circle" organized by the local entrepreneur Daniel Heimann and located in the town of Pirna, close to Dresden. While all three circles are linked and their individual members visit each other's events and gatherings, they each have their own audiences and aesthetic contexts. The local focus will be complemented by participant observations of events and the analysis of publications at the national level that members of the respective circles recommended or participated in.

The Contribution

In ethnographically exploring Dresden's far-right intellectual milieu this thesis makes four substantive contributions. Empirically, it provides one of the first ethnographic accounts of far-right intellectual activism in Germany and beyond and thus contributes to a growing number of ethnographic studies of the far right and populism in Europe (Pasieka, 2016; Pilkington, 2016; Shoshan, 2016; Thorleifsson, 2017). Methodologically, by analysing the symbolic construction, ideological legitimation and the activist prefiguration of a far-right *Kulturturnation* and white identity, the thesis links the social theory of intellectuals and their role in the aesthetics of political identity formation to the history of ideas and anthropology of local far-right activism. Such an interdisciplinary methodology jointly analyses different but equally important aspects in the local formation of political subjectivities that are usually looked at separately.

Theoretically, this threefold methodological approach contributes to the literature on the role of local intellectuals in the cultural process of nation-building and the way abstract ideas are aesthetically enacted and embedded in the concrete local context (Billig, 1995; Suny and Kennedy, 2001; Zubrzycki, 2017). It complicates political science theories that see populism and intellectualism as diametrically opposed (Mudde, 2016; Müller, 2016; Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 2017) by showing how racialized notions of *Kulturturnation* provide a shared repertoire for cultural elites and populist street activists alike. By contextualizing Dresden's far-right intellectuals as part of a national and local intellectual history it puts the phenomenon of far-right populism into a broader historical context and shows how the local and national history of ideas serves as an important symbolic repertoire in the making of symbolic boundaries.

Finally, and most importantly, my data shows that the far right should not be portrayed as an "irrational other" that is essentially distinct from a supposedly rational vision of national identity. Rather, Dresden's far-right intellectuals make visible and politicize the unmarked racial and irrational logic underpinning mainstream discourses on European national identities. By putting forward this argument the aim of this thesis is not to fundamentally question or confirm existing explanations of the rise of the populist far right, be it cultural (Inglehart and Norris, 2016) or economic (Berezin, 2009; Betz, 1994; Decker, 2004); rather, as an exploratory study, it complements "top-down work by political scientists and sociologists" (Gingrich and Banks, 2006: 10) by focusing on the continuities rather than ruptures between mainstream

politics and the far-right margins (Mudde, 2007: 297), white intellectualism and populism. By doing so it hopes to show the importance of local intellectuals and civil society leaders in the legitimization of far-right racism and populism and to underline the local and intellectual dimension in the rise of the far right.

6. Outline of the Thesis

Each chapter analyses ethnographic material as well as articles, books and publications relevant to the context to explore the different symbolic repertoires and mimetic archives of *Kulturnation* used by Dresden's local intellectuals to make *Kulturnation's* implicit racial being become explicit. The interdependence of *mimesis* and *poiesis* is central to all chapters. However, the first three chapters have a stronger focus on *mimesis*, that aesthetic remembering of past intellectual movements – the pre-war 1920s “conservative revolution”, the West German 1968 social revolution and the East German 1989 revolution – and their aesthetics of *Kulturnation* to provide an alternative vision of *Kulturnation* in the present. Chapter one (From Race to Culture) looks at how drawing on Heidegger's philosophy facilitates the shift from an “old right” to a “new right” by formulating a racialized cultural, instead of biological, understanding of the essence of German nationhood. Embedded in the “conservative revolution”'s *völkisch* tradition, Heidegger's philosophy of aesthetics and *Volk* is used to intellectually vaunt populism through a reconceptualization of a racialized cultural supremacy that resonates with intellectual, well-educated and “populist audiences”. Heidegger emerges here as the ideal type of a locally embedded intellectual fighting for the assertion of a white *Kulturnation*. In chapter two (From Left to Right) I look at how the New Left, its post-structuralist, critical intellectualism and alternative aesthetics provide Dresden's intellectuals with a countercultural language and prefigurative performance of *Kulturnation*. *Kulturnation* here legitimates an alternative, counter-hegemonic nationhood based on alternative spaces and the performance of a white counterculture that is defined against non-white immigrants, Islam and uprooted technocrats. Chapter three (From Bourgeoisie to Bohemia) explores how drawing on individual and social memories of 1980s conservative dissident intellectualism informs the self-vision and performance of today's intellectuals as anti-totalitarian dissidents. These intellectuals put forward an explicitly racialized vision of *Kulturnation* that they argue was preserved by the East German state and has today be re-activated and opposed to a contemporary “leftist” and “multicultural” West Germany. Part one concludes that all three

revolutions provide Dresden's contemporary far-right intellectuals with the cultural aesthetics of resistance and the symbolic repertoire for counter-hegemonic visions of a white nationhood.

In part two, chapters four to six shift the focus from the intellectual use of mimetic archives and symbolic repertoires of the past to the present *poiesis*, that is the transformation and prefiguration of hegemonic aesthetics of a white *Kultur* in the present. The focus here lies on the ways writers, artists, academics and local intellectuals aesthetically prefigure a white nationhood through novels, art and space, as well as race and religion. These chapters include not only the writings and interviews of my informants, but also the enacting, performance and spatial prefiguration of an explicitly racial becoming of *Kultur* in readings, panel debates, private salons, street activism and hiking tours. Chapter four (From an Educated to an Activated Bourgeoisie) looks at how literature is used to narrate and aesthetically prefigure the ideal subject of an activist, white and educated bourgeois self by blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction as well as culture and politics. Chapter five (From Precariousness to Empowerment) looks at the different ways local art and heritage are reinterpreted to construct "authentic" aesthetic experiences of what it means to be a white local citizen by collapsing historical knowledge about and emotional attachments to Dresden and its natural surroundings. Finally, in chapter six (*From Culture to Race*) the *mimesis* and *poiesis* converge in the ethno-poiesis, the racial becoming of a *Kultur* in the context of globalization and a multicultural reality. I examine how the unmarked racist and religious heritage in hegemonic visions of a secular and liberal-democratic aesthetics of *Kultur* enable far-right intellectuals use *Kultur* to simultaneously embrace secularism and faith as well as liberal democracy and biological racism. At the same time, it shows how intellectuals from a Muslim background find a space in *Kultur*'s implicit racial heritage, becoming explicit in the political aesthetics of *Kultur* propagated by Dresden's far right.

The conclusion points out that Dresden's far-right intellectuals exemplify the simultaneously counter-hegemonic and hegemonic character of far-right populism (De Cesari 2019: 16). In their *mimesis* and *poiesis* of a national aesthetics that implicitly equates Germanness to whiteness, they attempt to establish and politically organize an explicit white identity against a hegemonic "post-racist" vision of *Kultur* by defending and intensifying its implicit cultural racism. It shows the links between German *Querdenker* and similar intellectual efforts in other European countries, both east and west. Finally, it argues, that the central flaw of the local and more general responses to the intellectual far right has been the

unwillingness and incapacity to confront shared notions of exclusive white visions of *Kulturnation*.

PART I: *MIMESIS*

CHAPTER 1: From Race to Culture. Legitimizing Cultural Racism with Heidegger⁶

On the night of 8 March 2018, two months after my first encounter with Susanne Dagen at her Loschwitz bookshop, large crowds rushed into the Cultural Palace, Dresden's central venue for cultural events. Built under the socialist regime in the 1960s, threatened by demolition in the 2000s and finally restored and renovated between 2013 and 2017, it was to host a debate on the freedom of speech between two white local writers – Uwe Tellkamp and Durs Grünbein (Grünbein and Tellkamp, 2018). Both had been writing about Loschwitz, the neighbourhood of Dagen's bookshop, and Dresden's urban society from a white, East German perspective before and after reunification. Both gained national and international fame with their work. And both worked with the renowned German *Suhrkamp* publishing house. However, this was about as far their commonalities reached.

During my fieldwork, Tellkamp emerged as the *éminence grise* of Dagen's circle. While often avoiding being in the spotlight or part of Dagen's personal circles himself, his ideas, statements and interviews, some of which with far-right media, were a constant topic among my informants. Dagen had tried for many months to organize a debate involving Tellkamp. The trained physician lives in Loschwitz where he also grew up as part of the conservative and anti-socialist educated bourgeoisie that was marginalized in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) – an experience that he reflected on in his celebrated best-selling novel *Der Turm*. Grünbein, on the other hand, grew up in Hellerau, a neighbourhood in Dresden with a long tradition of international art and known for a more left-leaning liberal bourgeoisie. After reunification he spent time in New York and Los Angeles and now lives in Rome. On this night Tellkamp and Grünbein were each seen to represent a different camp in a process of polarization that has struck Dresden, Germany and Europe as a whole. A polarization, so said the general view, that oscillates between universal humanism and a particularistic preference for “one's own people” over “others”, as Tellkamp puts it in his speech.

The contrast between their opening statements at the beginning of the debate could not have been starker. While Grünbein attempted to formulate an abstract vision of what democracy means, Tellkamp immediately started with an attack against Islam – “This country has a problem with Islam” – arguing that one needs to look at the realities and that Germany

⁶ An earlier version of this chapter was published in the *Journal of Political Ideologies* (Göppfarth, 2020c).

would soon be dominated by Muslims. This should finally be thematized, he argues, “instead of discussing that Kant was a racist”. Tellkamp shows how the critique of Western thought is perceived as an attack on a white identity that would veil the “real threat”, namely Europe’s Islamization. While Grünbein attempts to emphasize the need for a rational debate, Tellkamp’s speech is underpinned by anger and wrath. He ignores the overarching topic and instead criticizes a limitation of the freedom of speech, Germany’s immigration and refugee policy and defends PEGIDA. He skilfully introduces some of the main alternative media of the German far right, but also publications that belong to the canon of the German far right, such as the former Green activist Rolf Peter Sieferle’s *Finis Germania* (Sieferle, 2017), a dystopian vision of Germany’s cultural death in face of mass immigration and a German identity weakened by a feeling of collective guilt.

Thanks to his clear public positioning on the side of PEGIDA and against the liberal left represented by Grünbein, it is in this debate that Tellkamp visibly emerges as a leading intellectual representing Dresden’s educated bourgeois far-right milieu. When I meet Dagen in the bookshop a few days after the event she argues that Tellkamp was the “true intellectual”. “He still has a connection to the *Volk* [the people],” she argues as she serves fresh herbal tea from an old tin pot. As usual for our regular meetings in her bookshop we sit in the back of the shop surrounded by bookcases and the old wooden beams that carry the building that forms part of a traditional Saxonian courthouse built in the 17th and 18th centuries. While sipping on her tea, Dagen claims that, as opposed to Tellkamp, Grünbein is an “individualist and narcissist” who “has lost the connection to the people in Dresden”. “He was in a different sphere,” her husband adds. “He doesn’t even touch the ground anymore, lives in his ivory tower. The debate was supposed to be about facts and not abstract philosophy. Tellkamp simply gave a voice to many citizens and their concerns about Islam and immigration.” To underline Tellkamp’s legitimacy as a “true” representative of the people he adds that the writer was celebrated by the local association of butchers and refers me to an article in support of Tellkamp allegedly written by a welder (Ackner, 2018).

A few weeks later, in an event in Dresden’s Town Hall, organized by the local *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) group that has seats in the municipal parliament, Dagen gives a talk with the title “‘Biased culture’. On politically correct art, exclusion and stigmatisation of political non-conformists in a culture financed by the state”. She underlines her role as a *Querdenker* speaking truth to a hegemonic culture that would be detached from

the people, a “Kulturbetrieb”, a mechanical cultural system, that is “largely based on short-term projects and financing, on action, velocity and profit” and that “neglects and undermines cultural traditions. It is a system where artists are not artists but nomads who run after subsidies and direct their work toward the highest chances of financial support.” This goes together, she argues, with a political elite that is “maybe civilized but not cultivated. Therefore, politicians do not know yesterday. They only live in the here and now and neglect culture as something that transcends political systems.” To that she opposes an understanding of culture based on Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein*. “For me, *Dasein* means following Heidegger and looking back on our local traditions in order to act into the future.” Finishing her talk, she claims: “This means that we have to get back to a balanced understanding of culture that is detached from the moralization in the here and now. This is why I have voted for the AfD.”

The above episodes exemplify how, in my informants’ attempts to intellectually explain and legitimize their politics of and local activism for far-right populism, Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein* as well as his figure of the “locally rooted” intellectual were recurring themes during my fieldwork. This chapter looks at Dresden’s far-right intellectuals and linked intellectual far-right networks to argue that reading Heidegger, invoking his name and philosophy and seeing oneself in his tradition provides the intellectual far right with a symbolic repertoire to redefine the myth of *Kulturnation* as central part of a white identity. It argues that Heidegger’s political aesthetics of *Dasein*, *history*, *care* and *being-towards-death* in the constitution of a *Volk*, his vision of “technocratic modernity” (*Gestell*) and “the Jew” as externalized “threatening others” to the *authentic Dasein* of a *Volk* and his populist concept of “rooted intellectuals” resonate with far-right self-representations, visions of populism and white cultural supremacy as well as cultural racism. By applying a Heideggerian reading to *Kulturnation*, these intellectuals can embrace populism and occlude a *racial* othering through an idiom of *cultural* immediacy. Heidegger’s simultaneous idealization of “the common folk” and his aim to bridge the gap between elites and ordinary people, as well as the “ontological desire for immediacy” that his philosophy represents (Mazzarella 2017: 18), not only feeds into far-right intellectuals’ critique of representation and their efforts to “decontest” populism. It also speaks to the far right’s discursive shift from race to culture. Moreover, it enables these circles to envision Tellkamp and themselves as authentic intellectuals and *Querdenker* rooted in a local white *Dasein* thinking beyond the here and now and who provide the ideas and spaces for an alternative far-right future. Finally, drawing on Heidegger’s philosophy provides the ideational bridge to a pre-war symbolic repertoire of revolution freed from links to Nazism, embodied in a

conservative intellectual “non-conformism” and represented by the anti-modern thinkers of the so-called 1920s “conservative revolution”. Heidegger and his way of doing philosophy emerge thus as an ideal type that far-right intellectuals can mimic. This chapter is the first of three chapters that focus on the *mimesis* of past intellectual movements by contemporary far-right intellectuals. In the first section this chapter looks at Heidegger’s philosophy to understand why it is attractive for the contemporary far right in Dresden and beyond. It then turns to show how Heidegger and his philosophy are being used by far-right intellectuals and populist far-right politicians in Dresden and beyond.

1. Heidegger’s Philosophy as a Symbolic Repertoire for a White Nationalism

Heidegger has emerged as a central thinker for the far right in Germany and beyond. In Russia, Alexander Dugin uses Heidegger’s philosophy to develop a “fourth political theory” overcoming Marxism, fascism and capitalism (Dugin, 2012; Dugin and Gottfried, 2014). In France, Heidegger has been a central influence on the *Nouvelle Droite*’s (Taguieff, 1993) concept of metapolitics. Far-right ideologist Michael O’Meara even argues that Heidegger is the central philosopher for the international far right (O’Meara, 2004; see also Beiner, 2018: 67–69). The central reason for Heidegger’s popularity is the way he conceptualizes a national people as defined by *Dasein*. Given the still predominant definition of European nations as white, it is a concept that resonates with the far right’s discursive shift from biological race to authentic white culture.

Cultural Racism and Authenticity

Dasein literally translates as “being-there”. In Heidegger’s 1927 work *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 2001a), *Dasein* is the central concept of what Heidegger calls existential analytic, the departure point for his “philosophy of being”. For Heidegger, the “there” of *Dasein* constitutes a particular local form of universal human “being” for whom its own being is a question (Beiner, 2018: 75). As human beings we are thrown into a specific “there” at birth. This “there” is defined first and foremost temporally (Heidegger, 2001a: 277) and characterized

by four dimensions: (1) our own *being-towards-death*, the resulting (2) *care* about our individual lives, (3) the *history* into which we are born, and (4) our *being-with-others*.

The first two dimensions define our individual *Dasein* in a non-relational way (Heidegger, 2001a: 308). Individual birth and death, the two poles in between which *Dasein* unfolds, particularize universal human being. While we are *in the world* with others, we are with ourselves only in death. In the face of non-relational death, we become aware of our particular *Dasein*. This makes us *care* about the way in which we choose to *be-towards-death*, our life project. Through this *caring*, things matter to us (Beiner, 2018: 80). *Dasein* becomes *authentic* and manifest without retreating into the banal everyday life Heidegger associates with modern society (Polt, 1999: 23–80). In this society, *authentic Dasein* has to be realized against the “*they*”, or, in other words, the mass of the people who “do things” in an average way. Here, *authentic Dasein* is threatened by the “other” of the “they” (Heidegger, 2001a: 296–298). It is *authentic* in its *being-towards-death* as it faces us with nothingness, makes us step out of the average understanding of the “they” and realize our singular existence. Through this existentialist dimension, Heidegger hopes to overcome *Seinsvergessenheit*, the forgetfulness of being and lack of meaning he sees in modernity.

The other two dimensions through which human being is individuated and takes the shape of an *authentic Dasein* are *history* and *being-with-others* (Polt, 1999: 5–6). Both are relational: being thrown into a particular and local historical “there”, we become part of a history and tradition that preceded us and that embeds us in a *being-with-others*. It is here where Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein* opens itself up for holistic interpretations (Phillips, 2005: 14). *Dasein* can only be understood in relation to the group one is part of. The “there” of our *Dasein* is essentially a *being-with-others*, one’s contemporaries. With them, the “we” stands in a certain history that is understood as “our” past, present and future. In addition to space and time, it is these contemporaries who make the “there” of *Dasein* specific. The historizing of *Dasein* is for Heidegger a “co-historising” (Phillips, 2005: 13). Although Heidegger explicates a communitarian understanding of *Dasein* as the basis for a national peoplehood substantially only in the 1930s, it is already visible in *Being and Time*:

If fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with-others, its historizing is a co-historizing and is determinative for it as destiny. This is how we designate the historizing of the community of a people [Volksgemeinschaft] (...). Dasein’s

fateful destiny in and with its “generation” goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein. (Heidegger, 1962: 436)⁷

In their relational dimension, *history* and *being-with-others* are necessary for *authentic Dasein* (Osborne, 2011: xii) as “Man as historical (...) exists in the togetherness of a historical people” (Heidegger, 2010: 200). In *Dasein*, both individual and collective being are intertwined in multiplicity (Phillips, 2005: 13) as *authentic individual Dasein* depends on its relation to local expressions of the *collective Dasein* of a *Volk* (Steinvorth, 2016: 91).

Heidegger further exposes his concept of the *Volk* in his 1934 lectures “Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language”. Defining for the *Dasein* of a *Volk* means asking the question of “who are we ourselves?” Asking this question, he argues, is timely as the question itself would be different from the central question of liberalism: “who am I myself?” (Heidegger, 2009: 45). When the “we-question” is asked a “we” is presupposed whose essence Heidegger sees defined by the *Dasein* as a *Volk*. The *Dasein* of a *Volk* is grounded in a history defined by the decision to be a *Volk* and manifested and formed politically in the figure of the state (Heinz, 2013: 76). By acting determinately together as a *Volk*, the “we” draws on a common mandate derived from the past “beingness” and tradition of the *Volk*. This tradition is handed down onto the present “we” to “labour” for a collective mission in the future (Heidegger, 2009: 109, 129–131). Here, the *Volk*, as a whole, *cares* about its being in the future. Through labouring as a *Volk* in the here and now, history is prefigured, the *Dasein* of the *Volk* re-realized and manifested.

This human-made temporality of *Volk* and *Dasein* is a human phenomenon that goes, as Heidegger claims, beyond the modern distinction between subject and object, individual and society. The subject and the object have an ontic relationship in *Dasein* overlooked by the shallowness of modern thinking (Beiner, 2018: 87), where the external world is perceived as present-at-hand, as objectively alterable by mankind – a thinking Heidegger sees at the origin of technology and liberalism (Heidegger, 2009: 121, 2013: 52). He claims, in opposing liberalism’s individualism, that “the destiny of a people has to be understood in distinctively historical terms” (Heidegger, 2013: 5). Contrary to Nazism, Heidegger thus envisions German nationhood not in biologically racial terms (Phillips, 2005: 15) but in adhering to a “spiritual” or cultural racism that defines national *Dasein* through its particular history or culture (Derrida,

⁷ For this quote I chose to use a different *Being and Time* edition as the translation better conveys the original German text.

1987; O'Brien, 2015: 89) or, in other words, as a *Kulturnation*. Developed in the context of a perceived national crisis of identity in the Weimar Republic, *Dasein* can be interpreted as a concept that focuses on forming a united national consciousness through a “jargon of authenticity” that, as Adorno argued in his critique of existentialism, aesthetically sublimates the traditional and the everyday of ordinary people through language mystifying rather than critically assessing power relations (Adorno, 2003).

Heidegger's thinking has here to be contextualized as embedded in an ethnocentric *völkisch* tradition that was central to the thinkers of the 1920s' “conservative revolution”. The *völkisch* vision links biology, culture and religion to define “the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*)” and its racial identity (Judaken, 2018: 63). For Heidegger as for the Nazis, “the Jew” represented a racialized “other”, embodying liberalism, capitalist modernity and rationalism that was “contaminating” the *Volk*; Heidegger styled himself as an authentic thinker “rooted in our native soil” (Heidegger quoted in Judaken, 2018: 63–64). The lack and even critique of biological racism in Heidegger has often been used in defence of Heidegger's philosophy (Young, 1997). As in the scholarship on the far right, the focus on biological racism has veiled the often more acceptable cultural racism that was just as central to Nazism as biologist ideas of racial purity and eugenics (Bernasconi, 2000; Sikka, 2003: 87–88) and “legitimated Nazi state policy on the Jewish question” (Judaken, 2018: 66).

Today, the far right is mainly perceived as populist and thus anti-intellectual. At the same time, biological racism is equated to Nazism and totalitarianism. In this discursive context it is precisely the lack of biological racism in Heidegger's thought that turns him into the embodiment of a far-right ideal of an “authentic intellectual” and his culturalist philosophy provides an ideal symbolic repertoire for a construction of an essential whiteness based not on biology but on culture. Drawing on Heidegger permits the contemporary far right to both distance themselves from Nazism and simultaneously reassert racialized differences in the name of culture and religion. In Heidegger's view the predominant bearer of the superior culture was the German people whose spiritual model of being is opposed to Anglo-Saxon capitalism, Russian communism and an uprooted Jewish cosmopolitanism, all of which he sees as the expression of a technocratic modernity threatening authentic *Dasein*. While whiteness is only implicit in Heidegger's ethnocentrism, contemporary far-right intellectuals use Heidegger's philosophy of *Dasein* for the construction of a white cultural identity and ethnopluralism that insists on the protection of an alleged cultural and ethnic homogeneity. Heidegger can be seen as the far right's central pre-thinker of a contemporary far-right cultural

racism, ethnopluralism and white supremacy that resonates with implicitly racialized concepts of culture that reach into the mainstream and are entangled with notions of *Kulturnation*.

Heidegger's "Other"

To essentialize a spiritual *Dasein*, Heidegger not only draws on rural, traditional and popular aesthetics, he also paints the picture of an existential threat to the *Kulturnation* from within (liberalism, Jews) and without (the universalism of modern technology). Through his shift of focus to the collective level of *Dasein* (Bennington, 2016: 220; Feldman, 2005: 182), Heidegger moves the idea of the “they” from the societal to the inter- or transnational level that takes the shape of a menacing “uniform organization of reified humanity” (Phillips, 2005: 32). The “other” is what threatens the *Dasein* of a *Volk* – universalism and a technological understanding of the world – an externalization of the inauthentic interior other as “system” or imposed “structures”.

While it is a matter of debate whether *Being and Time* is essentially political (Phillips, 2005: 13) or apolitical (Janicaud, 1996: 37–41), Heidegger’s 1930s lectures explicitly reject modernity and liberalism. Both, he argues, undermine the essence of *Dasein* through the detachment from traditional local bonds, community, dogmas and nature (Heidegger, 2009: 121). For a “genuine revolution of the whole of being” liberalism and its “shallow” conception of being has to be fought (Heidegger, 2009: 126). For Heidegger, a society cannot emerge out of a rational association of individuals, only a community of a *Volk* based on a historically handed-down determination to act together and to *care* about one’s own existence. Through *caring* in the face of decline, the *Volk* continues to be a category of *authentic Dasein* and the defining principle of the selfhood of human being (Heidegger, 2009: 139). Through its existentialism, *Dasein* is *authentic* and becomes an “insurrection against nothingness” (Heidegger quoted in Beiner, 2018: 76), the same nothingness many thinkers of the “conservative revolution” detected in modern liberal society.

In the 1930s, Heidegger sees this threat in American capitalism and Russian/Asian communism menacing Germany, the “most metaphysical of nations” (Heidegger, 1961: 31–32). For Heidegger, “Russia and America are the same (...) dreary technological frenzy” (Heidegger, 1961: 37–38). He sees in both the final political expression of the metaphysics of modernity carrying the telos of modern enlightenment in the shape of a universalism, a planetary state that subjugates the particular national *Dasein*. Heidegger’s initial support for

National Socialism (NS) arose from the hope that it would awaken the spiritual force to protect the authentic *Dasein* of Germany and Europe against the homogenizing imperial forces of America and Russia (Di Cesare, 2000: 116; Kisiel, 2001: 228; Phillips, 2005: 32). At the end, Heidegger fears, stands a “bloodless universalism” (O’Brien, 2015: 78–79) that perceives the world as a resource or “standing-reserve”, present-at-hand to be exploited and mastered by humanity (Heidegger, 1977: 8), an end of national historicity and the death of *authentic* national *Dasein* (O’Brien, 2015: 70). The world is understood as a resource to be exploited with modern technology, whose essence Heidegger calls *Gestell*.⁸ Through *Gestell*, the cultivation and revelation (*aletheia*) of the world happens through a purely technological and thus rational appreciation of the world that neglects traditional, spiritual forms (Heidegger, 1962: 20, 1977: 9; O’Brien, 2015: 24) and hollows out the *authentic Dasein* of the *Volk*. The result is a nihilistic *Seinsvergessenheit*, the forgetting of historical being of peoples, and a “debased technocratic globalism” (O’Brien, 2015: 70). In the face of this existential threat, Heidegger hopes the *Volk* will realize its *being-towards-death*, become aware of its non-relational difference and be *carefully* assertive about its future *Dasein* (Phillips, 2005: 3).

Authentic Intellectuals and Prefiguration

Deeply linked to his conception of authentic being and its “other” is Heidegger’s concept of the intellectual. He opposes a liberal notion of a rational intellectual and warns against the rise of allegedly uprooted bureaucrats. To be authentic, intellectuals need to be “closer to being” than these “ordinary intellectuals” (Beiner, 2018: 104). Heidegger (2012: 76) defines “future ones” as creators and deciders, thinkers and artists with the spiritual access to the mystery of being as the true intellectuals whose capacity to both connect to the historicity of *Dasein* and to think ahead of the others he sees necessary to overcome modern nihilism (Bennington, 2016: 213–222). He perceives them, and himself, at the same level as peasants and soldiers, both of which he equally believes to have a direct access to being (Beiner, 2018: 104). Here, Heidegger’s philosophy has a populist dimension, idealizing the “common folk”, fascinated with mass movements (Beiner, 2018: 74, footnote 19) and himself living the principle of a local philosopher expressing and drawing on traditions of local peoplehood. Through his vision of “authentic” intellectuals, Heidegger envisions his philosophy as a prepolitical aesthetics that

⁸ Heidegger later dropped the reading of technology as death of authenticity (e.g. Feenberger, 2005).

underpin an alternative “way of life”. This way of life is not only prefigured in his philosophy but also through his gathering of followers around him and strongly resonated with the building of alternative communities in the 1920s youth and reform movements (Faye, 2018: 279). Heidegger’s ideal intellectual thus draws on traditional forms of peoplehood to prefigure alternative forms of collective being through a different lifestyle – a vision that strongly resonates with the self-perception of Dresden’s far-right intellectual milieu in Dresden.

2. Talking Heidegger, Meaning Race, Prefiguring the White *Kultur*nation

Central to Heidegger’s philosophy is his aim to establish a concept of “being” based on everyday life, local “rootedness” and “the people”. Heidegger develops a cultural racism that goes beyond a conventional chauvinistic nationalism driven by power and belief in supremacy of force, elevating the *Volk* to a metaphysical entity and the expression of a cultural supremacy (Beiner, 2018: 96). By grounding a new beginning in the *Dasein* of the German people, he aims to set the foundation to overcome the nihilism of modernity (Beiner, 2018: 98) and to protect Europe from the American and Asian/Russian threat of technology, a cosmopolitanism represented by the enemy figure of “the Jew” and a meaningless liberalism (Heidegger, 2006: 331).

Heidegger’s attempt to conceive a mythical vision of cultural *Dasein* and nationhood codes and aesthetically occludes a racial distinction that is rethought primarily as a cultural identity. In doing so, Heidegger configures a myth of *Kultur*nation that should not be interpreted as an attempt to clad his crude racism in a language of philosophy (Faye, 2012, 2018). Rather, by rethinking race as a cultural identity, Heidegger lays bare the entanglements of European notions of cultural nationhood with notions of white supremacy. Heidegger, in fact, criticizes a liberal-rational *biological* racism as “antiquated” (Heidegger, 2001b: 178) and proposes instead to essentialize difference on the basis of *Dasein*, a particular *cultural* being in the world whose essence can be formed not by asking the abstract Kantian question of “what” but rather the concrete question “who are we” as a people (Faye, 2018: 276). He not only turns around liberal claims of universalism when he claims that an essential particularity is universally human and exemplified in his notion of *Dasein*; echoing the *völkisch* tradition, he also embraces race not as a biological, but a cultural identity that has to be defined and formed aesthetically by rooted intellectuals embedded in an organically grown culture. Thus, what he

calls a “metapolitical question” of defining a “historical people” (Faye, 2018: 283) is not different from what cultural sociology defines as the pre-political question of “who is who” that precedes the political question of “who gets what” (see introduction). Heidegger thus makes a philosophical argument for “symbolic boundary-making” to aesthetically form a coherent, homogenous and, implicitly, white nation.

Today, his concept of metapolitics, of a pre-political aesthetic and cultural forming of a national essence, has come to be the central concept of the post-war far right and its claim to have moved from an old to a “new right”, from race to culture (Lehnert, 2015). Heidegger’s ideal type of a locally rooted intellectual whose philosophy is designed not only by pre-thinking alternative visions of meaningful national *Dasein*, but also by prefiguring as an alternative way of life, underpins the self-conception of far-right intellectual milieus.

3. Imagining a White *Dasein*

The aesthetics of an alternative, locally rooted intellectual lifestyle is probably most explicitly lived by Götz Kubitschek and his *Institut für Staatspolitik* (IfS). Situated in the East German state *Sachsen-Anhalt* in an old manor in the tiny village of Schnellroda, the IfS regularly brings AfD elites, far-right activists and supporters together in so-called academies and congresses. The IfS is part of a well-established far-right intellectual network that reaches back to Armin Mohler, one of the protagonists of the post-war intellectual radical right. Like Dagen’s bookshop, the manor has the aura of a green alternative space. I first visit Schnellroda for a two-day congress in November 2016, driving there myself as it is hard to access the village without a car. Schnellroda is only two hours away from my own hometown, which is located in the same state. On my way I pass the many seemingly deserted villages, many of which are scattered with churches and houses that appear abandoned.

As I arrive a large number of Mercedes, BMWs and Audis have already parked around the local inn in which the congress will take place. Upon arrival one can sit down in the half-timbered building that houses the *Antaios* publishing house that is linked to the IfS. Here, early arrivals can enjoy homemade cakes, look at an exhibition on the 1920s “conservative revolution” or walk through the library exhibiting all the books published by *Antaios*. I briefly talk to an older man, who, like me, seems lost. He came from southwest Germany for the congress because he was unhappy with Merkel’s refugee policy. We don’t get much further in

our conversation as people start moving to the congress venue. While walking from the publishing house to the inn on the opposite site of the street I start talking to two young law students from Berlin who complain that Berlin is not German anymore. “You cannot find any German food anymore. There is Döner Kebabs everywhere. So it is really refreshing to be here in the countryside. Here Germany is still German”, say one, while his friend confirms “Yes, there are basically no Turks here.” In this short conversation the entanglement of culture, here represented by “German food” and a race, becomes apparent. Against the “multicultural” and “colourful” Berlin, Schnellroda emerges as a white intellectual space. During the different presentations in the beerhall-like room that is decorated with depictions of rural life, one can order beer and, later, be served traditional German food.

From Schnellroda, Kubitschek has developed networks linking Dresden’s PEGIDA movement to leading AfD politicians and local far-right milieus such as Dagen’s bookshop in Dresden. Dagen and Kubitschek are in regular contact and have collaborated in the organization of the Tellkamp-Grünbein debate. Central actors of the Schnellroda milieu regularly come to Dagen’s bookshop and other local intellectual circles to present their books and ideas. Together with Kubitschek’s *Antaios* publishing house, Dagen has started the so-called Edition Buchhaus Loschwitz, which includes a publication series called “Exile” – a project that is envisioned as “the art of refuge as well as the refuge of art in times of increasing political hostilities” and as opening up “spaces of freedom, thought and dreams” (Loschwitz, 2020). Together with Dagen, Ellen Kositzka, Kubitschek’s wife, has started the YouTube channel *Aufgeblättert, Zugeschlagen – Mit Rechten Reden* that is produced with the help of Kubitschek’s network *Ein Prozent*. In the YouTube videos, Dagen and Kositzka invite authors and intellectuals to discuss novels and books and their value for the “camp of the right” while drinking local wine and being surrounded by the books in Dagen’s bookshop.

As for Dagen, Heidegger represents an ideal intellectual for Schnellroda’s intellectual milieu. In the *Staatspolitisches Handbuch* on far-right ‘Masterminds’, published by the Schnellroda-based IfS, Heidegger is presented as having a “direct ... influence on the intellectual Right” as his ideas are “providing arguments in the metapolitical debate” (Lehnert and Weißmann, 2012: 7). The IfS is not a think tank in the classic sense as it is not policy-producing but rather culture-producing, aimed at the German cultural *Dasein* (Kositzka and Kubitschek, 2015). The idea of a particular German *Dasein* is also a regular subject of articles in the monthly IfS journal *Sezession* and other publications by the IfS or the New Right in general. Most authors and leading figures in the IfS have a background in philosophy, history

or cultural studies, some with direct links to Heidegger or professors such as Ernst Nolte, who himself was a student of Heidegger.

This also holds true for the authors of the *Sezession*'s Heidegger issue (Figure 19). Published in February 2015 (Institut für Staatspolitik, 2015) when the PEGIDA movement reached its climax, the spectrum of issue's authors reaches from historian Ernst Nolte (internationally known for his work on fascism) (Nolte, 1969) to the leader of the Identitarian Movement, Martin Sellner. The journal mirrors the actual diversity of far-right intellectuals and reflects how they use Heidegger and his philosophy to envision themselves as local intellectuals, embracing local notions of white culture. The different contributions focus on Heidegger and the way he is useful for "the camp of the right", as Sellner puts it (Sellner, 2017).



Figure 19: Photo of *Sezession*'s Heidegger issue (photo by the author).

In the introduction to the *Sezession* Heidegger issue (Institut für Staatspolitik, 2015: 1), Kubitschek begins with a Heideggerian interpretation of LEGIDA (Leipzig variant of PEGIDA). Looking back at a speech he gave in front of protesters (Kubitschek, 2015), he hopes that his words were able to put across the "meaningful history of our people ... in whose heritage we stand". Referring to history, he tried to "include the whole *Volk* in our *caring*" (emphasis added). A common historical *Dasein* is presented as the common basis for a *collective being*, even one with those who are assumed opponents of the GNR. In his eyes, the protesters symbolize the existence of the German *Volk* by expressing their "care" about the

German future. They represent a part of the *Volk* that “still knows about itself”, is aware of German *Dasein* and embodies it through its presence on the street.

Kubitschek frames the German *Volk* in the Heideggerian terms of history, care and *Dasein*—a conceptualization inclusive only to all those who share a white national German historical heritage. For Kubitschek, a “meaningful [German] history” mobilizes the people as the “German *Volk*” who expresses its caring about its *Dasein* through protest in a time when the German *Volk* is “first and foremost a form that is hollowed out, forced into the *Gestell*” (Institut für Staatspolitik, 2015: 1). Heidegger defines the *Dasein* of the people in historical terms. The care about this *Dasein* expresses itself in the anxiety about a “national death” in the face of *Gestell*, globalization and Islamization that takes the place of Heidegger’s “Jewish contamination”.⁹ In Heidegger’s terms, by caring about the possibility of the nation’s non-relational death, the people becomes aware of itself as a collective agent in history.

Even if this short introduction is not an in-depth analysis of Heidegger’s philosophy, it shows how his vernacular notions are used by Kubitschek to make sense of and legitimize the protests on the street. The accuracy of the application of Heidegger to LEGIDA is of secondary importance, as the aim, the legitimization of a white nationalist movement and its alternative illicit political language through a great philosopher, is what is central here. Basing his nationalism on the morally acceptable, but through its dependence on historical legacy’s still exclusive principle of national history, Kubitschek attempts to legitimize illicit forms of nationalism. He argues that a belief in a common historical mission leads to the belief in a common fate necessary to resist transnational homogenization and the meaningless *Gestell*, or, in more mundane terms, “the system”. In the rational reading of being that he, and Heidegger, see at work in modernity, history has no place, as its meaningfulness is lost in a purely economic conception of the world (Institut für Staatspolitik, 2015: 29).

In another article in the same issue, Martin Sellner, philosophy student and leader of the Identitarian Movement,¹⁰ describes his “path of thinking to Heidegger” (Institut für Staatspolitik, 2015: 8–13). He sees Heidegger as “essential for a real understanding of our time and the mission of our camp”, a “spiritual King” whose concept of *Dasein* is the “only, true and last enemy” of the “project of the planetary human state”, “imperialistic rationality” and

⁹ Anticipating a national cultural death is common in the German New Right and reflected in the titles of books such as Sarrazin’s *Germany Abolishes Itself* (Sarrazin, 2010) and Rolf Peter Sieferle’s *Finis Germania* (Sieferle, 2017).

¹⁰ The Identitarian Movement was formed around 2002 and can be considered the New Right’s youth movement. It is present in several European countries and connected in a transnational network (for an analysis of the Identitarian Movement, see Bruns, 2016; Zúquete, 2018).

“totalitarian enlightenment” (Sellner, 2015). Heidegger is a mastermind because his revolutionary thinking was not only directed against the “old bourgeois-metaphysical intellectualism” that the mandarins also opposed (Ringer, 1969), but also against the racist biologism and anti-Semitism of Nazism:

It [Heidegger's philosophy] questions all modes of nationalism ... and fascism as well as all conservative, religious or traditionalist ideas. ... The nationalist brotherhood wars, the biologic misconceptions of the ethnos, the fascist excess of statehood, the Führer cult, the megalomania, the ecstatic political religions ... and last but not least the enterprise ... to eliminate the alienation with modernity through the extermination of the biological Jew as modernity's 'demon'—all this appears ... as the expression of the forgetting and the oppression of the questions of being and truth which naturally leads to a “loss of centre”, and to a spiritual and political extremism. (Institut für Staatspolitik, 2015: 12)

As this quote shows, the seemingly post-racial and anti-NS aspect of Heideggerian philosophy is used to legitimize the far right's white nationalism against claims of racism or closeness to NS. It even opens itself up to leftist anti-capitalism as, according to Sellner, Heidegger's insistence on *Dasein* is the only way to resist a planetary capitalism destroying “authentic *Dasein*”. Modern progress eradicates these “different questionings and revelations of being” through its “ever more progressive exploitation and exploration of being” (Institut für Staatspolitik, 2015: 9).

Referring to Heidegger, Sellner summons the threat of a universal global state as a technocratic *Gestell* leading to the end of history and the particular historical *Dasein* of peoples. He celebrates the diversity of cultures, only to use Heidegger to argue that this cultural diversity is under threat. As he states, “*Dasein* is, in its questioning for its mode and being always rooted in a concrete ethno-cultural soil ... a community and a world of language” (Institut für Staatspolitik, 2015: 10). Sellner advocates asking “the Heideggerian question of ... *Dasein*” that “calls for a new fathoming of *Heimat*, *Volk*, Nation and Europe” and for the re-funding of nationalism in a *seinsgeschichtlich* (being-historical) way that deconstructs the *Gestell* of ‘the postmodern “End of History”’ (Institut für Staatspolitik, 2015: 12).

The aim is to (re)legitimize the currently questionable idea of an exclusive racial nationalism by wrapping it in Heideggerian terminology of history and linking it to the far right's concept of ethnopluralism of a coexistence of ethnoculturally homogeneous but globally diverse peoples (Gessenharter, 1989: 40, 2002: 194). Sellner uses the “prevailing vocabulary” of liberalism (such as “diversity” or “pluralism”) (Beiner, 1992: 145) to change the established

political language from within. He shows “that despite contrary appearances a number of favourable terms can be applied as apt descriptions of [one’s] own apparently questionable behaviour” (Skinner, 2002: 135).

One can object to such a reading as wrong or contradictory, especially because Heidegger rejects biological racism. Moreover, Heidegger did not see all cultures as equal, but rather he saw Germany as the privileged expression of *Dasein* that was to save Europe from its spiritual decline. However, the essence of both ethnopluralism and Heidegger’s philosophy forms the conviction that the particular *Dasein* is threatened by planetary *Gestell*. As Sellner argues in a different article for *Sezession*, Heidegger’s thinking is a “gatekeeper against the imperialistic reason and the totalitarian enlightenment” that threatens the “authenticity” of things, humans, people and cultures (Sellner, 2015: 2–3).

Another central author of Schnellroda’s intellectual milieu is Martin Lichtmesz. He has been influential through contributions to *Sezession* as well as through a number of books published with Antaios. *Can Only a God Save Us?* is one of these books. Its title refers directly to Heidegger’s claim uttered in the famous 1966 *Spiegel* interview (Heidegger, 1976). Lichtmesz dedicated a whole chapter to Heidegger (Lichtmesz, 2014: 97–122), focusing on his late philosophy and specifically his framing of modernity as culminating in an era where “science and technology” have “replaced God” and been given “God-like status” (Lichtmesz, 2014: 97–98). For Lichtmesz, this belief has become planetary, total and quasi-sacral, leading to “disenchantment” and “the vanishing of the mysterious, the mythical, the miraculous, the sacral, the numinous—all those irrational sources” that nurture life (Lichtmesz, 2014: 98). These sources, however, are necessary to limit a “moral of the feasible” and a belief that “everything functions” (Lichtmesz, 2014: 98). Appreciating human being through a purely technological appreciation of the world would make humanity live in a *Gestell*, the uprooting of human life based on a meaningless shaping of the planet through technology. More than that, the idea of the *Gestell*, Lichtmesz suggests, represents a domination of human *Dasein* through a technology that has developed its own force. He follows Heidegger’s interpretation of the Holocaust by arguing that such a technology would eventually lead to catastrophes such as Auschwitz and the nuclear bomb as symbols for a planetary nihilism (Heidegger, 1977). According to Lichtmesz, “all essential and great has only developed out of the fact that the human being had a *Heimat* and was rooted in tradition” (Lichtmesz, 2014: 122).

Yet, Schnellroda and the IfS are not the only spaces of far-right intellectualism. Another “hub” is Berlin and the so-called Library of Conservatism (*Bibliothek des Konservatismus*

(BdK)). Situated in Berlin's now bourgeois and formerly left alternative neighbourhood of Charlottenburg, the BdK lies close to former central places of West German intellectual New Left activism in the 1960s and 1970s. Alongside the more alternative activism of the IfS, the BdK has developed into a bourgeois platform bringing together widely accepted German politicians and political scientists, such as Christian Democrat Union (CDU) member Wolfgang Bosbach (Bosbach, 2014) and Werner Patzelt (Patzelt, 2018), representatives of CDU's radical right *Werte Union*, AfD politicians and far-right intellectuals.

In 2017 I attended a lecture by the Finnish literary scholar Tarmo Kunnas on his book *Fascination of an Illusion: European Intelligentsia and the Fascist Temptation 1919–1945* (Kunnas, 2017b) on the main European figures of the “conservative revolution”.¹¹ Despite the cleavages between the more “populist” Schnellroda and the more “bourgeois” BdK, I see some faces I had seen in Schnellroda, such as the students from Munich who praised Schnellroda's rural, authentic German character. Yet, the atmosphere in the BdK is more formal and almost posh. Many in the audience are dressed in tweed jackets similar to the ones the AfD's former leader Alexander Gauland prefers to wear to underline his bourgeois background. The speakers stand in front of a massive bookcase representing the large library attached to the BdK and aesthetically underlining the educated bourgeois character of the BdK.

In his presentation, Kunnas focuses on Heidegger and the connection of his notion of politics and *Dasein*. According to Kunnas, Heidegger sees the Greek *polis* as the “basis for being human. The idea of the polis is the ‘there’ of *Dasein*”, the “historical site out of which *Dasein* is feeding itself”. This rootedness in a *polis*, Kunnas argues, and “direct access to being (...) is the only way authenticity could be reached”. For Kunnas, Heidegger provides an important definition of politics not restricted to parties and the state, but as a “great politics”, including culture and art. He states that Heidegger was part of a whole range of conservative intellectuals who hoped that the convergence of the people, politics and “artistic politics” would help to lead to a European renaissance and resistance to the “decline of the European culture in materialism and plutocracy”. The nation as a part of great politics is here seen as a sort of spiritual platform bringing together elites and the people. Even if Kunnas presents the “conservative revolution” as a phenomenon of the past, the discussion following his presentation makes clear that his presentation is used as a tool to analyse the present. Most comments point to a perceived current decline of Europe and mention that looking back at the

¹¹ Summary available online (Kunnas, 2017a). I attended the presentation on 25 November 2017. The quotes are taken from my notes.

“conservative revolution” and Heidegger would be a useful way to face the “contemporary cultural crisis”. One older man emphatically states “Those thinkers realized that Europe was dying back then. Who is seeing this today? Surely not our cultureless politicians.” How broad the range of far-right politics is in the BdK and its international network is shown by the fact that Kunnas presented the same book to the fascist Casa Pound in Italy only a few weeks earlier (Kunnas, 2015).

Heidegger’s conception of intellectualism and cultural nationhood also drives much of the intellectual work of Dresden’s far-right intellectual milieu. Frank Böckelmann is one of the regular participants in Dagen’s salon. He is the editor and publisher of the intellectual Dresden-based magazine *Tumult* in which one can find regular references to Heidegger. For example, in a short piece in *Tumult* on the 2017 German elections, Lorenz Jäger, sociologist, journalist and former representative of the Marxist Frankfurt School, quotes Heidegger’s alleged last handwritten words: “What is needed is a reflection if and how in the era of a technological homogenous world civilisation a homeland can exist.” According to Jäger, the idea of such an era represents the “madness that today enjoys highest recognition” by the mainstream (Jäger, 2017: 7). This reading of Heidegger points to a view of the world undermining *Dasein*, and similar to that of Lichtmesz and Sellner.

In *Tumult*, Heidegger is also used to read the so-called migration crisis. In an article from 2018 (Pevensie, 2018) an author with the pseudonym Edmund Pevensie presents Heidegger as a “critic of modernity” “who has assessed most thoroughly the being of a planetary egalitarianism”. This egalitarianism is seen as driving migration policymaking as a manifestation of the *Gestell* as it would lead to an “*Entvolkung*”, turning meaningful and grown communities into a mere population by dissolving “old cultural spaces and the mixing of ethnicities for the production of a world society” shaped by “inhibited capital flows”. Using a Heideggerian lens the article sees uprooted globalist intellectuals as one of the core drivers of such a development. Quoting Heidegger’s essay *Die Zeit des Weltbildes*, Pevensie describes contemporary intellectuals as “researchers” who are “essentially technicians”. Instead of culture, the *Betrieb* of science replaced intellectuals with a rational “researcher”, “a different sort of human being”. For the researcher, bookshops and libraries lose importance: “The researcher does not need a library at home anymore. He is always travelling, presenting and informing himself on conferences and congresses.” The author sees this “anti-intellectual” figure as the essential opponent in an “ongoing war” that is not defined by economic questions but by the attack on the “metaphysical and religious roots of the occident”. *Tumult* also

dedicated a large part of a 2015 publication to Heidegger, claiming that his black notebooks do not affect his standing as a central European thinker and also including memories of Nolte's time as a student of Heidegger (Nolte, 2015). Other articles aim to relegitimize Heidegger in Germany, emphasizing his status as a "master thinker and most influential philosopher of the 20th century" in the US, Japan and France (Gerke, 2015).

Yet, Heidegger does not only appear in Dresden's intellectual far-right publications. In one of my many conversations with Michael Bormann, Dagen's husband and co-owner of the bookshop, he refers to an interview with the French New Right thinker Alain de Benoist discussing Heidegger in the far-right populist magazine *Compact*. In the interview Heidegger's terminology is used to justify calls for more national sovereignty to "overcome the currently widespread idea of historylessness (*Geschichtslosigkeit*)" and rule of technology in the shape of a global "digital totalitarianism" (Compact, 2014). Globalization is portrayed as a spread of "individualism, the religion of human rights, the pre-eminence of self-interests, the regression of all values for the profit of the market society and thus the permanent spread of the capitalist *Gestell*" (Compact, 2018).

Bormann argues that Benoist shows, using Heidegger, that there is something more profound that underpins human *Dasein* and that is independent from political systems, fast-paced globalization and short-term profit-making. Applying De Benoist and Heidegger to the local situation in Dresden and the experience of the rapid regime change in 1989, Bormann argues:

This shift of political systems is maybe one reason why many people are thinking again about such things as family and Heimat. People feel that these things cannot possibly be turned off like that. These feelings will not just go away. So when the GDR broke down most of the middle administration level, these bureaucrats, they were all gone! They all lost their jobs, and then you realise "ok, all this works only as long as the system is there". These systems are not here for eternity. So you start looking for things that have persisted change, that have survived five, six, seven changes of systems. Timeless values or what I would call prepolitical values and spaces. This is where one should dwell. With this I mean friends and friendship that you cherish, a certain decency, a certain culture, etc. And I think this is what many realise now. They are searching for a deeper identity and do not just want to earn money and make a career.

Bormann counterposes *Heimat*, family and cultural identity, to an externalized political system. With Heidegger, notions of family, familiarity, community and culture are portrayed

as inner and timeless values of essential difference threatened by a globalizing system, acceleration and homogenization.

4. Reaching Broader Audiences

Framing the contemporary world through Heidegger is not limited to far-right intellectual circles but can be used by far-right protagonists more widely to legitimize or ‘decontest’¹² a white nationalism. The examples above show that intellectuals engage both intensively and sporadically with Heidegger’s thought. They draw on his philosophy as one source to frame their worldview and define what a nation and a *Volk* is. Here Heideggerianism is attractive through its rejection of liberalism, its spiritual-historical understanding of the nation, its embracing of populism and an aesthetic understanding of politics as a pre-political way of life.

The dense networks between intellectuals and AfD politicians have led to the introduction of Heideggerian concepts in the AfD’s populist notions of *Kulturnation*. By using Heidegger to design *Kulturnation* and its authentic intellectual representatives, far right intellectuals try to appeal to educated bourgeois audiences and voters who themselves are dissatisfied with contemporary politics. Elite support is a declared goal of the far right and seen as necessary and even more important than reaching mass support in order to bring about substantial social change through metapolitics.¹³

Michael Klonovsky is a good example of the entanglement of far-right intellectualism and AfD populism. His popular blog *Acta Diurna* is a central reference in GNR circles. He was adviser to Frauke Petry, former leader of the AfD, and assistant of Alexander Gauland, who has led the party together with Jörg Meuthen from 2017 to 2019. On his blog, Klonovsky calls Heidegger’s *Being and Time* “one of my favourite books” before he quotes his favourite review of *Being and Time* by a reader on Amazon who argues that Heidegger’s work is a masterpiece pushing the limits of human intelligence (Klonovsky, 2017). In another blog post Klonovsky

¹² According to Freedén’s morphological approach to ideologies, “decontestation” is central to all ideologies and describes the attempt “to end the inevitable contention over concepts by decontesting them” (Freedén, 2003: 54).

¹³ Metapolitics is a concept elaborated by the French NR intellectual Alain de Benoist, which draws on Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony (Taguieff, 1993: 7–8). The focus of metapolitics is the realm of culture, which is seen as the “‘infrastructural’ basis of both civil society and the state” (O’Meara, 2004: 65). Heidegger has used the term metapolitics in his earliest black notebooks to name what he hopes to be the “wholly other” that is to follow the end of traditional philosophy and metaphysics (Heidegger, 2016: 85; Rosenstock, 2017: 116, footnote 77).

quotes Heidegger's disciple Ernst Nolte with the hope that "our descendants don't fully dissolve in what (...) Heidegger has called the world civilisation", here clearly referring to a white European civilization (Klonovsky, 2016). Although this use of Heidegger's terms remains superficial, the explicit reference to him is nevertheless a means of legitimization, a sign of cultivation and *Bildung*. It equally shows that Heidegger's work has had an impact on central figures at the intersection of far-right intellectualism and AfD populism and that Heideggerianism is a common reference point of the far right's alternative political language rooted in a national and local integralism and philosophically mediating the immediacy of peoplehood.

But even at the AfD level, a deeper engagement with Heidegger can be observed. One of the most direct links between the New Right and the AfD leadership is Marc Jongen, former assistant to the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk and now MP responsible for the AfD's cultural politics. Jongen has presented a paper entitled "Migration and *Thymos*-Training" in the IfS (Jongen, 2017b) and was also a guest at the BdK (Jongen, 2017a: 8). Initially seen as the AfD's party philosopher, his importance in the GNR and the AfD has been increasingly marginalized by the actors outlined above. Nevertheless, Jongen is another example of the import of Heideggerianism into the AfD's political language.

Jongen's philosophy is strongly influenced by Heidegger. His PhD is centred around the question of how to "reattribute exigent meaning to the notion of tradition, without falling behind the epochal lections of modernity?" (Jongen, 2009: 1). Following Heidegger and the "conservative revolution", Jongen aims for a spiritual renewal in a meaningless present in order to overcome "the modern phantasm of linear progress" (Jongen, 2009: 1). Relying on Heidegger's notion of *aletheia*, he calls for an end to this time of "oblivion of being" by uncovering the truth of history and thus a past meaningful for the present and future (Jongen, 2009: 2). Like Heidegger, he claims that the reason for this oblivion is modern metaphysics, and it can only be overcome through a post-metaphysical interpretation of being. He is convinced that with an oblivion of the truth of history, tradition and "the origin (...) there cannot be a future, or only a catastrophic future" (Jongen, 2009: 7). To avoid such a catastrophe, a spiritual return to the origins is needed.

Jongen is an interesting case because as a philosopher and leading AfD member he is, as he says, active in two worlds: the academic-philosophical and the political (Bender and Bingener, 2016). His interviews provide insight into how he translates his philosophical Heideggerianism into a political one. Here he calls for a spiritual renewal in the face of an

Islamist threat through *thymos* – the “spiritual strength” necessary to overcome the logo-centric system of the established parties. While he concedes that summoning emotions and appealing to the spiritual in politics is a dangerous game, he says it’s a risk worth taking “if one wants to face the big existential menace of the perishing of German culture” (Bender and Bingener, 2016) that he sees directly linked to the ethnic diversification of Germany (Bednarz, 2020). German culture is here essentially linked to whiteness.

To avert this threat, a Heideggerian recovery of traditions would be necessary to invoke pride and anger against those who threaten them. He argues that even if they are social constructions, traditions are “necessary illusions” to protect the “cultural-religious superstructure” of the society. In this way, Germany would return to an *authentic being* based on a recognition and celebration of Germany’s identity. Instead of being afraid of this, he says that “the danger today is not so much that we will freeze our identity and commit to an aggressive nationalism, but rather that we lose what is proper to us” (Jessen and Mangold, 2016). Through his focus on the traditions and emotions of the *Volk* he oscillates between intellectualism and populism. By decontesting anger he clearly legitimizes the anger visible in populist movements such as PEGIDA.

Yet, it is one of the most prominent nationalist and populist politicians, Björn Höcke, AfD leader in Thuringia, who has the most direct links to Dresden’s far-right intellectuals. Supported by former AfD leader Alexander Gauland, he is a close friend of Kubitschek, acts in close coordination with the IfS and regularly speaks at PEGIDA (Weiß, 2017: 25). An eloquent orator, Höcke puts the question of German nationhood at the centre of his speeches and calls for the (re)invention of traditions through the (re)discovering of “authentic history”. Promoting the Kyffhäuser meeting organized as a “new tradition” every year by the nationalist AfD section Der Flügel, Höcke implicitly refers to Heidegger: “I think we founded a great tradition [the Kyffhäuser meeting] that is forward-looking. (...) We (...) as a Volk need a spiritual return to our great history, our great culture, to shape the future and to win back the future” (Der Flügel, 2016). At the AfD’s 2015 national congress in Hanover, Höcke openly refers to Heidegger: “As Germans we have to ask who we are. We need a ‘Yes’ to the ‘Us’.” The German people have to step out of their “forgetfulness of being (*Seinsvergessenheit*)” and return to its “order of being (*Seinsordnung*)”. “Yes”, he concludes, “this is Heidegger” (Bender and Bingener, 2015). This might represent a simplistic and distorted reading of Heidegger (Zorn, 2015), but it nevertheless shows Heidegger’s appeal to leading AfD politicians and the

impact his words, even if used as sound bites, can have on a larger audience, specifically as part of white cultural conception of German nationhood.

Besides this more superficial use of Heidegger in speeches, Höcke talks in detail about his view on Heidegger in the recently published book *Nie zweimal in denselben Fluss*, co-written by one of the central far-right intellectual actors in Dresden, the painter and central figure of Dresden's far-right intellectual circle in Radebeul, Muhesin Sebastian Hennig. The first time I hear about the book is in March 2018, a few months before its publication, when Hennig tells me about the project during one of the hiking tours he organized. The book is an attempt to introduce Höcke, “the populist”, to a more intellectual leadership and will later lead to the listing of Höcke's network *Der Flügel* as one to be observed by the *Verfassungsschutz* (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2020). In the introduction, Frank Böckelmann, another core figure of Dresden's intellectual far-right milieu, former far-left activist of Germany's 1968 Movement and editor of *Tumult*, praises Höcke, specifically for his notion of the *Volk*: “Here we hear not a culprit who is pilloried and is looking for excuses, but an intellectual, who has confidently thought through the notion of the ‘Volk’—a rarity in the political debate” (Böckelmann, 2018b: 14) as he would define the *Volk* not biologically but as ethnocultural formations that formed over centuries (Böckelmann, 2018b: 17).

Höcke says that he “stumbled upon” Heidegger's *Being and Time* as a young student (Höcke and Hennig, 2018: 77) and found his “deeply felt anti-materialism confirmed. No viable ideas concerning order can be derived from materialistic ideologies, merely technocratic constructs (...) held together laboriously at the beginning of the 21st century only through bread, games, manipulation and (...) repression” (Höcke and Hennig, 2018: 78). In the face of this “national oblivion of being (...) our *Volk* loses its soul” and a positive posture toward itself (Höcke and Hennig, 2018: 121). Alluding to Heidegger's critique of the modern separation of subject and object and the conception of the world as *Gestell*, he calls for an understanding of *Heimat* not as “some abstract environment standing in opposite to Man but concretely the forests, meadows, fields, animals and plants of our homeland” (Höcke and Hennig, 2018: 79). Höcke defines *Volk* as “a unity of descent, language, culture and commonly experienced society. It is a human form of community (...) not as close as a local tribe and not as distant as an abstract humanity” (Höcke and Hennig, 2018: 127). This would lend it a complexity that “universalist cosmopolitanism” cannot cope with.

Using Heidegger's philosophy, Höcke aims to subvert the established political language that associates populism with simplicity and complexity with *realpolitik*. He

concedes that the notion of the *Volk* is a construction but claims that this critique would be “banal”, as all human reality is a construction. Undermining the notion of the *Volk*, however, would be part of a dangerous trend in “late modernity” in which it has become fashionable to “to deconstruct what has developed and grown” (Höcke and Hennig, 2018: 126). By not accepting this complexity and the spiritual depth of the being of the *Volk*, “universalists” are the true racists as they deny the existence of people and propagate the utopia of a pure humanity “empty of people (*ohne völkisches*)” (Höcke and Hennig, 2018: 129). In reality, the “melting pot” argued for by liberals and multiculturalists would be a “salad bowl” depriving the different peoples of their *Dasein* and destroying their diversity (Höcke and Hennig, 2018: 129). His geopolitical analysis also mirrors Heidegger’s. Just as Heidegger sees the *Dasein* of the German *Volk* threatened by America and Russia, Höcke sees contemporary Europe in the pincers of neoliberal capitalism and Islam (Höcke and Hennig, 2018: 194). Yet again Heidegger’s notion of *Kultur* is used to occlude a racial exclusion when Höcke claims that the only way to save Germany’s *Dasein* is by deporting those undermining the national people, a process he describes as a “project of remigration,” another far-right term euphemizing the creation of an ethnically homogenous nation state (Höcke and Hennig, 2018: 254).

The examples above show that the strong structural and ideological connection to the far right permits AfD politicians to draw on a common political language elaborated and made to resonate locally by far-right intellectuals. The vocabulary legitimizes illicit forms of exclusive white nationalism and political practice without employing an openly racist discourse. Furthermore, it shows that Heideggerian notions can be included in political speeches to mobilize support, be it among a more intellectual, well-educated electorate or a broader, more “populist audience”.

5. Conclusion

Heidegger’s own involvement in National Socialism (O Trawny, 2014) and the publication of Heidegger’s black notebooks have led to heated controversies about if Heidegger is to be taken seriously as a philosopher or to be ostracized. The opposing sides in the debate either see Heidegger as a representative of a radical racist philosophy (Faye, 2012, 2016, 2018) essentially contaminated by Nazism (Bambach, 2003; Farin and Malpas, 2016; Faye, 2009; Faye et al., 2006: 55–66; Karademir, 2013: 99–123; P Trawny, 2014) or underline the value of

Heidegger's philosophy in detecting the shortcomings of a rationalistic modernity independently of his Nazism (Dallmayr, 1993; O'Brien, 2015). It is this ambivalence about his philosophical heritage that today serves the intended ambivalence of a far-right ideology that claims to reject racism and to merely want to defend European culture.

The way Heidegger and his philosophy are used by local intellectual circles in Dresden and beyond, as well as by AfD politicians and populist activists, shows that he presents not only an intellectual ideal type through which intellectuals like Tellkamp and Dagen can paint themselves as non-conformist revolutionary *Querdenker*, but the myth of *Kulturturnation* underpinning his concept of *Dasein* also provides intellectuals, artists and writers in Dresden with an aesthetic vision of a pre-political lifestyle that is echoed in the spaces of Dagen's bookshop and Kubitschek's Schnellroda manor. Seemingly detached from a "modernist" biological racism of Nazism, Heidegger's notion of *Kulturturnation* occludes and perpetuates racialized notions of nationhood by defining essential difference through the prism of culture. Heidegger's universal particularism speaks to contemporary far-right projects of identity and racial becoming beyond biologism. The fact that notions of cultural *Dasein* also underpinned the racist Nazi ideology who saw the *Volk*, as Hitler put it in a speech in 1937,¹⁴ as a body that can only realize its "slumbering energies" when "threatened" in its "*Dasein*" allows the far right to hold on to Nazi aesthetics while cladding them in more acceptable claims of essential cultural differences.

As in previous notions of *Kulturturnation*, notions of race and culture are deeply entangled in Heidegger's philosophy of an organically rooted *Volk*. Heidegger's anti-globalism and conviction that cultural decline and nihilistic modernity could be overcome by a fundamental rethinking of being under the "guidance of German hyper-nationalism" (Beiner, 2018: 72) and his embracing of a "collective myth of socio-cultural decline and renewal" (Feldman, 2005: 176) provide a common ground for far-right populists and intellectuals. As the final chapter will show, far-right intellectual milieus use a cultural racism based on Heidegger's philosophy and the unmarked racist heritage of liberalism as means for the explicit reintroduction of biological notions of race. But before that, the following chapters look at how Dresden's intellectuals not only draw on Heidegger's "conservative revolutionary" philosophy, but also

¹⁴ Adolf Hitler in a speech given in Nuremberg on 13 September 1937. Supplement to *Quentin*, 1938. Full text in German: "So wie der Körper seine höchste Lebenskraft entwickelt im Augenblick der Abwehr einer in bedrohenden Krankheit, so werden auch die Völker zu den höchsten Steigerungen der in ihnen schlummernden Energien erst dann getrieben, wenn sie in ihrem Dasein bedroht, ja gefährdet sind!"

draw on the political aesthetics of rootedness, authenticity and counterculture of the 1968 Movement and 1989 revolution.

CHAPTER 2: From Left to Right. Speaking White Truth to Power

Südvorstadt is one of Dresden's districts most affected by World War II and post-war socialist urban planning. Remains of 19th century bourgeois neighbourhoods are scattered across an old street grid cut by broad socialist boulevards, dwarfed by some socialist high-rise housing blocks and an eclectic post-reunification architecture. The remaining pre-war buildings were mostly built in the late 19th century. They appear as often lonely reminders of a once pompous suburban neighbourhood. Some of the old, remaining mansions that once belonged to Dresden's upper classes are today occupied by offices of the university whose main campus is at the centre of *Südvorstadt*. Others are once again in the hand of wealthy Dresdeners.

Frank Böckelmann lives in one of these *Gründerzeit* buildings. He was born in Dresden, left the city for West Germany as a child and spent most of his life in Munich. He is one of Dagen's and Bormann's closest friends and a regular participant in Dagen's salon. Dagen has told me about many nights of discussions and wine drinking where all ended up singing old communist, socialist, but also traditional German, folk songs together. Böckelmann is one of the most influential intellectuals of the German far right. Not only has he written the foreword to Björn Höcke's book (see chapter one) praising him for his intellectual approach to the notion of *Volk*, he is also the publisher of the far-right intellectual magazine *Tumult*, formerly a far-left publication moved, together with Böckelmann, from Munich to Dresden in 2010. In his books, Böckelmann criticizes multiculturalism for its "Eurocentric deletion of otherness" (Böckelmann, 2018a). He has turned Adorno's critique of Heidegger's "jargon of authenticity" against contemporary society that he sees dominated by a "jargon of worldopenness" – an empty and monotonous discourse of "equality", "tolerance" and "diversity" that has led to a "*Dasein* without origins, *Heimat*, posteriority and transcendence" at the service of a global economy (Böckelmann, 2017).

The *mimesis* and incorporation of far-left political aesthetics to construe a revolutionary white identity is a current phenomenon in the German far right.¹⁵ Not only did many of my informants celebrate parts of the far-left political party *Die Linke* and specifically their leader Sahra Wagenknecht, books about left-wing populism by Chantal Mouffe and the destructive force of neoliberal capitalism by Wendy Brown are often-recited references (Institut für

¹⁵ In Kubitschek's IfS this openly national socialist current is represented by Benedikt Kaiser who, together with French far-right thinker Alain de Benoist, calls for a reading of Marx from the right (Kaiser et al., 2018).

Staatspolitik, 2017). As chapter one showed, drawing on Heidegger and the “conservative revolution”, far-right intellectuals argue to philosophically defend and authentically represent a “cultural” white *Volk* that is not defined through a “rationalist” biological concept of race.

This chapter looks at the example of Frank Böckelmann and intellectuals surrounding his magazine *Tumult* to argue that the national-revolutionary past of the West German New Left and its countercultural understanding of *Kulturnation* today contributes to the countercultural aesthetics of Dresden’s intellectual far right. The *mimesis* of the New Left’s political aesthetics, ideas, culture and spaces here forms a symbolic repertoire for the defining and performing of a revolutionary white culture that symbolically includes “the people” protesting in the streets, while excluding an intellectual and non-white “other”. A Marxist term of revolution is rethought as the aesthetic elevation of a suppressed white national *Volk*. This *Volk* – the vision – expresses its authentic existence through far-right populism and is threatened by an abstract totalitarian, technocratic liberalism that imposes a multicultural society onto Germany. The ethnic concepts of *Kulturnation* and the nationalism that were entangled with parts of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s provide a common ground to build up a white counter-*Kulturnation*. New Left concepts of alternative national identity paired with an East German resistance to the “multiculturalization” of Germany function as the symbolic site for an alternative way of life resisting a “new totalitarianism”.

To explore the *mimesis* of the New Left by Dresden’s far-right intellectuals, I use the first section of this chapter to look at the notions of nation and race in the New Left. I then examine how intellectuals like Böckelmann draw on the entanglements of race and culture in New Left aesthetics of nationhood to envision East Germany as the site for an authentic white counter-*Kulturnation*. In the final sections I then analyse how the New Left’s politics of aesthetics underpin attempts to envision academic institutions and Dagen’s bookshop as sites for countercultural resistance and activism.

1. Race and Nation in the New Left

Until not long ago, Böckelmann had been more known for his far-left past. He was part of the Marxist artist group Situationist Internationale that formed in the late 1950s around the French theorist Guy Debord. Their aim was to use art to “construct situations, that would release revolutionary energy by liberating everyday life from its superficial and routine-like character”

(Reichardt, 2014: 105). Through subversive artistic activism in the public space, the members aimed to point at the intellectual emptiness of capitalism by opening up utopian, countercultural spaces. These spaces were to be shaped by decentralized forms of organization, interpersonal relationships and solidarity. They were to embody an alternative way of life characterized not by values of “having” but by values of “being” (Brand, 1982: 15) and to be opposed to consumption, profit and technocratic rationality (Brand, 1982: 13; Hecken, 2006; Lee, 2007).

The German branch of the movement formed in 1958 as the *SPUR-Group*. In the early 1960s, Böckelmann joined the group in Munich together with Rudi, Dutschke the later icon of Germany’s 68 student movement. Coming mainly from bourgeois backgrounds, these counter-intellectuals met and lived in communes and gathered in bohemian salons that were to prefigure alternative, anti-bourgeois ways of life. The protagonists sought to “leave behind their bourgeois existence – career, family, integration and security, opportunism and obsession with power – to sabotage social values and norms” (Reichardt, 2014: 107) and to experience a liberation of the self and its sexuality from perceived authoritarian structures.

These notions of counterculture soon converged with the idea of a “positive” cultural nationalism opposed to that of the Nazi past and a to a capitalist, imperialist present. Marxist milieus around the student movement, the Communist Party and the early Green movement saw the union of nationalism and socialism as a necessary precondition for a German national liberation from an allied occupation that was perceived as colonization (Diner, 1982). Nazism was framed as a collaboration of capitalists, the nationalist right and fascists that had threatened the “existence of the German *Volk*” (Brandt and Ammon, 1981: 9), oppressed its “authentic will” (Ludwig, 1995: 69) and perverted a true “national consciousness” (Ludwig, 1995: 57).

Central figures of the New Left, such as student leader Rudi Dutschke, embraced German nationhood¹⁶ and claimed that the “fragmentation” of a national cultural tradition through the separation of Germany in East and West would only serve the status quo of Soviet state slavery and US capitalist imperialism. Thinkers like Marcuse framed both Soviet communism and capitalism as totalitarian “others” (Marcuse, 2002). Parts of the New Left embraced German reunification as a way to realize a national liberation from Eastern and Western totalitarianisms as captured by Peter Brandt and Herbert Ammon (Brandt and Ammon, 1981), the latter of which has more recently also signed the Declaration 2018 (Broder et al.,

¹⁶ Dutschke’s vague positioning has led to a debate in the scholarship between those who underline his national revolutionary ideas and those who emphasize his international socialism. For a more detailed discussion see Lönnendonker, 2011.

2018, see introduction). Following a more radical nationalist path, Henning Eichberg developed his concept of ethnopluralism, claiming that the student movement had rediscovered the need for a national cultural identity in the fight against alienation driven by “big business and bureaucrats” (Brandt and Ammon, 1981: 352). In 1978, he asked: “Are we Germans or ‘citizens of the FRG’¹⁷ with an Americanized language (...)? Identity or alienation, this is the new main contradiction, Imperialism or our *Volk*” (Brandt and Ammon, 1981: 351). His focus on national identity and his links to the French *Nouvelle Droite* made him highly influential in the so-called New Right.

This neo-nationalism allowed the exculpation the far left and its “revolutionary subject”, the *Volk*. It embraced a Stalinist definition of the nation as a “historically grown and stable community of people” founded on a community of language, territory, economy, psychology and expressed in a specific national culture (Ludwig, 1995: 48). Creating a classless society would not “lead to the dissolution of national communities and its cultural differences”, but “to its realisation in a new, shared national cultural identity” (Brandt & Ammon 1981: 15). Post-war “Guestworkers” were seen as bearers of an essentially distinct homogenous cultural identity that could only be tolerated “if Germans are reassured of their own cultural identity” (Brandt & Ammon 1981: 24). Ignoring the question of cultural identity, the protagonists warned, would result in the reduction of “individuals to unconscious idiots of consumption” (Brandt & Ammon 1981: 24).

The following sections look at how Dresden’s far-right intellectuals, specifically the circles around Böckelmann and his magazine *Tumult*, draw on the New Left’s political aesthetics as a symbolic repertoire to construct a revolutionary white identity. It focuses on those individuals who either have direct links to the New Left or who apply a Marxist reading to justify their intellectual activism for the populist far right.

¹⁷ Federal Republic of Germany.

2. A White Counter-Kulturation

As I ring the doorbell to Böckelmann's turn-of-the-century apartment block, I see that the building also houses lawyers' offices. Yet there is no sign stating that this is the place where the magazine *Tumult* is produced. The magazine has its origins in the late 1970s when it was started by Böckelmann together with a group of philosophers as a "Magazine for Traffic-Science" (Figure 21). "Verkehr" in German not only refers to "traffic", but also intercourse, alluding to the magazine's embeddedness in the New Left's sexual revolution. Inspired by French post-structuralism it tried to bring together intellectuals, philosophers and artists to analyse politics and culture. In 2013, Böckelmann left the initial *Tumult* to refound it together with the Austrian publisher Horst Ebner in Dresden as a "Quarterly for Consensus-Disruption". With a price of 10 euros, the magazine is aimed at an intellectual and educated bourgeois audience. On its website (Tumult, 2020) it is envisioned as a an "organ" to counter the "striking

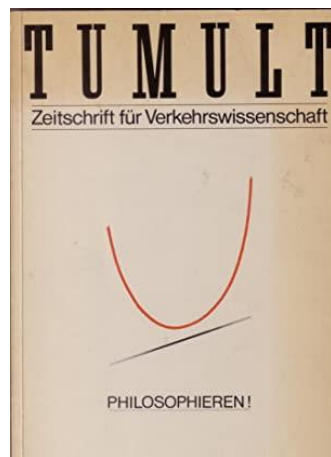


Figure 21: Tumult issue from 1987 (photo by the author).



Figure 20: The spring 2020 issue of Tumult including an article on the writer Uwe Tellkamp (photo by the author).

reticence of intellectuals in the face of a convulsion of global powers and markets and the growing pressure of consensus in the public opinion". The main reason for this pressure is seen in the economization of universities and the lack of career chances of academics. The fear of saying things that could undermine one's career would lead to a culture of conformity, the "undermining of traditional intellectual spirit", and the *Gleichschaltung*¹⁸ through an "ideology

¹⁸ *Gleichschaltung* describes Nazism's attempt to muzzle, bring into line and homogenize German media, culture and society in the 1930s. It is frequently used by Dresden's intellectuals to show the contrast to *Querdenker* who "fight" against this homogenization.

of openness”. The magazine wants to provide an “independent” platform for intellectuals, academics and artists who refuse to submit to these pressures.



Figure 22: a collection of Tumult issues from Winter 2015 to summer 2019 (photo by the author).

The contributors are described as *Selbstdenker* – independent thinkers and another version of *Querdenker* – who refuse to submit to an “ubiquitous cool servility and well-behavedness” that is not driven by conviction and intellectual reflection but by the fear of standing on the wrong side of history and becoming superfluous. True intellectuals, the self-description closes, are “the elites of the superfluous”, those who do not submit to the increasing pressures of rationalization and efficiency. The magazine treats different dimensions of what its authors see as a freedom of speech regulated by language and claims of racism, the emergence of a new totalitarianism exemplified in a “fight against the right” or the EU, existentialist and Marxist philosophy, “mass immigration” and Islamization (Figure 22). The contributors are mainly academics, writers and artists. More recently, *Tumult* has started to organize public readings featuring some of its contributors such as Uwe Tellkamp (Figure 24).



Figure 23: Frank Böckelmann posing with the Winter 2019 Tumult issue. Facebook post (1 December 2019) by Tumult (screenshot by the author).



Figure 24: Facebook post (20 December 2019) by Tumult advertising a book reading by Uwe Tellkamp (screenshot by the author).

As I enter the building, a massive turn-of-the-century wooden staircase is in front of me. The building is well kept and entering it one feels like they are immersing themselves in Germany's imperial past. I had never seen Böckelmann in person before this first encounter. Googling him, I came across some photos in which he looks grim, almost intimidating. Yet, as I reach the floor of his apartment an old, almost brittle man opens the door, welcoming me in with an open smile. The apartment is large, decorated with drawings of Saxonian villages, paintings of landscapes and some colourful figurative art. As with most of the living rooms of my interviewees, Böckelmann's is dominated by a massive library. He ushers me to a dining table that is set with traditional Dresden cake and coffee (Figure 25). He excuses himself for the quality of the cake. "There are now all these chains here; it is just not the same as the old bakeries," he says.



Figure 25: A table set with coffee and traditional local cake and pastry awaits me when I arrive at Böckelmann's home (photo taken by the author).

During our conversation, Böckelmann posits that the contemporary left has lost its social-revolutionary aspect and instead defends a hegemonic ideology of a “fundamental openness, equality and intellectual homogenisation”. For him, however, this is by no means Marxist. The left’s “original sense” had been to empower “the exploited class so that it can shape values and thus shape its own and society’s history” by driving a subversive counterculture. “I believe,” he says, “that the counterculture today is standing on the side of what one perceives as populist. Or as the ‘New Right’.” And this connection, he argues, enables the New Right to represent reality in intellectual discourses and activism in new, prefigurative ways. “As Lenin says”, he claims, “one cannot represent reality if one does not include what most probably is still to come. The foreseeable belongs to the description of reality. Today, the people who have the capacity to include what is coming are on the side of the ‘New Right’.”

He says one should not take too seriously what the people on the street say: that they feel that they don’t get money while the refugees get plenty.

It is deeper than that. What drives them is the feeling to be tricked. First there were these 12 years of Nazi rule from which one was liberated. Then there was bolshevism. Friendship between the people, peace, growth of production, etc. Those were abstract values. Then they liberated themselves from this with many difficulties. Integration into the old federal Republic has never really worked out. And now there are again abstract principles imposed from above: tolerance, diversity and world openness. Those are the posters that you can see on the buildings in Dresden. Asylum camps are built, and then there are these other people here, just like that. And the Dresdner asks himself, in a pre-reflexive way: “What does this have to do with Dresden, with Saxony or with Germany? Now we all have to submit to these abstract values again?” he says, alluding to the ideals of diversity, tolerance and openness propagated as part of a positive modern German nationhood.

Böckelmann admires the East Germans for resisting immigration. Painting East Germany as the keeper of an authentic Germanness, he concludes:

In the West, we have all been brainwashed. We were Americanized. Many moved from the provinces to the cities. They felt good about this; their self-confidence grew. One was part of a city society, modern and cool. This is the central word! Nothing would be surprising or shocking anymore. One is totally open. And people who have gone through this development, people like me for example, for them the idea to close borders is simply obscene. Everything that is good and progressive is associated to being open. The only reason officially given to limit immigration is that one doesn’t have the capacities anymore. But that means that if there

were the capacities, one would even take in 30 million. (...) But here in East Germany, they dare saying “no” because they have not been brainwashed.

(...)

When I say that the majority of Germans still seems to support a diverse German society, the majority in Germany is not right. Normally, every dominant majority in time creates its own reality and positive identity. But today, Germany’s majority does not create its own reality. It ignores it. Lenin would say that we have to try to anticipate the future, to reckon that in the next 50 years some 100 million Africans will come to Europe. One has to realize this. And if this is the case one has to develop a fundamental position on this. Either one says, “well, we cannot do anything, this cannot be stopped”. Then you have to say, “Adieu Europe”, then that’s it. Or one says “no, we want that we continue to exist”. And then one has to say, “dear Africans, dear Afghans and Iraqis, we don’t want you”. But the majority doesn’t take a clear position on that. Instead there is just this muddling through.

For Böckelmann, a truly European culture can only emerge through the Schmittian constitution of an essential differentiation to a non-European “other”:

It is only in the defence of Europe against these millions of immigrants from the South that there can be a political Europe. There has never been one before. Not through conferences about what Europe is, nor in long negotiations or through the establishing of a common European law can Europe become a community. Only in the shared resistance against immigration, against a shared enemy or threat can Europe be forged,

he claims, chewing on his cake. It is clear for Böckelmann, who this enemy is:

Muslims, however modern they are, they will always have a loyalty towards Islam (...). If it were three million Ukrainians, then yes. If it were Iraqi Christians, ok. But please, not 10 million Muslims! Then we have a theocracy with stoning in 30 years. This is the way it is. But nobody talks about it. 80% of the immigrants are Muslim.

Bringing the conversation back to its beginning, he says,

this means that the conservative today has to be different. He cannot simply preserve the status quo as in the past. Today, it is the other way around. Today, the leftists are the ones who only look at the facts. Adorno would have said in the '60s that this is pure positivism. That one only looks at what is and does not include what is becoming. To look only at the now. This is actually conservative in the old sense. Today conservatives have to anticipate what is becoming.

I say that this sounds very Heideggerian to me. He laughs. “Yes, of course. But today you have to be careful to use him. After all he has been revealed to be a Nazi in the black notebooks”, he notes with an ironic undertone and smirk in his face. As a media professional, Böckelmann knows who can be quoted. Instead of relying on philosophers who are linked to right-wing thinking, Böckelmann prefers to explicitly showcase his Marxist thinking, be it only to underline that it is in fact not him “who has changed but the left”, as he says.

Böckelmann’s assessment of the current situation and the role for the far right shows how his New Left past underpins his imagining of the far right as a prefigurative movement that creates spaces of counterculture by anticipating the future. Dresden is for him the symbolic site of a white counter-*Kultur*ation. PEGIDA, as the embodiment of the *Volk*, is imagined as innocent, homogenous and tricked by three systems – Nazism, socialism and now a capitalist, Americanized, multicultural Federal Republic. The contemporary political regime is externalized as a “system” equal to Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), driven by abstract values and ignoring reality. Böckelmann idealizes East Germany as a space of resistance, a pure people that, untainted by West German indoctrination, becomes the new revolutionary subject. It is this *Volk* and its resistance that is seen as the essence of a true German identity that not only resists against “the system”, but also emerges as truly European in its struggle against a non-white, non-Christian uncivilized “other”.

The revelation of a white European identity carried by an ethnic pluralism is not Böckelmann’s ideal alone. Before I leave his house, he shows me how to aesthetically prefigure this ethnopluralism in a playful way. When we finish the interview, he proposes “We could do this funny game, this language game.” He hands me a questionnaire with 15 empty lines, laughing boyishly,

Oh this will be funny. I will now play different languages that were recorded from radio programmes all over Europe. You have to write down the language you hear. One right answer gives you one point. If you don’t know which language but recognize at least the family of language, Slavic, Roman, German, Celtic, Baltic, then it is half a point. We played this for my wife’s birthday. And we had literature scholars here. And it was shocking how badly they did.

While he plays the different languages, he comments “Oh this is beautiful” or “How marvellous, these sounds”. After about 30 minutes the game is over. “Isn’t this great,” he laughs. “I have organized an IT expert to put these radio recording onto a CD.” As we go through my answers to see how many points I have, I feel almost like a student who is being

examined by his teacher. When my answers are wrong, he tells me the correct answer, giving me a short lecture on how one would best be able to distinguish them. He gets excited whenever I have a right answer. “Yes, it is Danish. This language was once compared to a butterfly.” He imitates the language in a singing way. “Great, isn’t it? One point, marvellous. And the next one?” I answer, “Romanian.” He puts away the pen, starts applauding me. “Wow, this is amazing, great job. You see, this is diversity!” he exclaims. In the end I make eight and a half points. “With this you would have been third, behind Jörg Bernig and Ulrich Fröschle. Not bad!”

During my time in Dresden, Böckelmann’s game was a common reference among the different intellectual circles. Playing it not only contributes to the establishment of intellectual hierarchies with Böckelmann as the “quizmaster” and central “guardian of knowledge”. With his New Left background, his age and eloquence, the game is centred around him as a teacher figure who distributes authentic countercultural knowledge and redefines the New Left’s heritage for a far-right purpose. It also contributes to the symbolic performance of a counter-intellectual community and a way of proving to one another a certain degree of education and cultural knowledge. By framing it as a sign of a “beautiful European diversity”, it aesthetically represents, in a playful way, the far right’s theory of ethnopluralism, of essential differences between ethnicities, based on culture, language and race. The postmodern celebration of a patchwork difference of equals is here turned into an essentialized difference between European nations that are imagined as homogenous ethno-states. In their homogenous diversity they are framed as symbols for a “true diversity” of a European self that is portrayed as threatened by EU homogenization and a non-European “other”. Populists in East Germany are being sublimated as the ordinary expression of this resistance against homogenization, as a new “revolutionary class” that includes the imagined future in its assessment of reality.

3. The East as the Authentic German Self

When I come to the bookshop a few days after the interview with Böckelmann, Dagen is excited to hear that I was among the top three in Böckelmann’s language game. “It was so much fun, but I was surprised that some of our academics didn’t perform that well.” With “our academics” she refers to Jörg Bernig and Ulrich Fröschle, two writers and academics that, as Böckelmann told me, had scored higher than me. Not only is Dagen’s circle in Loschwitz

frequented by prominent members of an alternative far-right media sphere like Böckelmann, many also have links to the Technical University (TU), Dresden's university. The writer Jörg Bernig worked for the university in the past. Many followers of Dagen's circle are literature scholars, historians or cultural scientists at the TU. All of them use their positions as academics to promote far-right positions and develop far-right semantics first. But it is only Ulrich Fröschle who has, like Böckelmann, a West German background and links to the German New Left. Fröschle is also a close friend of Böckelmann and advises him in his editing and general positioning of *Tumult*.

Dagen was keen on putting me in touch with "our academics". "You absolutely have to talk to them," she repeatedly told me. Most of the contacts I get through Dagen were willing to talk to me, albeit sometimes showing some scepticism. When I first email Ulrich Fröschle, chair for New German Literature and Cultural History at the TU, he responds that he fears that I see him as "Frondist of a 'New Right' (...), which under the contemporary conditions of discourse would be a declaration of hostility". He still agrees to meet as he is "always interested in interesting conversation" and attaches an interview he gave to a Russian online media platform which, as he says, would be a good basis for our discussion.

As I read the interview, it becomes clear why describing him as member of the New Right would lead to a hostile relationship. In the interview, he argues that the terms "right wing" and "New Right" would be terms of political marginalization embedded in the hegemonic discourse, which he sees mainly "in the big media outlets and universities". The label "New Right" could mean the end of a career. For him the left-right poles are obsolete anyway. The main cleavage today is that between "globalist 'elites' and their producers of ideology" and "'particularists' or 'federalists' and their producers of ideology". The former would be led by a moral universalism rejecting any form of borders or barriers. He sees them represented not only by "big transnational companies", but also by the "federal government" and "if one excludes the AfD, more or less all political parties in today's parliament".

Like Böckelmann, he sees the contemporary German left as inauthentic, calling it the "so-called Left" and sees it as being driven by "a barely reflected mixture of alleged anti-fascism, anti-German resentments, human rights fundamentalism and a diffuse one-world-thinking". Instead of speaking truth to power, he says, the leftist Antifa would have the same interest as global capital, namely "the end of the state and its borders and an uninhibited economic globalisation that is serving first and foremost corporate economy, finance

speculations and their political hegemony. These allegedly ‘leftist’ parties in Germany are barely different in their impact and intentions from an allegedly ‘conservative’ CDU [Christian Democrat Union]/CSU [Christian Social Union].”

Fröschle sees the “mass immigration of mainly young, unqualified men and their families (...) from the Maghreb, Africa, Afghanistan” as a core expression of globalist politics. Applying a Foucauldian terminology to the widespread racist theory of the great replacement, he argues that “this executes a bio-politics at the expense of indigenous Germans and will turn them into a minority in the near future”. He sees these politics enforced by totalitarian “language rules”, a “self-censorship of the media and the elimination of a true opposition”. He directly opposes this “enemy” of inauthentic leftists and conservatives to his vision of a “true” conservative who is a “supporter of the traditional state of law (...), legally functioning states and the relevant regime of borders as the primary political actors. Such a state guarantees equality before the law (...) and understands itself as the organisation of a *Staatsvolk*.” This conservatism is far from being far right or ideological; rather, according to Fröschle, it is a “pragmatic conservatism“ that is opposed to a “transformation of Germany decreed ‘from above’”.

The main party of this “new” conservatism would be the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD); with the main movement being the “government- and media-critical Monday Demonstrations of the so-called PEGIDA movement”. Both, he argues, are grassroots organizations attracting “disappointed citizens” and former supporters of other parties. Despite differences in economic policies and concepts of national economics, the shared platform would be the nation state based on a “basically positive understanding of the German history” that is not reduced to a simple pre-history to Hitler’s national socialism. Fröschle directly refers to Kubitschek and *Sezession* as central pre-thinkers of this “camp” that he sees in the tradition of the “aristocratic resistance (...) rejecting (...) National Socialism as a modernist and at the core leftist project” whose “political and racial” conception of egalitarianism would rely on the claim of an “unlimited” human capacity shaping humanity and the world. He sees a similar ideology underpinning “Merkel’s politics of open borders”, which “de facto leads to a fatal, radicalizing bio-politics” and aims at “rapid[ly] and radical[ly] rebuilding (...) the German population.” Compared to this radical political aim, the AfD would be “anti-radical”. Fröschle ends the interview with a sentence that is nothing short of a warning: “If there is an economic and political escalation of the situation in Germany (...) a radicalisation of the conservatives will be likely.”

Having read the interview, I have a look at Fröschle's university website. Under his professional description as chair for new German literature and "Vice Director of the Center for Central European Studies in Politics, Economy & Culture" Fröschle included a quote by Theodor Adorno: "In Germany commitment (...) amounts primarily to parroting what everybody is saying, or at least what everybody would like to hear." As a representative of the Frankfurt School, Adorno is generally seen as part of the New Left. Today, he is part of the canon of German philosophy exemplifying a critical intellectual that speaks truth to power. For a regular visitor to Fröschle's website, these quotes are not problematic; rather, they serve to confirm the idea of academia as a place of social critique. Yet, far-right visitors to his webpage who are aware of Fröschle's political views will understand this as a clear positioning against the "left-liberal mainstream". The quote puts the far right in the tradition of *Querdenker* forming an intellectual avant-garde against a new totalitarianism.

Fröschle asks me to meet in the *Schillergarten*, a large beer garden in Dresden Blasewitz, situated just next to the Blaue Wunder, on the southern side of the Elbe. Opposite Loschwitz it is not more than five minutes walking distance from Dagen's bookshop. The Elbe is lined with this kind of institution that in the summer are crowded with hikers, cyclists, tourists and locals enjoying the views of the Elbe Valley over a pint of lager and local food.

I meet Fröschle on a hot summer day in June 2018. The big linden trees provide shade to a never-ending stream of customers (Figure 26). With its name referring to Germany's national poet Schiller, the beer garden's history reaches back to the end of the 17th century. As its website claims, its name is derived from two visits by Schiller (Schillergarten, 2020b). An embodiment of "Dresden's beer garden culture", as it says on its website, the restaurant is proud to serve local beer and homemade meals made of local ingredients (Schillergarten, 2020a). This mix of *Kulturnation* and popular local food culture are part of the restaurant's self-branding.



Figure 26: View from the Schillergarten beer garden across the Elbe River to Loschwitz and the Blue Marvel (photo by the author).

Fröschle gets me a beer. When he returns, I ask him how he has been experiencing the polarization in Dresden leading up to PEGIDA and the situation today. He says that for him it has always been a biographical question that reaches back way, long before the recent developments. “I have been knowing this double life for a long time.” He says that he very consciously moved to East Germany as he feels freer here:

*For me as someone who has been socialized in the West, freedom comes from the East. Because here I made the experience that people have a fundamental distrust in the authorities. Of course, you cannot generalize this, but through the biographies of the people this is stronger here than in the West simply because the average citizen in the West assumes that he has grown up in freedom. As there was critique in the media, by the *journalle*, or the *Pressbengel*, to use this nice term by Marx, one assumed that this is true freedom. But this is, at least for people who are schooled in post-structuralism, of course an illusion. And East Germans know this. Here the system was more rigid. This led to a more general distrust.*

With the change of “system”, he argues, many people continued this mistrust and that it broke out with the refugee crisis: “But there has been this resilience to mainstream discourse way before that. Many people told me way before the crisis that things are not so different from the GDR. For example, during the so-called ‘Euro-Crisis’.” He says that in Dresden people

called this “*Gleichschaltung*’. (...) This is an expression that I have heard here for the first time really.”

It soon becomes clear, that for Fröschle “the East” is not only East Germany, but Eastern Europe as a whole. For him, both have preserved forms of German and European culture that have been lost in the West.

Just look at the museums in Russia. When I visited them for the first time, I realized that this is something that you totally lack when you are socialized in the west. I mean this is also Europe! And this entire museum landscape of the Russian imperialism, the symbolism, the Russian avantgarde is barely taking place in the western art history.

He sees the same happening with East German socialist realist art. “Figurative painters like Mattheuer or Tübke with their late-socialist-realism. (...) The mainstream does not really pay attention to this. I am really influenced by Armin Mohler”, he says, referring to the far right’s post-war master mind. “He always wanted to be an art historian and was really interested in GDR art and literature. I saw him several times when I was studying in Munich and was fascinated by the ways he wanted to establish an anti-universalist world view,” he asserts, speaking quickly and with a thick south-west German accent while the sun lets sweat run down his neatly shaved bald head.

For Fröschle and many other West German supporters of the far right, the authentic German *Kulturnation* was preserved by the GDR’s socialism. “In the GDR and the FDJ [Free German Youth] culture and especially the general high valuing of literature culture was highly normed, of course. But there was a strong attachment to culture, both among dissidents and the state. In the West, this was more open but at the same time also more arbitrary.” He admires the FDJ as it would have preserved the movement culture that he sees as a typical pre-war feature of German culture. “I have myself a background in the movement culture. I always admired the *Wandervogel* movement” he says, referring to a youth movement that linked hiking to singing traditional German folksongs and that emerged in the mid-19th century (Figure 27). The members came mainly from an educated bourgeois background and were characterized by a strong cultural pessimism and romantic nationalism and a rejection of technological and economic change. The movement did not fundamentally challenge the educated bourgeoisie but tried to renew it by embracing new “trends” such as a racism and the idealization of an “authentic” folk culture and rural life (Scholtz, 2006; Siefert, 1964: 173–185; Ulrich, 2006). It was particularly strong in Saxony and Dresden (Ulbricht, 2007). “They formed

against the mainstream of the empire in the late 19th century. So, this is something that is typical for German culture, this anarchical freedom inside the system,” he claims.

This movement culture also continued to exist in the West and had strong links to the Communist Party and the New Left. But it remained more at the margins. In the GDR it was preserved in the FDJ. Just like before by the Hitler Youth. The FDJ was in fact a follow up organization of the Hitler Youth. They had the same structure. Their newspaper had the same name. And I believe that this movement culture was preserved by socialism. Just like this high importance of literature. And you can still see this today when you go hiking for example. People with these traditional hats and jackets. So, I really felt at home here from the beginning and did not want to leave Dresden anymore.

In contrast to that, West Germany, he argues, fell victim to an Americanization of German culture. “Yet, this Americanization did not just start in the post-war years, as the New Left liked to claim. In fact, one of the biggest agents of Americanization was of course the Third Reich. And then, of course, the 1968 Movement itself, even if it was not their aim at all. But their hedonism definitely chimed with the commercialization and Americanization of German culture” he claims. Yet, he also sees the New Left and the 1968 Movement as an inspiration: “In reality it was a national-revolutionary movement that was driven by a deep anti-Americanism and cultural criticism by such figures such as Henning Eichberg.” This is also what attracted him to *Tumult*. “It is a journal that I know from the late 80s and early 90s. Back then, *Tumult* was heavily based on French theory. My reception of Foucault ran through *Tumult*. And it also opened my way into Böckelmann’s circle.”

Today, Fröschle thinks that the leftovers of this Germanness are threatened again by a homogenizing mainstream and Americanization. He sees this especially in academia.

In the old system set up by Humboldt, the notion of Bildung was way freer. I studied philosophy and went to other universities to hear specific lectures. This is unimaginable today, to just take your time to shape yourself through knowledge. But they destroyed this great old system.

Therefore, he says that his students would not even know the basics of philosophy anymore. What is more, the politicians of today have a lack of cultural education and instead strong links to the economic lobby. “Economic ideologies are here being linked to educational policymaking. All the Pisa fuss has dismantled Humboldt’s idea of *Bildung* to put economic criteria at the top. And the consequence is that our areas of study, the humanities are dead.” Which is a development that, he thinks, can only be countered through a counterculture from

the right that can prepare for a revolution. “I think we are approaching a state of exception,” he says, clearly referring to Schmitt’s emergency politics, “and we have to be prepared for this. I have experienced two states of exception in my life. First, 1989. I was raised to say that I would always believe in German reunification. But in fact, nobody believed that it was going to happen. When things happened, I left Munich with a student friend to drive to East Germany, in October 1989. Just before the opening of the wall. And we drove to Leipzig to take part in a Monday demonstration. This was an incredible experience for me. It felt like experiencing first-hand what I had read about the French Revolution,” he says filled with a mixture of passion and nostalgia. The moment still visibly moves him.

His second experience of a state of exception is linked to his background in the military. Before studying in Munich and becoming interested in post-structuralism he worked as a paratrooper for the Bundeswehr.¹⁹ “In the army, in the times of the Cold War, there was always the scenario of a Russian attack (...). So this feeling that everything can totally change from one moment to the other is deeply ingrained in me.” He believes that today we are once again in such a state of exception:

The upheavals that we are living through now dwarf what happened in 1989. What we see today is more massive and global. And as in the past, many people don’t see it. Those who are a bit smarter, they slowly realise it. I am a sport shooter and hunter myself and have many contacts in the scene. And I know that subcutaneously people prepare for the state of exception. In shooting clubs, the number of memberships rise, just like the registrations in hunting courses. (...) The opening of the borders in 2015 really led to the feeling that really quickly things can escalate.

Even if he doesn’t say so explicitly, this escalation is a result of immigration and multiculturalization and thus the dissolution of the East’s homogeneity as a white space and culture. To imagine this state of exception, Fröschle refers to literature, his area of expertise. “I think one can expect a scenario of the Thirty Years War,” he says, referring to the interreligious war that shook central Europe from 1618–1648.²⁰

Here local centres kept up order at the local level. And interestingly this is also the dominant scenario in the literature. In novels like Wladimir Sorokin’s Telluria, Georg Klein’s The Future

¹⁹ Name for the German army after World War II.

²⁰ A recurring theme as chapter four shows.

of Mars, or Houellebecq's work, the world of states as we know it falls apart and reorganises itself in smaller parts.

Both novels treat dystopian scenarios of civil wars between different political and religious groups and represent what Fröschle thinks is a realistic development given what is happening today.

Fröschle sees it as essential that intellectuals share these insights with a broader audience, which is why he has joined, in addition to Dagen's circle, another network in Berlin. "It meets every now and then and members are Klonovsky, Böckelmann, a very heterogenous group. Last time Thilo Sarrazin and Henryk M Broder were there as well. There was this feeling that we had to do something. Very typical for intellectuals. They wanted to have a greater impact. (...) And then Vera Lengsfeld contacted me and sent me a very short sentence," he says, referring to the so-called *Declaration 2018* petition (Broder et al., 2018).

And I found this so unbelievably good. So self-evident and without pathos. I said, of course I will sign this. I have never seen that with so little I had such a big impact. And this is of course due to the mixture. That Broder was in there and Tellkamp.

Yet, Fröschle is also sceptical of the general focus on Islam. "For me Islam is not the main enemy. Rather, it is globalization and internationalization. Things that authors like Rolf Peter Sieferle have talked about," he says referring to one of the leading members of a group of New Right intellectuals with a background in the Green movement.

Sieferle is for me the last universal thinker. And he has developed a sort of environmental history that very early on criticized the notion of unlimited economic growth. Or also, Thomas Hoof, who is one of the founders of the Green party. What I always tell Böckelmann is that we need less Islam and more focus on a conservative critique of technology and commercialization.

For Böckelmann and Fröschle, a far-right counterculture against "the system" is an expression of a specifically German *Kultur* following the tradition of German reform and youth movements, the "conservative revolution" and the New Left. Both share a Marxist reading that idealizes far-right populism and the *Volk* as a "national-revolutionary subject" against a globalizing capitalism and technocracy. While Böckelmann sees the main enemy in Islam and an "invasion" of Europe by Africans, Fröschle focuses his critique on economic globalization. Both share the vision of a dystopian future that sees the end of an organically grown *Kultur* and that is anticipated by thinking present developments into the future, be it through prefigurative activism or literature. Finally, both see themselves as *Querdenker*

who counter a totalitarian system uniting an “inauthentic” left with global technology and capital.

4. The Academy as a Site of Counterculture

The idea that Germany is dominated by a left-liberal totalitarian “other” is an old trope in the far right (Müller, 2000: 202–203). In Dresden the idea is not limited to intellectual circles, but it is also to be found in one of the most renowned research institutes – the Hannah Arendt Institute for the Research on Totalitarianism (HAIT). To have an academic affiliation during my fieldwork I got in touch with the HAIT before knowing about its links to the far right. A semi-independent institute linked to both the university and the Saxonian state, it focuses on systematically researching national socialism, communism and the “ideological and ideational preconditions” and consequences of both systems of domination for people’s real lives (Hannah Arendt Institute, 2020). Located in an old 19th century building reminiscent of medieval German castle its special focus is the “opposition and resistance against both German dictatorships [and the] critical analysis of political extremism (...) in the present”.

The institute’s approach of putting radical left and right totalitarianism on an equal footing through the so-called horseshoe theory is contested in the German academic context. It has for a long time been the theory underpinning the centre-right CDU’s approach to dealing with the far left and far right, basically framing them as equally non-democratic. Yet, the institute has developed into a respected research centre whose staff is, following Germany’s consensus-based approach on politics, hired on the basis of political affiliation. While this approach worked in times of relative political stability, today it favours the far right.

During the first days of my fieldwork, I present myself and my research interest in far-right intellectualism to the institute’s director, renowned historian of East German history Thomas Lindenberger. He tells me: “Well you will have enough to look at here.” Assuming that he refers to the institute’s exhaustive library, I say, “Yes, your book collection is impressive”. He disbelievably looks at me and answers, “I am not talking about books. I am talking about staff.” Lindenberger refers to staff member Lothar Fritze, who is a professor of political theory at the University of Chemnitz. One of his core research interests is the “totalitarian thinking in Marxism and National Socialism” (Fritze, 2020c).

Fritze gained nation-wide prominence in 1999 when an article he published in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* caused outrage. In the article, which was based on a lecture he had given at Chemnitz and an academic article he had published in the *Jahrbuch Extremismus & Demokratie* (Fritze, 2000), he questioned the moral legitimacy of Georg Elser who failed to kill Hitler with a self-built bomb in 1939. Fritze turned the whole argument into a book that was published in 2009. As Elser's assassination attempt did not kill Hitler, but other participants at the event, Fritze argues in this book that Elser had to be blamed for "unacceptable inadequacy" (Fritze, 2020a) and could not serve as a memorable example of political resistance (Fritze, 2009). The article appeared shortly after an exhibition honouring Elser as an exemplary figure of resistance against Nazism. In the article Fritze argued that Elser was comparable to a left-wing terrorist and is thus morally not suitable as an ideal to follow (Niven, 2002: 89–91). Fritze's theses have been highly controversial, and so far, he is largely marginalized in academia. Yet, magazines like *Tumult* have provided him with the space to renew his claims and to present his newest books reasserting his view (Fritze, 2019, 2020b).

Lindenberger, however, was referring to a different incident. Shortly before I arrived in Dresden, Fritze found himself at the centre of another scandal. In 2016, he published the book *The Evil Good Will – Rescuing the World and Giving-up the Self in the Migration Crisis* (Fritze, 2016) in which he describes "Willkommenskultur" as totalitarian, comparing it to Marxism and its utopian idealism. The online blog of the far-right publication *Sezession* celebrated the book as an important contribution to the "deconstruction (...) of the state-supported Willkommenskultur" as it is "unmasking the ideology [of Willkommenskultur]" and helps bring about a "fundamental shift in consciousness" necessary to defend "the self" (*das Eigene*). The book established the moral foundation for the "right of resistance for the native population" (Kaiser, 2016).

However, it was not only Fritze's book that fed into the far right's narrative of resistance. It was also the fact that he himself had been a regular contributor to *Sezession*. What led to the scandal, however, was that he had given a presentation in person at the *Institut für Staatspolitik* (IfS) at its so-called *Winterakademie* entitled "On the Fascination of Marxist Thinking" just after former GDR dissident Michael Beleites' presentation on "Is Competition a Natural Law? Biological Alternatives to Darwinism" (Institut für Staatspolitik, 2018).

In the public debate in Saxony and Germany, Fritze's views created some uproar, but were seen as the erred self-development of a lone academic isolated in the institute (Wolf,

2018). Yet, the institute's co-director and researcher of extremism, Uwe Backes, has himself expressed sympathies toward the New Right (Niven, 2002: 90). Backes encouraged Fritze to publish his article on Elser. When I meet Backes at the HAIT and we discuss my research, he is surprised that I am interested in Kubitschek as an intellectual representative of far-right nationalism: "He is not an intellectual, he is rather a strategist," Backes argues. He then claims that "Kubitschek is not a nationalist, but in the tradition of Stauffenberg." He sees more a problem in the general German debate about history that would be "inhibited", characterized by "neurotic traumas" and driven by a "moralistic dimension especially when looking at National Socialism in historical science".

To be sure, the institute has several academics who try to counter these tendencies. During my fieldwork I spent several days in the institute's library. On one occasion, one of the researchers, whose research is critically analysing the AfD, is doing an interview with the local public TV station, MDR, and commenting on a speech given by then AfD leader in Saxony-Anhalt André Poggenburg. The speech was given on the occasion of the so-called *Politischer Aschermittwoch*, a traditional event in German politics where well-known politicians give public speeches that are especially exaggerated, often taking place in villages and rural regions. The AfD's event in 2018 took place in a small village in Eastern Saxony. Poggenburg's speech caused uproar in German politics as he called Germans with a Turkish background "*Kümmelhändler*" and "*Kameltreiber*", "cumin merchants" and "camel jockeys", (Richter, 2018) both racist terms originating in colonial times.

As I was sitting behind a bookcase in the otherwise empty library, my presence went unnoticed. In the interview the researcher clearly dissects the racist dimension of the speech. After the interview the journalist seems to be disagreeing with the researcher's analysis. "Was this really directed against all the Turks in Germany? Do they all really have to feel addressed? Why do political speeches, especially those on the 'Politischer Aschermittwoch' always have to be so politically correct? I don't want to support what was said but I have the feeling everything that is said by the AfD is already marked as problematic just because it is the AfD who says it." I hear a short moment of silence. The researcher seems to be surprised by the journalist's direct countering of his analysis after the interview. "Of course, it is problematic, because it puts all German Turks in one devaluating category. And you have to understand that Poggenburg is member of the radical wing of the AfD; he embraces a *volkish* vision of Germany," the researcher explains. "Hmm, I don't know," the journalist replies, still not convinced. The short episode shows how, in a local context that tends to be supportive of the

AfD, critical researchers are not taken seriously. Instead, the racist thinking in the AfD reaches deep into academic institutions and parts of the media.

5. Dagen's Bookshop as a Site of Counterculture

The increasing polarization in German society is mirrored in institutions like the HAIT, causing their attempts to represent scholars from different backgrounds to flounder. The increasing confidence of the far right has led to making far-right voices in the institute visible. Fritze has turned the HAIT and its aims into a useful tool for the legitimization of the far right's totalitarian "other". This became clear in my conversations at Dagen's bookshop. Initially, I restrained from revealing my affiliation to the institute. However, with Fritze's and Backes' names being associated with the Institute, I soon realized that stating my affiliation actually helped me.

As I meet Dagen and Bormann one afternoon, Bormann, who himself is West German, tells me "Backes and Fritze are good men! They have an objective view on the situation." He says that they show the obvious, namely that Germany is today developing into a totalitarian society: "What was the SA in the 30s is today the Antifa and the so-called civil society." For Dagen and Bormann, Antifa and other left-wing civil society actors endanger the authentic German culture they try to preserve in their bookshop. Both regularly emphasize the historicity of their bookshop. For example, as we make our way from the bookshop to the private kitchen, we cross the courtyard in the middle of the three buildings that form Dagen's estate. "The buildings are from the 18th and 19th century," she tells. When we enter the kitchen, I sit down at a long wooden table. "My sister made it herself," Dagen tells me with certain pride. The kitchen has a warm and homely feeling. On the walls hang paintings and drawings from local artists²¹ as if to underline the local authenticity of the bookshop. As I make myself comfortable, Dagen serves me a hot tea.

She claims:

There is no such a thing as civil society What we call civil society today mainly consists of leftist organizations that are being financed by the state. So the long arm of the state reaches into civil society. When they attack us, their language is either personal or just empty slogans. Like

²¹ In his work David Holmes described a similar feeling of personal warmth and decoration with local art and craft when interviewing an Italian far-right leader at his home (Holmes, 2019: 66).

“populism”. These words are just labels and not important. There is no real solidarity and community anymore. What we call civil society is basically organizations financed by a neoliberal state that has outsourced activities and thus creates dependencies.

Dagen is proud not to be part of this “system” and emphasizes that she is fully independent. “The way many react to me and my positions is purely defensive. One can see that it is driven by their fear, not only the loss of their discursive hegemony and positions.” In face of a totalitarian “mainstream” she claims there has been the building of a true community of solidarity around her. “This makes me feel strong, so I can live with the constant attacks,” she says.

Dagen’s bookshop emerges as a space for intellectual dissidence that imagines a local intellectual “resistance” to a new, left-totalitarian system. As Dagen puts it, “the bookshop tries to capture exactly this. It is not primarily a business, but an alternative concept of life. It simply is *Heimat*, a place of belonging.” As she tries to describe the meaning of the bookshop for herself and Dresden, she uses the term “Scholle” (in English: ice floe) and refers to a sort of island that is safe from external influences and change.

It is a place of familiarity, not a place where you have to prove to yourself or work on every day. It carries in itself a strong consistency, but this is also linked, of course, to our life, the way we look at life, our attitude, and this attitude is in this case above all a conservative attitude. That means really to preserve something and rather to do things as a long-distance runner instead of doing things in the short run. No festival or event (...) but rather really to be something continuous. (...) We already live in a world of an unbelievable tempo, unbelievable glairiness, unbelievable hardness, so all that we read a long time ago in some science fiction novels like 1984 by Orwell is now becoming reality. (...) I know that many cannot bear this velocity already physically; they become sick, they become aggressive (...). When they just don’t have a haven of peace (Ruhepol), when they have no possibility to get outside of a work process, when they cannot make themselves free for family, for more traditional forms of living together, when all that is important is to get the literal “fast kick”, this is, I believe, a society that is not able to survive. We spend much time in the countryside where you can also observe animals, and where one simply realizes that what we are doing here is not healthy. It is lethal. (...) What I mean is this necessity to join (...) everything. But at one point one has to pull oneself out of everything. And that you can only do it if you have an inner structure, when you know what is right for yourself and what is less important, what you want and what you don’t want and I

believe that this structure can be decisively given from outside and inside respectively by spirit (Geist) or through belief, I mean religious belief. And of course, Bildung is a central aspect. The satisfaction, this feeling of security that overcomes oneself if one has a nice library, that gives me the feeling that for the rest of my life I can occupy myself with great things no matter what is going on out there.

Dagen and Bormann see their bookshop as a space for a far-right countercultural notion of *Kulturantion* that resists an emerging totalitarian regime. As Dagen tells me, their primary task as bookshop owners is that of “agitators [*Anstifter*] who give impulses and incite rebellion”. In doing so they do not only see themselves in the tradition of an anti-socialist dissidence; they also derive their task from anti-Napoleonic nationalism. As Bormann says, “my uncle always compared me to this bookshop owner Johann Philipp Palm who was shot during Napoleonic occupation in the early 19th century [Figure 28]. They shot him 10 times or so because he was upright and didn’t deny what he was doing. This non-conformity has been put into my cradle I guess.” Dagen, now turned silent, is staring out of the window, then nods and says “Yes, there were quite a lot of bookshop owners who had to give their lives for defending their culture.”



Figure 27: Execution of the bookshop owner Johann Philip Palm by French troops in 1806 (picture available on Wikimedia Commons).

The story of Palm gives meaning to Dagen's and Bormann's activism and their role in the political struggles in Dresden. Palm received the death sentence for a pamphlet he had written entitled "Germany in her deep humiliation", a fierce attack on Napoleon and the way his troops behaved when occupying Germany in the Napoleonic wars. He is a useful figure to refer to in order to paint the bookshop as a hub of resistance against an authoritarian "other". Palm was shot without a real trial and without having exposed the real author of the pamphlet. Still today, a prize for the freedom of speech and press is awarded in his name. Yet, referring to Palm also place the bookshop into a German nationalist tradition. Palm has not only been celebrated for his free speech, but also for his patriotic zeal in publishing a pamphlet of nationalist resistance against Napoleonic imperialism. Referring to him builds a bridge to 19th century notions of counterculture and *Kulturnation*. It provides Dagen and Bormann with a myth of origin in the fight against an alleged totalitarianism. Together with New Left notions of counterculture the narrative of anti-totalitarian resistance legitimates Dresden's far-right intellectual circles as bearers of a national countercultural spirit, this time directed against a totalitarian multiculturalism and commercialization.

6. Conclusion

The symbolic, ideational and personal links to the New Left endow Dresden's intellectual circles with the notion of an authentic East German counterculture and "anti-hegemonic" dissidence – a narrative that is further legitimized by academics like Fröschle and Fritze and the latter's affiliation to the respected HAIT. Populist social movements like PEGIDA are idealized as the revolutionary subject. East Germany is glorified as the place where an authentic homogenous and proud German culture would still be alive. This is seen as a threat by a civil society and by the state, as being a homogenous "system" promoting a technocratic globalization and the invasion by an African or Muslim "other". The perception of a *cultural* nationhood as predominantly threatened by a *racial* "other" lays bare its entanglements with 19th century notions of racial superiority that have been perpetuated by parts of the New Left.

The contradictory ways in which countercultural pasts are used as symbolic repertoires to give meaning to a "white" resistance show the instability of past meanings and meanings of the past. As Mikhail Bakhtin argued,

“Even past meanings, that is those that have arisen in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (completed once and for all, finished), they will always change (renewing themselves) in the course of the dialogue’s subsequent development, and yet to come. At every moment of the dialogue, there are immense and unlimited masses of forgotten meanings, but, in some subsequent moments, as the dialogue moves forward, they will return to memory and live in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will celebrate its rebirth.” (quoted in Todorov, 1984: 110).

By drawing on these unstable symbolic reservoirs far-right intellectuals are able to design a continuity to countercultural notions of *Kulturnation*. Selectively linking past phenomena of anti-totalitarian in an anti-system politics that is seen as specifically German enables them to establish a transcendent truth that brings “different fields of cultural activity (...) into relation to each other” (Gingrich and Banks, 2006: 20–21). While through Heidegger and the “conservative revolution”, far-right intellectuals can philosophically defend a cultural *Volk* rather than one defined as biological racism, the influence of the New Left introduces the notion of counterculture. In both cases, Dresden’s intellectuals claim to represent an authentic left and right that is countering an inauthentic totalitarian and radical mainstream. By applying the post-structuralist theories of the New Left, far-right intellectuals claim to defend a white, counter-hegemonic and suppressed *Kulturnation* that is seen as expressed by the populist movements like PEGIDA. Dresden’s far-right intellectuals’ have increased their influence in academia and beyond. Today they are members of networks including public figures such as Thilo Sarrazin and Henryk M Broder – connections that manifested themselves in the so-called 2018 declaration (Broder et al., 2018).

The next chapter looks at a third counter-revolutionary repertoire Dresden’s far-right intellectuals draw on – another national-revolutionary moment – the 1989 revolution. Merging the New Left’s anti-totalitarianism with the memory of the anti-totalitarianism of countercultural, anti-socialist educated bourgeois intellectuals who were active in the late 1980s, Dresden’s intellectual far-right milieu today envisions Dresden as a symbolic site of cultural resistance that has survived two totalitarian regimes: a totalitarian National socialism and the GDR’s technocratic “petty bourgeois” socialism.

CHAPTER 3: From Bourgeoisie to Bohemia. Re-enacting Conservative Dissidence in the GDR²²

One of the first warm days in Dresden in 2018 is 19 April. Despite the good weather, the *Lindengarten*, a former ballroom, is full. About 70 guests, mostly men between 40 and 60, wait for Vera Lengsfeld to give a book reading. A former German Democratic Republic (GDR) civil rights activist and Green Party politician, Lengsfeld is now a member of the Christian Democrat Union (CDU). She has been involved in activism against Islam and mosques since 2006 (Lewicki and Shooman, 2020: 5). Today, she is part of a group of several former GDR civil right activists and public intellectuals who support *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and PEGIDA and has recently become a vocal far-right intellectual who co-initiated the *Erklärung 2018* (Broder et al., 2018), a petition against “illegal mass immigration”. Calling for intellectual solidarity with far-right populist street protests like PEDIGA, the declaration aims, as Lengsfeld says in Dresden, “to do what the support of GDR intellectuals did to resistance in 1989”. Its webpage shows a photograph of a 1989 anti-regime demonstration in Berlin. The petition received more than 170,000 signatures from conservative and far-right intellectuals, some of them very prominent, like Henryk M Broder or Uwe Tellkamp.

The lecture’s location symbolizes the convergence of two pasts: a 1980s GDR dissidence and a pre-Nazi guilt-free national greatness. Built in the late 19th century, the ballroom embodies the rise of the German Empire during the *Gründerzeit*²³ (Kukula and Helas, 2007). The central stage is framed by two emblems showing the heads of Goethe and Liszt, two figures embodying the German *Kulturnation*. The aesthetics of the room echo the years during which a German nation state was formed and with it its cultural identity; that is, a “golden age”, where German national self-confidence was seen at its height, where a memory of guilt was unimaginable and where Germany was, so it is imagined, culturally and ethnically homogenous. It is a guilt-free, white past of *Kulturnation* that on this sunny day literally frames the collective and nostalgic remembering the revolutionary ending of the GDR.

The reading is part of Lengsfeld’s promotional tour for her book *1989: Diary of a Peaceful Revolution* (Lengsfeld, 2014) and the *Declaration 2018* (Figure 29).

²² A different version of this chapter was published in 2020 in *Social Movement Studies* (Göppfarth, 2020a).

²³ The name given to the time between 1880 and 1914 when the German Empire witnessed a long period of prosperity.

Introducing the book Lengsfeld asserts that today “we live in a society, where the GDR has been resurrected (...) and where you can earn a prize for civil courage when you carve a swastika into your hip and claim that it was done by right extremists” (Lengsfeld, 2014: 9). Calling someone out as a Nazi, she argues, is the ultimate sign of civility. She claims that a fading memory of the socialist dictatorship and an emphasis on the Nazi past has led to a societal climate conducive to the return of a leftist totalitarianism. In the reading Lengsfeld reads out her notes on the 19th of every month in 1989 and sets the events in direct relation to the present day, 19 April 2018. Her words bring back the heated atmosphere of the GDR’s last months. The audience listens carefully to the detailed accounts. Whenever Lengsfeld mentions familiar situations and known events, one sees nodding heads and hears sentences like “that’s the way it was” or “I had totally forgotten about that”. Lengsfeld makes sure that the present context is not seen as detached from memories of GDR resistance:

Today’s situation is not far from 1989. Look at the denial of reality by the established parties. Their discourse on immigration reminds me of the wishful thinking of the GDR’s political leadership. Reality and the mood in the country are simply neglected.

Lengsfeld pushes the analogy further: “Then, STASI and state were the pig system.²⁴ Today, the pig system is the state paying the Antifa.” While the West Germans in Dagen’s far-right intellectual circle, like Böckelmann, Fröschle and Bormann, tend to compare the current political system to Nazism, here the individual and social memory of anti-GDR activism emerges as a powerful trope for the circle’s East German members. The message is clear: the resistance against the GDR regime and STASI needs to be re-established against a “new leftist dictatorship” by Chancellor Merkel and the Antifa. “We need another revolution to stop the destruction of our beautiful country” she says. Intertwining Lengsfeld’s personal account with the listeners’ individual and local social memory, a new, shared memory is forged in the present and pitted against a “repressive leftist-liberal state”. Individual and collective memories are socially co-constructed and revised from a far-right perspective.²⁵ By co-constructing an alternative past, political,

²⁴ The German term “pig system” here refers to a corrupt political regime.

²⁵ For the post-reunification period in Dresden see Ten Dyke, 2001.

individual and collective memories are synchronized, equating 1989's day-to-day events to today in order to drive present and future political activism.

49 WortReich: *Vera Lengsfeld*
1989
Tagebuch der Friedlichen Revolution
Fortsetzung? Vera Lengsfeld liest höchst aktuelle Episoden aus ihrem und unserem Leben. Ihr Tagebuch behandelt Fragen, die uns immer noch und jetzt wieder sehr bewegen. Welche Errungenschaften sind heute wieder genauso gefährdet wie damals? Darüber kann und muss man reden.

Einladung
zur Lesung und Diskussion am
19. April 2018, 19 Uhr im
historischen Ballsaal „Lindengarten“
des Quality Hotel Plaza Dresden,
Königsbrücker Straße 121a,
01099 Dresden
Eintritt 10,- €, Abendkasse 12,- €
Karten an allen bekannten
Vorverkaufsstellen

MICHAEL SITTE-ZÖLLNER
„WORTREICH“
WUNSCHWITZ 5
01683 NOSSEN

Vera Lengsfeld,
geb. 4. Mai 1952 in Sondershausen, Thüringen,
studierte Geschichte und Philosophie in Leipzig und Berlin.
Sie war seit den 70er Jahren aktiv in der Opposition gegen das
SED-Regime, Bürgerrechtlerin und Mitglied der ersten frei
gewählten Volkskammer der DDR.
Von 1990 bis 2005 war Lengsfeld Mitglied des Deutschen
Bundestages, zunächst bis 1996 für Bündnis 90/Die Grünen,
ab 1996 für die CDU. Seitdem ist sie freischaffende Autorin in
Berlin-Pankow.
Lengsfeld erhielt 1990 den Aachener Friedenspreis und 2008
das Bundesverdienstkreuz. Sie ist Unterzeichnerin der Charta
2017 und Mitinitiatorin der Gemeinsamen Erklärung 2018
www.erklaerung2018.de

WortReich:
V.i.S.d.P. Michael Sitte-Zöllner,
Wunschwitz 5, 01683 Nossen

Vera Lengsfeld
1989
Tagebuch der Friedlichen Revolution

Vera Lengsfeld
Ich wollte frei sein
Die Mauer, die Stasi, die Revolution
HERBIG

Das Buch kann bei der Veranstaltung
käuflich erworben werden.

Figure 28: Ticket for Lengsfeld's book reading with short bio and advertisement for her books (photo taken by the author).

What this future should look like can be read in the books of far-right authors. Lengsfeld's lecture is chaired by Dagen, whose bookshop is represented with a bookstand. Lengsfeld's book is sold along with the far-right books like *Nationalmasochismus* (Ley and Lichtmesz, 2018) and *Finis Germania* by Rolf Peter Sieferle (Sieferle, 2017), which call for an end to German self-hate and a *Volk* based on a “positive, mobilizing, self-affirmative identity which is necessary for the survival and thriving of a nation” (Ley and Lichtmesz, 2018: 10). Setting the scene for her far-right activism, Lengsfeld shows how the memory of a conservative educated bourgeois anti-GDR activism embracing ordinary people's protest in the street is used to frame a countercultural resistance to a “left-liberal totalitarianism” and multiculturalism.

In chapter one I examined how far-right intellectuals embrace Heidegger and the “conservative revolution” to frame themselves as local and thus “true” intellectuals who embrace not a biologist notion of race but a white *Kulturnation*. Chapter two looked at how this white identity is merged with New Left notions of a countercultural resistance to commercialization and Islamization. In this chapter I argue that the memory of the local revolutionary past and anti-socialist, conservative, educated bourgeois lifestyles in the 1980s are used as a mimetic archive for a white “revolutionary” identity formation. As Lengsfeld shows, memories of the anti-socialist dissident past not only legitimates an intellectual embracing of populist movements, it also reactivates a local nostalgic memory of a bourgeois bohemian conservatism opposed to an uneducated but dominant middle class and its petit bourgeois lifestyle (Kreuzer, 1968: v–vii).

Lengsfeld exemplifies how local far-right intellectuals in Dresden draw from the past educated bourgeois opposition to the GDR to re-enact a conservative, educated bourgeois dissidence this time against the “destruction of our beautiful country” by technocracy and non-white immigration. The political aesthetics designed here merge the *poiesis* of a white revolutionary self to the *mimesis* and defence of present and past notions of a white, educated bourgeoisie. To construct these aesthetics, the GDR is selectively remembered as both an idealized white national culture and an absolute totalitarian “other”. The idea of a specific East German educated bourgeois identity helps to navigate the tensions between defence and transformation, idealization and othering of the GDR past in the present as it enables notions of cultural superiority, religion, conservatism and race to be subsumed, while also tapping into the identity of resisting the GDR. In the first two sections I briefly review the role of memory, nostalgia and *Ostalgie* in the far right before turning to Dagen and her bookshop and the way it serves as a space in which the politics of aesthetics of an anti-socialist activism are remembered and performed as a white resistance movement in the present.

1. Memory, Nostalgia and the Far Right

As stated in the introduction, the socialist state and its bohemian counterculture drew on aesthetic and structural continuities to 19th century notions of *Kulturnation* to generate a national identity. Embracing *Kulturnation* as a myth of origin helped to preserve and claim,

rather than question 19th century tropes of national greatness and European superiority and provided a shared mimetic archive for a modern white European civilization. Occluding racism, anti-Semitism and far-right activism (Krüger-Potratz et al., 1991; Waibel, 2014), 19th century visions of *Kulturnation* underpinned the attempts of the GDR elites and its intellectual conservative critiques to portray themselves as morally superior to the capitalist West. This went together with the enforcing of spatial segregation (Göktürk et al., 2007; Hussain, 1991) and the public marking of Arab, African and Asian socialist contract workers in the GDR as uncivilized (Piesche, 2002; Spennemann, 1997; Waibel, 2012: 97–111).

Anti-socialist intellectuals remained sceptical about official claims of superiority. They tended to see the socialist state as a threat rather than a guarantor of European culture and civilization. Instead of celebrating socialist progress they saw its “petty bourgeois elites” as blind to cultural heritage and as facilitators of an “Africanization” and descent into “barbarianism”. The leadership of uncultivated elites threatened their place in the “European family”, which for them was the synonym for cultivation and civilization (Verdery, 1991: 2). Anti-system intellectualism was here explicitly defined through the embracing of Europe as civilized and opposed to an “African” uncivilized “other”.

While the memory of an educated bourgeois anti-socialism is specific to East Germany and Dresden, the construction of a countercultural memory is not. Memory has emerged as a central focus of far-right politics and activism. As noted in recent scholarship, like progressive movements the far right aims at a subversive construction of counter-hegemonic visions of the past (Bull, 2016: 218) to *mobilize* for an alternative future (Gutman, 2011). This memory-construction is not only meant to mobilize for social change but also to *legitimize* it. Achieving both depends on the salience of shared memories (Assmann, 2006b; Müller, 2002; Olick, 2008) that are appropriated in a “usable” way for the legitimization and the founding of political authority (Hoye and Nienass, 2014; Wüstenberg and Art, 2008).

Yet, far-right populist memory is inherently ambivalent as it simultaneously challenges and defends hegemonic memory discourses (De Cesari and Kaya, 2019). Unlike its progressive counterparts far-right populist memory politics do not aim for a critical (re)assessment of national pasts but are fundamentally opposed to it (Bull and Hansen, 2016). A “people’s memory” is pitted against the memory of “elites” and turned it into a sacralized and mystified

national symbol (Bull, 2016) celebrating not questioning reactionary, nativist and racist pasts (Levi and Rothberg, 2018: 356). A homogenized collective memory regime freed from past guilt forms the basis for a pride-based exclusive nationhood (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). This purifying dimension is common to far-right populist memory politics in Europe (Caramani and Manucci, 2019; Kotwas and Kubik, 2019; Wodak and Forchtner, 2014) and the US (Wasilewski, 2019).

This ambivalence is also characteristic of intellectual far-right memory activism in Dresden. As the example of Vera Lengsfeld's lecture shows, the memory of the socialist past has a strongly nostalgic dimension. Yet, in Dresden's far-right intellectual milieu, nostalgia is not simply a passive longing for a lost past, but also a political means to "reconfigure the future through reference to the reinvented national past" (Kenny, 2017: 15). It provides an emotional basis for the activation of individual, social and political memories (Assmann, 2006a) from the socialist past to politicize intellectuals and their attentive audiences and to mobilize them through the prefiguration of an alternative German collective memory and far-right future. At the core here is an "anxious hope" (Gordon, 2018) for a future similar to the nostalgic past and a different dystopian present and future. A revolutionary, whitewashed past is used to frame and give meaning to a white nationalist and educated bourgeois resistance in the present.

This process of ambivalent politicization relies on the merging of two forms of nostalgia that refer to different pasts and both challenge and confirm the German memory consensus. The first is a positive nostalgia for a guilt-free past that not only forms the basis for the post-war far right's political memory of national pride. More central is here the widely shared myth of *Kulturnation* that underpinned attempts in both East and West Germany, left and right, to establish a national cultural identity untainted by and occluding Germany's illicit politics of the past. Lengsfeld's choice of venue represents a notion of *Kulturnation* that is seen as the essence of a healthy, normal German identity in the 19th century prior to Nazism. It expresses the aesthetic common sense underpinning a shared understanding of cultural nationhood that both elites and "the masses" can adhere to. The second nostalgia is more specifically linked to the Dresden context. It is a negative nostalgia characterized not by a celebration of the GDR, but also of the educated bourgeois resistance to it. It celebrates the intellectual communities, their activism, local rootedness and alternative lifestyle as an embodiment of an authentic *Kulturnation* that has resisted socialism and now reclaims an intellectual cultural leadership.

It is here useful to draw on Tatjana Boym distinction between "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia (Boym, 2001). While the former hopes to restore a golden past, the latter

draws on the past for a critical re-evaluation and active changing of the present. In this chapter I argue that in the intellectual support of the far right in Dresden, both elements underpin an ambivalent memory politics entangling notions of *white* cultural nationhood with far-right politics. Here, reflective nostalgia can be restorative, and vice versa. I thus conceptualize nostalgia more broadly as an important driving force for political change. Pitted against cultureless technocratic elites and uncivilized non-white immigrants, negative and positive nostalgia draw on a shared repertoire of *Kulturnation* to mobilize far-right activism.

Together the nationalist positive and the post-socialist negative nostalgia form a multidirectional nostalgia “cross-referencing” and capturing ‘simultaneously the individual, embodied, and lived side and the collective, social, and constructed side of our relations to the past’ (Rothberg, 2009: 3–4). Their complex intersection goes beyond a simple glorification of the past (Druxes, 2016: 18–19) responding “to increased anxiety” (De Vries and Hoffmann, 2018: 3; Duyvendak, 2011). Nor is it simply an apolitical appropriation of everyday past, as in *Ostalgie* (Bach, 2017) or instrumentalization of revolutionary and democratic discourses of the anti-GDR movements in the 1980s (Simpson, 2016: 38); instead, this multidirectional nostalgia re-activates symbolic repertoires of past conservative educated bourgeois anti-socialist activism. Nostalgia here emerges as an action-oriented form of remembrance that is central to individuals’ and groups’ readings of the present and imagining of the future (Dames, 2010: 272; Stewart, 1988) and carries an “agency of yearning” (Whitehead, 2010). By drawing on social and individual memories local far right movements help to make a far-right political memory resonate with a local context (Bonikowski, 2016: 429–431; Snow and Benford, 1988). Through its productive dimension, nostalgia can be entangled with a hopeful imagining of an alternative future. Together with pre-war and New Left notions of alternative, countercultural lifestyles, it today underpins a prefigurative far-right politics. This shows that prefigurative politics and notions of “hope” are not only central to progressive movements (Blee, 2007), but also underpin far-right activism (Decker, 2015: 16).

2. *Ostalgie* and Nostalgia for the National

Nostalgia is not only a form of refusal to feel at home in a *political* regime (Roth, 1991: 15, 19). It can also express the rejection of a *memory* regime. After reunification, Germany witnessed two nostalgic reactions to the hegemonizing critical memory regime: East

German *Ostalgie* and West German far-right nostalgia. In West Germany, reunification ended the east–west antagonism. Subsequent debates on national identity led to a wave of far-right publications that sought to reassess the Federal Republic of Germany’s (FRG) memory consensus (Olick, 2003) and calling for a more “self-confident nation” celebrating its pre-1933 past (Rohrmoser, 1990; Schwilk, 1995) and opposing a Holocaust-focused collective memory. This opposition was politically embodied by far-right parties (Heilbrunn, 2017; Müller, 1999) but it also chimed with wider parts of society (Assmann, 2013).

In East Germany, reunification led to a different form of nostalgia. Unlike in the West where nationalism was increasingly seen as an impediment to reason and progress, and like in other Eastern European socialist states, the concept of the nation remained largely untouched (Suny and Kennedy, 2001: 13). Most GDR citizens were socialized by cultural politics aimed at a collective guilt-free memory (Kattago, 2001: 82). Hence the notion of a guilt-free, proud national identity remains powerful in East German conceptualizations of culture to this day (Leo, 2004). Yet, this guilt-free memory was challenged after reunification. East Germany’s myth of anti-fascism was critically reassessed (Morina, 2011: 242) and its guilt-free “usable past” brought into question (Clarke and Wölfel, 2011: 3). East German anti-immigrant violence permitted a West-dominated public discourse to portray East Germany as the place where Nazism had survived unchallenged, while largely neglecting West German anti-immigrant violence. Many East Germans experienced this as a double humiliation: the abrupt vanishing of GDR symbols was perceived as a devaluation that was exacerbated by the conflation of the GDR with Nazism (Glaeser, 2000). *Ostalgie* emerged as a renewed interest in symbols of the socialist past and “a defence mechanism against the uncertainties caused by rapid political and economic changes” (Sierp, 2009: 49–50).

During my fieldwork, Dresden’s urban spaces are full aesthetics of *Ostalgie* that often converge with the celebration of local identity and references to *Kulturnation*. For example, trams advertised an exhibition of a famed GDR movie, *Drei Haselnüsse für Aschenbrödel* (Figure 30). The movie is a GDR take on one of the Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales and is situated in an idealized 18th century past that resonates with local visions of *Heimat* or homeland. It is widely known in East Germany and was filmed in Moritzburg Castle close to Dresden. The advertised exhibition takes place in the same castle and blurs childhood memories with memories of Germany’s cultural heritage, its fictionalization in

the past and its continued presence in Dresden's surroundings. The movie and exhibition appear as detached from the time and place, as commonsensical renderings of a *Kulturnation* that is engrained in popular memory across political systems unrelated to the context of its production and the current political polarization.



Figure 30: A Dresden tram advertising the Schloss Moritzburg with a reference to the famous GDR movie *Drei Haselnüsse für Aschenbrödel* (photo by the author).



Figure 31: Canned tomato sauce “Schoolkitchen tomatosauce”, referring to the tomato sauce served in GDR schools, recognizable by the GDR coat of arms and the FDJ (the GDR's youth organization; see chapter two) uniform worn by a little girl (photo taken by the author in a Dresden supermarket).

Another example is the pride in the GDR's technical achievements, as exemplified by the popularity of old motorbikes. This pride often goes hand in hand with symbols of local identity and a Saxonian patriotism, such as the Saxonian coat of arms (Figure 33). The nostalgic celebration of the GDR past goes as far as the selling of GDR “school tomato sauce” in supermarkets with a label depicting a girl in Free German Youth (FDJ) uniform, Germany's national colours and the GDR's official symbol (Figure 30).

The most visible example is, however, the city's private “GDR Museum”. It resides in the upper floor of a shopping centre where its advertising merges with that of different supermarket and drugstore chains (Figure 32 and 36). In the museum the achievements of technical engineering are proudly presented (Figure 35) alongside everyday products of life in the GDR (Bach, 2017). Yet, the exhibition not only conveys the simple idealized and commercialized memory of everyday, it also conveys a nostalgic memory of the strong national identity in the GDR that was not questioned by a critical assessment of the Nazi past. Linked to it are the heroic memories of a communist resistance that is presented, in the figure of Ernst Thälmann, as an embodiment of the German *Volk* (Figure 37). Music also plays a central role. The lyrics of the popular GDR band *Die Puhys* are displayed. They convey a form of local attachment and national pride that explicitly refers to Germany as a *Kulturnation*:

*If I think of Germany, I remember poems
the sound of great names comes out of dead stone
And there is silence inside me as never before
Here I was born, this is my land.*

*If I think of Germany, I also feel like crying out loud
I remember so much hatred, distress and misery
I see the earth burned to ashes
Here I was born, this is also my land.*

*If I think of Germany and you my child
Of all who have been born in our time
I think of the people over there and here
Of those who are overcoming the fears together.*

*I don't want to forget!
I don't want to forget what once was!*

In the lyrics a proud *Kulturnation* is opposed to the misery and catastrophe of Nazism, echoing the general perception of Nazism as opposed to a transcending notion of cultural nationhood both in East and West Germany. Both the memory of a *Kulturnation* and of Nazism are presented as binding together the *Volk* on both sides of a separated Germany, a shared source of identity in a divided reality. As part of the exhibition's aesthetic concept the poem conveys a proud ethnic national identity in connection to a nostalgic remembering of the GDR past. The lyrics are placed behind a display of so-called *GDR Wundertüten* (surprise bags, as the contents are unknown) that can be purchased for 15 euros (Figure 34). The fact that the lyrics literally provide the background for a commercial act underlines the banality and "common senseness" of this aesthetic ordering. "Revolution" and "socialism" are here remembered as phenomena of the past that can be re-experienced and even purchased. At the same time, notions of national and local pride are transmitted as a pre-political given.



Figure 33: GDR-fabricated cars and motorcycles in the GDR Museum with a photo of the GDR's last head of state Erich Honecker (photos 31–36 taken by the author).



Figure 31: "Schwalbe", GDR-built motorcycle with the Saxonian coat of arms and a sticker of Donald Duck, in a Dresden street.



Figure 29: "Ernst Thälmann – a great son of the German people." A newspaper article displayed in the GDR Museum



Figure 34: GDR-built firetruck in front of the shopping centre, advertising the GDR Museum.



Figure 32: Display of the lyrics of the Pudhy's song as a background for GDR merchandise.



Figure 30: "The World of the GDR" has found its place in the capitalist present. Advertisement for the GDR Museum side by side with advertisements for supermarkets and electronics stores.

The examples above exemplify *Ostalgie* as symbolic resistance to West-dominated politics (Bach, 2015: 139) by depoliticising public symbols of socialism and revolution and turning them into privatized and commodified objects²⁶ that challenge ‘nation-building agendas of the new Germany’ from the margins (Berdahl, 1999: 193). In Dresden’s public space, these symbols are detached from their political context. At the same time, their aesthetic arrangement and presentation not only conveys a depoliticization of socialist and revolutionary symbols, but the core of these symbols, namely the notion of a guilt-free, proud and white national and local identity, is left intact. The presentation of these symbols as, for example, in the “GDR Museum” therefore also represents a nostalgic commemoration of a political memory of national greatness. This greatness is not only shown in the pride of engineering achievements, but also through the banalized commemoration of a popular *Kulturnation* that is opposed to and detached from Nazism.

As a Holocaust-centred collective memory was part of the West-dominated nation-building process, *Ostalgie* can be interpreted as a symbolic and aesthetic resistance nostalgically celebrating a guilt-free past. While in the 1990s *Ostalgie* represented a depoliticized nostalgia for a guilt-free past sought in everyday symbols, individual and social memory, the right-wing nostalgia for a guilt-free past represented a political memory. While *Ostalgie* was highly symbolic, the far right’s explicit nostalgia for a great past lacked meaningful forms of past resistance that would not refer to the Nazi past. Such a nostalgia for national greatness remained largely limited to West Germany and failed to gain broader support (Salzborn, 2016: 43–45). Today we can observe a symbiosis of *Ostalgie* and far-right nostalgia. The pervasive symbolism of *Ostalgie* in East Germany banalizes a *commonsensical* notion of cultural national greatness that is implicit in *Ostalgie*. Its apolitical, commonsensical aesthetics and its form of a social and individual memory veil a political yearning for a guilt-free memory. Therefore, it provides the far right’s explicit call for a political memory of pride with an effective cultural opportunity structure to activate the socialist past for its project of white identity.

²⁶ Esra Özyürek has observed a similar process in Turkey (Özyürek, 2006).

3. Multidirectional Nostalgia and Far-Right Activism

The far right's ambivalent memory politics and multidirectional nostalgia is not visible only in Lengsfeld's lecture. The nostalgic remembering, on the one hand, of the GDR as a preserver of a proud German national identity that has been lost in West Germany and the imagination of an educated bourgeois resistance against a left totalitarian system, on the other, is widespread. Not only West Germans like Böckelmann and Fröschle idealize East Germany as the residue of an authentic, white nationhood untainted by immigration (chapter two) (Greiffenhagen and Greiffenhagen, 1994). The envisioning of East and Central Europe as the bearer of an original Europeanness untouched by Muslim immigration has emerged as a powerful trope beyond the far right (Sayyid, 2018). In an article on the blog of the far-right *Sezession* (Bosselmann, 2019), the GDR is praised as the "last nation" as it has kept the "will to be a nation" alive by nurturing a pride in the German *Kultur*: "The cultural heritage of the German intellectual history was held up [by the GDR] because (...) it did not only want to continue this great tradition but complete it." The author adds that this went together with keeping the GDR "monoethnically German". Again, the entanglement of culture and race emerge in this vision of *Kultur*. Its feared end is directly linked to the idea of an ethnic dissolution through a West German "hedonistic" embracing of a "homogenizing multicultural society" at the service of the economy. East Germany is here imagined as the symbolic site of a true white German identity resisting globalization and multiculturalization. What is more, Bosselmann implicitly describes his audience as the true bourgeoisie that is opposed to an inauthentic "neo-bourgeois" that has lost the touch to its local and national roots.

This ambivalent memory and multidirectional nostalgia has not only come to underpin the AfD's increasing links to civil society institutions working on the commemoration of the GDR's victims (Wüstenberg, 2019); it also underpins many of the events in Susanne Dagen's bookshop. Situated in Loschwitz, a central space for the 1980s anti-GDR conservative bohemia, the bookshop brings together the local educated bourgeoisie, former GDR activists and far-right intellectuals. Dagen initiated the *Charta 2017*, an online petition against an increasing "dictatorship of opinion", drawing open parallels to anti-socialist dissidence (Dagen, 2017). The petition was signed by more than 7,800 supporters and led to the debate between writers Uwe Tellkamp and Durs Grünbein (chapter one).

During my fieldwork, Dagen held events like the Lengsfeld lecture as part of the series *ZeitZeuge: Ein Leben zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie* (Contemporary Witness: A Life between Dictatorship and Democracy) and *70 Jahre DDR* (70 Years GDR) in the *Kulturhaus* adjacent to the bookshop, cooperating with the Association of the Politically Persecuted by Communism²⁷ and implying a continuation of the GDR-totalitarianism into the present. Several former GDR dissidents have become part of far-right networks. For example, Michael Beleites, a friend of Dagen, has emerged as a central figure of Germany's far-right environmentalism. In his blog "Quergedacht – Positionen zum Zeitgeschehen" (Lateral Thinking – Positions on Current Affairs) (Beleites, 2020), he ponders on the "difference but equality" of peoples and races as well as the importance of *Heimat* for identity in times of migration. Dagen benefitted from a cooperation with Dresden's administration that allowed her to advertise events on the municipal library's flyer – proof of her local standing. One half of the flyer is filled with events from the public library, the other with events organized by Dagen, sometimes together with *Tumult* (Figures 38–40).

²⁷ The association has a longer history of entanglements with explicitly religious activists and the AfD (Wüstenberg, 2019: 101).

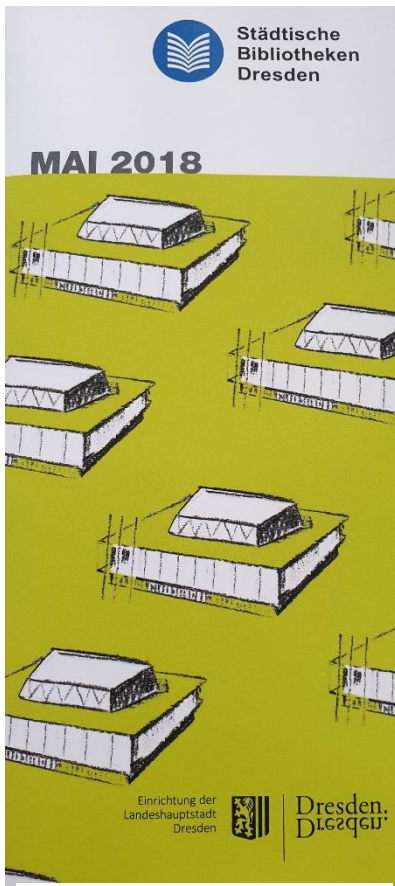


Figure 38: Programs brochure for the municipal libraries and public cultural spaces in Dresden for May 2018, with the city's official logo (photos of figures 38–40 taken by the author).

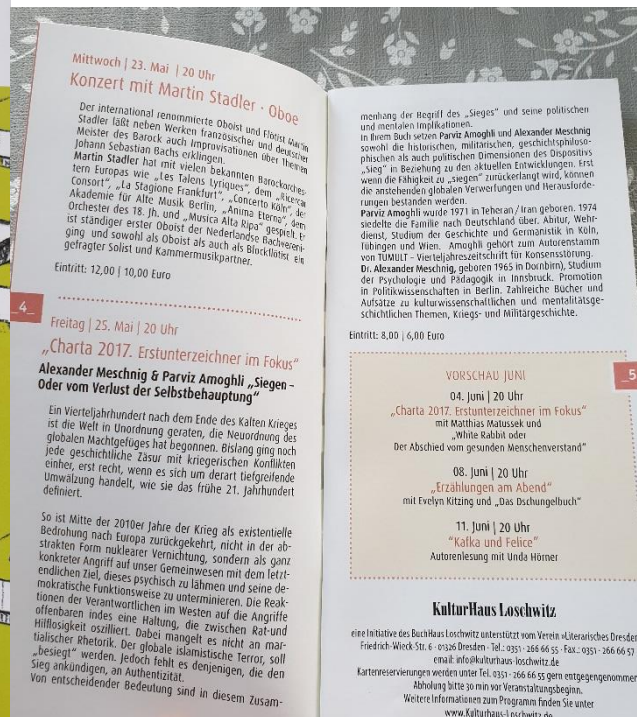


Figure 35: Programs for Dagen's KulturHaus in the same brochure, advertising concerts and book readings.



Figure 40: Back cover of the same brochure, advertising the book reading of *Triumphing or on the Loss of Self-Assertion*, a book published by Tumult with a cover of a decapitated statue, symbolizing the loss of a white European dominance (chapter five).

The event space next to her bookshop is crowded for most of the events I go to, and seats are hard to get. I attend the first event of the “contemporary witness series”, a “reading and conversation with Angelika Barbe and Siegmara Faust”. As the flyer for the reading says, the events are supposed to present dissidents “who as non-conformist writers and artists were exposed to the arbitrariness of the lawless regime of the GDR”. The flyer transfers the past resistance to the present, stating that the “calling to ‘change the country, to fight peacefully for democracy’ is today again driving former dissidents”. By initiating the event series, Dagen wants to give a voice to “dissidents (...) who were ostracized in the GDR and are being stigmatised again today”.

Siegmara Faust is a writer who was imprisoned in the GDR. He was part of the GDR’s anti-socialist conservative intelligentsia. In the 1980s he formed a group with other writers that was inspired by the 19th century French bohemian and symbolistic artists collective Les Nabis (Kaiser, 2016: 34). After reunification, he was Saxony’s state

representative in the assessment of the Stasi files. Today he co-owns a former GDR prison, now a memorial site for GDR victims, in Cottbus and has shown support for AfD positions (Wüstenberg, 2019: 102). Angelika Barbe was equally active in the GDR dissident movement. Originally a member of the GDR's Social Democratic Party (SPD), she joined the CDU together with Vera Lengsfeld. Until 2017 she worked for the Saxonian state centre for political education, an institution that exists in all German states to promote a participatory democracy (Sächsische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2020).

Introducing the event, Dagen says that the main reason for starting the series was an article published by *Der Spiegel* on former GDR dissidents (Von Hammerstein, 2018), "ridiculing" their activism against the socialist regime. Faust starts his reading saying that he "hates the 68ers who dominate the elites today". He claims "most of them were spoiled hedonists who turned into brutal radicals. *We* knew what it meant to live in real dictatorship. Nevertheless, we were way more peaceful and bourgeois in 1989. But instead of acknowledging that, the 68ers are glorified today." Instead, he admires "such true characters as Heinz Buschkowski", referring to the controversial former SPD mayor of Berlin's diverse neighbourhood Neukölln. "With him there was order and not this *Multikulti*. He said where the problems were. And with people like him you could still make fun of Mohamed". Faust's frustration with a lack of recognition for his claimed educated bourgeois intellectuals' role in the toppling of the GDR goes together with a rejection of multiculturalism. A new limitation of the freedom of speech "against Islam" is here seen as repeating GDR censorship.

He reads out two poems that he has written, and which treat his memories of growing up in the post-war years and under the GDR's dysfunctional economy. They are full of pathos, religious references and quotes of famous German poets. He tells the audience about his time in prison and says that this has deeply shaped him intellectually. "In prison we were abused, but this was not too bad. In fact, we had the time to write our own newspaper. This was intellectually stimulating. There were many highly educated people, writers and professors with me," he says, underlining that he really developed a cultural consciousness under these conditions. "This gave me the strength to continue to resist," he says. When he was released the first thing he did was

"to buy a soup, a newspaper and Goethe's Faust II. I then spent a year reading Heidegger. All this made me realize soon that Europe has come to be contaminated with a cultural Marxism that destroys tradition, culture and religion to create a new man. But finally,

people wake up now. I hope it is not too late. I have pushed myself to read the Quran. I can tell you, this is not compatible with our culture. Full of brutality. Sooner or later they will take over.”

Barbe joins in and says she agrees with Faust.

“Fortunately, we have such intellectuals like Hamed Abdel-Samad, Bassam Tibi, Imrad Karim, Necla Kelek or Seyran Ates. They know what they are talking about. Abdel-Samad said that he has converted from superstition to knowledge. But they are stigmatized and receive death threats. This cannot be tolerated in a liberal-democratic country. Islam does not belong to Germany. Nor do headscarves.”

Faust continues by referring to Heidegger: “Today Europe is in the pincers between left-liberalism and Islam. After all, the Nazis were leftists, they were socialists. We should not forget that. So people really need to join the streets.” Barbe underlines that this event is important “because these [GDR] perpetrators are today still sitting in the national parliament”. She claims that Dirk Hilbert, Dresden’s mayor, would be “more interested in fighting the right than assessing the leftovers of the GDR” she sees still present in public institutions and the media.



Figure 36: Siegmund Faust during his reading in the KulturHaus on 20 April 2018 (photo taken by the author).

In the Q&A it someone in the audience asks if there is a utopian vision for the future today: “In 1989 we were driven by a social utopia. Today I think we must defend bourgeois values such as the family against the ideology of world openness. But how can we better mobilise for this?” Barbe answers:

Religion should really be the way to go. Religion has organically grown together with the German nation. And from Christianity we know that it is about loving the one that is close to you, not the one who is far. But today we are too used to prosperity and wealth. We all want to be Gutmenschen. We don't want to take responsibility. Like this we will not be able to eradicate evil. So we have to reread the bible, to defend the Christian vision of the human being. This is not a utopia but a struggle that we have to fight now.

Another man in the audience says that he has also attended Lengsfeld's lecture and laments that not enough young people were there. “How can we reach a broader and younger audience? And how come that the swastika is seen as a taboo while the Red Star is hip?” Here, Faust appears a bit clueless and says that the main problem is the anti-authoritarian education. “Due to this, young people are without respect. But they are waking up now. And the older they get, the more they will realize what is going wrong.”

Both Barbe and Faust seamlessly interweave the memory of GDR dissidence with anti-Islam activism and an embracing of religious and conservative values. Their symbolic boundaries are clear: an educated bourgeoisie that is carried by values of nationhood and Christianity and that is defined against leftist elites on the one hand, and Muslim immigrants on the other.

4. From Individual Memory to Political Activism

After the events in the bookshop, chosen participants often gather in Dagen's kitchen over local wine and Mediterranean snacks. Not only are the presentations discussed here in more closed circles, but also more general social and political developments are discussed. After one event, Böckelmann sees me and asks me if I want to join the group in the kitchen. On the way there Böckelmann complains about the Islamization of his neighbourhood.

“The only German butcher has recently closed. Now there is a halal butcher.” Dagen replies ironically, “But of course there is no Islamization.” Böckelmann is an authority in these events because of his sharp and eloquent comments. In one of the meetings he praises Höcke as an “intelligent and sensitive man”. “His notion of *Volk* is a very interesting one. But it is important that Kubitschek does not publish the book,” he says, referring to the book Höcke would later publish together with Sebastian Hennig (chapter one). “The IfS and Kubitschek are already too stigmatized. Publishing it there would ultimately stigmatize Höcke and the book. So it will be published with the Manuscriptum publishing house,” he says. “They are also publishing Gauland, Klonovsky and our *Tumult* books.”

As we sit together the group discusses the strategy of the AfD. “The problem is that many agree with the AfD but would not vote for the party. This stigmatization is just too strong,” says Bormann, who, as usual, prefers beer over wine and drinks from his bottle. “This is due to this guilt-culture in Germany. In other countries in the West this doesn’t really exist. But they are also trying to change this by now reassessing colonialism.” Another participant, who says he comes from Austria, says that he does “not understand the Germans. Germany is no dictatorship but especially intellectuals who work in the public service, such as academics, are too obeying. They are dead scared to lose their jobs if they say something. But once the AfD is in power they would quickly embrace the new realities. I am sure of that. It was the same in Austria.” Böckelmann agrees to this hopeful account. It becomes clear that Dresden’s far-right intellectuals dream of a national revival, a new revolution that “preserves” a sanitized national past and that ends all critical assessments of it.

The individual and social memory of the GDR’s conservative dissidence is not only underpinning Dagen’s events and the discussions following it; it is also, as she and other participants in her salons claim, one of the central motivators for their activism in the present. Dagen herself justifies her support for AfD and PEGIDA in her East German biography. During one of meetings with her she directly refers to her own childhood in Dresden’s educated bourgeois circles in the 1980s and the repressions this milieu had to face in the GDR. “We all have been through this before. Being pressured by the state, having to risk one’s existence because of what one says. We have scissors in the head, back then and today,” she says, alluding to self-censorship in the 1980s. “The difference today: it is not the state that is creating this pressure, but civil society,” she complains. Dagen is in her mid-40s and grew up in the universe of Dresden’s 1980s bohemian

subculture. She has fond memories of these “formative” years: “I was naturally at home in an artist’s world, from my childhood on. I was growing into this world and got in touch with many cultural things, as a child even.’ Yet, her fond memories of these years are mirrored by the trauma of state repression:

Everything happened under the eyes of the STASI. There were really frightening and threatening situations for me as a child: When the doorbell rang, and strangers stood in front of the door. They acted as if they’d know you, but you have never seen them. They came inside, disappeared with the mother in the study and closed the door.

Even if this memory still has a strong emotional effect on Dagen, she does not want to find out about the realities of that period:

I have not looked into my STASI file. It is bizarre, I know. My husband encouraged me to have a look but what will this change? One would have to re-evaluate one’s whole memory and biography and I don’t want that.

She wants to keep the positive memories of the intimate artist circles. It is the idealized memory of a free space seemingly untouched by the state, but nevertheless surrounded by its repressive apparatus. Today, this individual memory forms a usable past for Dagen “giving her strength” in facing the challenges of her present activism. She tells me that all that she learned back then has given her the cultural *Bildung* (education) necessary to survive in “today’s profit-driven system”. The current debates surrounding PEGIDA, the AfD and refugee policy, she says, bring these memories back to her:

Often artists who applied to leave the GDR or criticised the regime disappeared. This was Stalinist purging and I never want to have that again. But I fear today things develop into the same direction. If somebody says something that is not politically correct, he is muted.

The traumatic experience in the late GDR is contrasted with the feeling of community in the artist colony, the nostalgic memory of which is selectively used to interpret the present situation.

Today, Dagen sees censorship and a disappearing of “places of true community”. The account of her own politicization mirrors the development of an

apolitical *Ostalgie* into a negative nostalgia that is politicized for a far-right political struggle: “I was never a political person. After the end of the GDR we were all just tired of politics. In the GDR politics were everywhere.” Dagen’s politicization happened through an activating of the socialist past as a negative nostalgia to frame a far-right opposition to “today’s system”. It is used as a symbolic and temporal frame to make sense of the present: “Today we need spaces like this to be political. If politicians in Berlin don’t represent us anymore, we have to make our own politics, here, on the ground. And it has to be politics informed by culture, not merely based on competence. But we need to be confident of our roots, to face the future and save Germany before it disappears.” She is convinced that the decision to “open the borders” in 2015 was based on German self-hate and will, “if we don’t do anything today”, lead to the extinction of Germany. Her activism is informed by a hope that the dystopian future can still be escaped if “we act now”. Dagen aims to provide these “free spaces of community” not only through her events, but also through the kitchen table discussions that follow most of her events and include her closest circle, including Bernig and Böckelmann, as well as less public intellectuals such as Markus Schürer.

During my fieldwork, Schürer was not publicly active, but simply followed and participated in the circles of Dresden’s far right intellectuals. Only after the end of my fieldwork has he taken up a more prominent role as one of the authors of the newly established cultural magazine *Anbruch* (Anbruch, 2020) – a magazine with links to the Identitarian Movement and *Ein Prozent*. Markus was 16 years old when reunification happened. He works as a private lecturer in medieval history at the Dresden University and is one of the many local intellectual figures who regularly come to the meetings at Dagen’s bookshop. We meet for a first interview at the Augustiner, a Bavarian beer-hall-like restaurant right next to Dresden’s famous Church of our Lady, the famed symbol of the city’s beauty and cultural wealth. The square in front of the church has become one of the main gathering spaces of PEGIDA. It smells of beer and Bavarian food in the Augustiner, a crowded beer hall in the reconstructed historical city centre of Dresden. The restaurant’s rooms are covered in black-and-white photos showing Dresden before its destruction in World War II. After we order two beers and food, Schürer says, “I have been ordering my books at Dagen’s shop since the 1990s”, adding that he enjoys the familiar atmosphere of the bookshop. As he says, he is sympathetic to PEGIDA because of his “socialization in the east”. He grew up in a pious Christian environment, and his family

had always at least passively opposed the GDR state. “This made life difficult for the family. I was not part of any of the organizations one had to go through to gain the privileges in the GDR.” His childhood in the *Erzgebirge*, the mountainous region close to Dresden, was largely untouched by GDR secularization and the region is often described as East Germany’s bible belt (Lühmann, 2014). For Schürer’s family, the church was “extremely important as a counter world to socialism” and “the repressive regime that went along with it”. Like Dagen’s artists’ colony, the church was for Schürer a place of community and freedom from the regime’s constant ideological indoctrination, a place where one could speak one’s mind freely and find community outside state institutions:

I was 16 when reunification took place. This means that I have experienced the things that happened back then in a very conscious way. And insofar I also became sensitive and more conscious of certain problems. Coming from a Christian family I was exposed to repressions. My family was very sensitive to these kinds of things as my grandfather was a middle-class entrepreneur. His business was expropriated by the regime in 1972. So, there were many reasons in my family to be against the system. But I also have to say that my parents were no dissidents. They were normal people who tried to get through times with as little harm as possible. But it was always clear that one cannot speak about certain things at school for example. We were definitely living in two worlds. On the one hand the system with which one was confronted with in school; and then the church’s community. This was definitely a place of freedom.

“Thus,” he emphasizes that, therefore, “I am still deeply attached to the church”. I ask if and how this feeling of freedom has changed today. He says that he remembers that in the first years after reunification he felt that there was a large amount of freedom.

There was this incredible feeling of being free. I moved from the Erzgebirge to Dresden in 1994 to study. So, I still got a bit of the feeling of free life. This was a wonderful time, at the beginning of your 20s. There was a certain mise en scene of a bohemian lifestyle. I wouldn’t say that I really ever had a bohemian life, but we surely pretended to have it. With coal heating and cheap red wine. And back then cigarettes were also still cheap.

He nostalgically describes this time as one of freedom but also of a non-engagement with politics.

I would also say that I was rather unpolitical. I was tending maybe more to a left liberal side. But I was never a true leftist. I realized this quickly when I arrived here and got in touch with true leftists in the student milieu. That was never my thing. There may be different reasons for that. But I would say, that at the core I am not a homo politicus. Today I am political because I have been forced to be.

Echoing Dagen, Schürer says that his background has made him sensitive to any form of repression. Today he has many flashbacks regarding the behaviour of the press, as well as civil society institutions and his university. While he concedes that it is “of course not the same as the GDR”, he still sees parallels: “If one utters certain views one is being excluded from the discourse or even loses one’s job,” he says, telling me about a colleague whose contract with the university was not extended because of contentious articles he published.

And the university tells you what you should do, calls on you to participate in anti-PEGIDA demonstrations, to be open to the world and to condemn hatred. This very much reminds me of the late GDR. I didn't really feel attracted to PEGIDA back then. I also didn't go to the demonstrations myself. But what appealed to me ex negativo were these coercions to join the counter-demonstrations. This is something that I have experienced as something very unpleasant (...). And of course, all the things that followed. This peer group pressure in the academic milieu. One had to be against it, unconditionally, without any discussion against what one actually is. I usually never watch the TV news. But after that I started watching it again. And this clearly reminded me of the practices of the GDR television and press. Or if you take these posters and slogans that you see on the buildings in the city. How (...) is this different from the GDR?

Schürer refers to the large banners that were put up on central buildings in the city, such as the well-known Volkswagen Glass Manufactory, calling for diversity and tolerance. Böckelmann had already referred to them in my interview with him (chapter two). In the GDR, central buildings were bearing socialist slogans such as “Socialism wins”. In the post-reunification years these slogans have been ironically recycled to subversively criticize capitalism, reformulating the GDR slogan on the same building as “Capitalism is ailing” (Figures 42–45). Today, the calls for tolerance and diversity are read as aesthetics of indoctrination, this time from a left-liberal totalitarian regime that wants to impose a multicultural society. For Schürer, this is clearly a development similar to the

GDR. But like back then, he was initially afraid to speak up, especially because most of his friends were leaning to the liberal left, as he was himself. But slowly he became aware that there was a bigger group thinking like him.

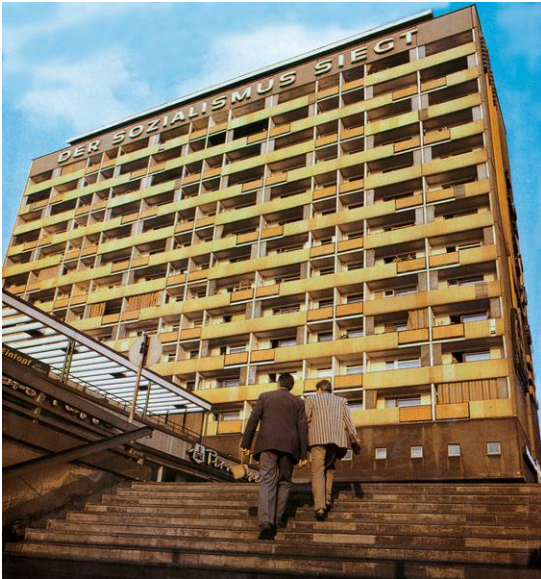


Figure 39: Picture of the prominent Neubau (chapter four), a modern socialist building in Dresden with the inscription “Socialism wins” in the 1980s (see also Figure 12; photo on Pinterest, screenshot by the author).



Figure 40: The same building in 2015 with a new slogan illegally installed saying “Capitalism is ailing” (photo by Anja Schneider, *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten*, screenshot by the author).



Figure 38: “Room for tolerance and diversity” slogan on a renovated socialist Neubau in 2018 (photo taken by the author).



Figure 37: “For diversity, for tolerance, for Dresden” on Dresden’s Volkswagen factory (photo taken by the author).

First, I saw what the writer Jörg Bernig wrote in the Sächsische Zeitung [the local newspaper]. This was the first time I saw Bernig as someone political. Before I only knew him as a writer. And then I discovered Tumult at a kiosk at a train station. I saw that my colleague from the university, Ulrich Fröschle, had written an article in it. And then I thought “hey, this is a good occasion to get into touch with him” in a different way. And through Fröschle the contact was established to Jörg Bernig. And then we also both knew Susanne Dagen. And so, things developed. When I saw that Dagen was also selling Tumult in her bookshop I knew that she was on the same side. So, over time I have lost some friends or at least I don’t talk about politics with them anymore. But other friendships have become more intense. And then there are new friendships with Bernig, Dagen, Fröschle, and

others. (...) And I don't know what is going on in other cities, but I guess you can talk about a certain salon culture that has developed here.

He explains that today he knows better where he stands.

I am someone who has turned into a conservative step by step. When I was 20 or 30 I would not have called myself conservative, but today I would do so. I prefer the term "conservative" to "right". Not because "right" is tainted. For me, it is not. But it is an imminently political notion. Conservative, on the other hand, is more encompassing. It has an anthropological and cultural connotation; it is an alternative vision of life. And this is because if you look at the notion of "culture" in an etymological and conceptual way, it is inherently conservative. It comes from the Latin word colere, to cultivate something. So working with culture naturally has something very conservative. It does of course not exclude the progressive. But culture and conservatism belong together. And besides that, I think freedom and conservatism should belong together. Because I think that we are still living in a system of society that guarantees a relatively high level of freedom. However, there are real tendencies, in very different social sectors, that are cutting freedom, bourgeois freedom. This is linked to a growing technocracy, I would say, and alleged defenders of freedom. They are cutting back freedom in the name of minorities. (...) Certain supporters of certain cultures and religions, Islam for example. They are taking root here and spread a culture that, I am convinced of that, is diametrically opposed to our understanding of freedom. We can just look at the keywords of a new form of repression: anti-Muslim racism, Islamophobia and so on. Under the cover of religious freedom, the critique of religion, which is truly part of the DNA of Europe. Just think of the enlightenment. So I think that when you want to understand the notion of bourgeois freedoms, democracy and so on, if you want to preserve the nation you need to bring together conservatism and freedom.

Saying that liberalism is the DNA of Europe shows that he perceives liberal culture as essentially, quasi-ethnically European. After our meeting Schürer invites me to come to his house for our next meeting. I realize that he appears to like me and enjoyed our conversation. A few weeks later I take the tram to a neighbourhood close to the *Großer Garten*, Dresden's central municipal park. Schürer lives in a flat in a massive 19th century mansion. As I enter the building and then the flat, I am impressed by the high ceilings, parquet floors and contemporary art that, besides a couple of massive bookcases, fill the

flat and that, as he tells me, is in part painted by his partner, a local artist. It reminds me of the flat I grew up in East Germany where, after reunification, many flats in large turn-of-the-century mansions were rented out to families. As in Dagen's bookshop, I instantly feel at home and familiar with the mixed style of modern and traditional furniture with which the apartment is decorated. Schürer offers me some wine and we briefly chat about his passion for Italy and Rome, where he spent several months as part of a past research project. "This is what European culture is about. This beauty, this historical depth," he says passionately, only to continue about another, as he says "less pleasant", stay as part of his academic work.

This second stay was not in Italy but in Düsseldorf where he took up a guest lectureship for a couple of months. In contrast to the enthusiastic tone that carried his voice when talking about Rome his face is now expressing deep concern. He says that in Düsseldorf he realized the "link between freedom and conservatism". He lived in a house "where I was the only German. I had the only German name on the letter boxes. The streets were full of veiled women at one time of the day, at another full of men. I realized that this is a deeply different culture. And when I was teaching medieval church history some students who I believe were Muslims were openly questioning Christian history. This has never happened before and I just didn't know how to handle that," he says, thoughtfully showing how cultural and racial understandings of European selfhood are collapsed into each other and perceived as threatened.

Part of this problem, as he sees it, is the lack of a positive relation to German nationhood, which is something that he sees as a positive aspect of the GDR.

1989 was a democratic moment, but it was also a moment of nationalism. And there is no problem with that. I can say about myself that I have always had an undisturbed relation to the nation. So when this nationalist saying "We are one Volk" emerged relatively quickly after reunification, this was also a reflection of my own posture. And I believe that this is one of the big misunderstandings between East and West after reunification. The West saw reunification primarily as an enlargement of the market and democracy. The East as a return to the nation. At the same time, I could never relate to the slogan "I am proud to be a German". This explicit pride is strange to me. The nation is rather something for me that is unquestioned and self-evident. I am of course aware of the problematic parts of German history and I also believe that one should not hide it. But I don't believe that the present memory culture should be final.

It was the affirmative relation to the nation that he experienced as positive in the GDR: “even if the GDR was not the fatherland that I would have claimed. But the notion of fatherland was not questioned. It was very present. And then you should not forget that the GDR was an ethnically very homogenous state.”

Meanwhile, Schürer has exchanged my wine glass for a glass of whiskey. He invites me for a cigarette on the balcony and say, “You can call me Markus by the way.” In this moment I realize how our shared interest in politics and culture, as well as history, has provided a common ground that could lead to a friendship. I imagine having studied in Dresden and having Schürer as a lecturer. What if he had been my mentor? What if I had come to his house as a young student? As in Dagen’s bookshop, I feel an uncanny familiarity that, under different circumstances, could have meant my path into contemporary far-right networks. On my way home I reflect on how Schürer, like many of my informants, was keen on sharing his thoughts, not only to explain his thinking but also to convince me, to use the common ground and background as the basis not only for a friendly conversation, but for the diffusion of his political views. While most of my informants never asked me about my political views, my bare interest in them seemed to make them assume that I was agreeing with their cause to save a German *Kulturnation* from its demise by technocrats, Islam and non-white immigrants.

Schürer’s account echoes other core group members I interviewed. Many see Dagen’s events as analogous to the salons of dissident writers in the 1980s, this time speaking out against the “muzzling of freedom of speech” or an imposition of multiculturalism from above, like the GDR’s imposition of socialism. Their activism is driven by the wish to establish a proud memory culture that turns the guilt-free memory of an explicitly white past into the norm. As Schürer says, “German memory cannot focus on 12 years of history, this is not normal. Germany has to become more self-confident, more assertive, if it wants to survive.” He says, “This is especially true with the future we are facing. I believe that we will soon enter an era of tribal wars. All these different cultures that are pouring into Germany. They dissolve the sovereign, the German *Volk*. This will lead to chaos.” For him, Dagen’s bookshop is a space where this can be discussed freely and where resistance can be organized: “Dagen’s events and many far-right publications are intellectually highly satisfying. They point to what must change. Even if I am more pessimistic, I believe we can still change things and save what is left of Germany.”

When I first heard them, many of these historical analogies (Hochschild, 2016: 16) comparing contemporary Germany to the GDR appeared ridiculous to me. Yet, since the end of my fieldwork many of them have made it into the public debate in popular German newspapers²⁸ and TV shows.²⁹ Slogans like “*Vollende die Wende*” (complete the revolution) or “GDR 2.0” were central to the AfD’s 2019 election campaigns (Gensing & Kumpfmüller, 2019).

My informants see themselves as intellectuals in the tradition of a non-conformist GDR resistance. Their negative and positive nostalgia forms the basis for a prefigurative politics that draw on the memory of past resistance and solidarity to embrace far-right populist campaigns for a politicized white identity. The coexistence of this utopian nostalgia with a dystopian future shows that hope and anxiety are not necessarily antagonistic, but complementary. Instead of seeing nostalgia as a monodirectional and fearful past-fixated reaction to change, the activism of such local intellectuals is better understood in terms of “anxious hope” – a hope driven by dystopian visions of a multicultural future and the belief that it is not too late to act (Gordon, 2018: 543). Yet, what future memory do Dresden’s far-right intellectuals want?

5. From Nostalgia to a Sacralization of National Memory

As mentioned above, the future form of memory the far right aims at is one that sacralizes and mystifies national peoplehood as an integral, eternal essence that is seen as threatened by an externalized “system” or “other”. In Dresden this includes not only the pitting of a “people’s memory” against the memory of “elites”, but also an intellectual resistance is remembered as preventing the dismantling of the *Kulturnation* as a national myth by celebrating not questioning reactionary, nativist and racist pasts. This aim becomes clear when, once again, looking at Ulrich Fröschle. In addition to his work for *Tumult*, he is gives seminars on memory culture as part of his work for the local university.

²⁸ An early example: Klonovsky (2010). More recently: Broder (2019), Kraus (2019).

²⁹ East German journalist Ralf Schuler compared an advertisement representing ethnic diversity to GDR propaganda in the popular TV show *Hart Aber Fair* (2019, min. 42:50–45:00).

During my fieldwork, Fröschle invited me to attend an event he co-organized with the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*,³⁰ an association founded in 1919 to search and identify fallen soldiers and maintain their graves (Kriegsgräberfürsorge, 2019). The event is entitled “Through Graves to Peace? On the Practical Work of the *Volksbund*”. It takes place in one of the central lecture theatres of the Technical University (TU), which, as it turns out, is oversized for the event. Nevertheless, about 30 mostly young people, presumably students, have made it to the event that is supposed to introduce the project *The Past of the Future. German-Russian Workshops for a Shared Memory Culture*.

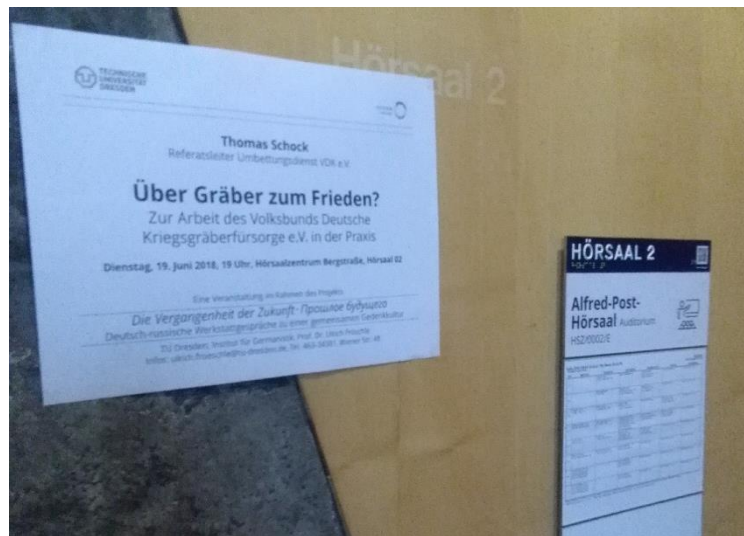


Figure 41: Posters with the official logos of Dresden Technical University next to the entrance to the auditorium advertising Fröschle’s event (photo taken by the author).

Introducing the *Volksbund*, Fröschle says that many people ask him “What do you want with these old stories? What is important is the future!” He believes, however, that the future has a past and that “the past determines the future. Therefore, we have to talk about the past of the future.” He puts a special emphasis on German-Russian relations and says that the project is to improve the relations between both countries in a time of rising tensions: “The danger of a new war is there. So to keep the peace is the political goal of this project, that I have been developing together with students of the TU.” As part of the workshop German and Russian students visit each other, exchange ideas about the different forms of commemoration of the victims of past wars in order to develop a “shared memory culture”.

³⁰ The organization was deeply entangled with the Nazi regime and transposed Nazi-semantics of commemoration into the early post-war years (Ulrich, 2019).

Fröschle does not only put this workshop into the context of international relations between Germany and Russia, he also argues that:

This has a domestic dimension. Because in our immigration society, Germans from Russia³¹ are a very important group. You can take this group as a very good example for immigrants who not only have one national past, but also their own collective memory. This is emerging out of two nations, Russia and Germany. So to form an immigration society one needs a commemoration that overcomes national oppositions and creates a shared identity. Here the commemoration of the dead plays a very central role. When we went to Volgograd or Stalingrad for the last workshop, we saw that the Russians have their own way to deal with the dead that is very different from the Germans.

He then hands the floor to a representative of the *Volksbund* who explains his work in Eastern Europe. He has been organizing the exhuming of the scattered remains of fallen soldiers to rebury them in proper cemeteries. He presents the different projects and emphasizes how emotional it can be when “you find the remains of *Wehrmacht*³² soldiers who were as young as you” when they “fought for survival”. At the end of the presentation Fröschle says, echoing Böckelmann’s ethnopluralist vision of Europe:

Let’s finish this with a declaration of love to the Europe of cultures. We should not forget that the politics of burials and the memory politics connected to that are part of a cultural warfare. (...) Because (...) the dead are not dead. They live on in some form and if you don’t deal with your dead in a dignified way then they will (...) reappear in the shape of traumas. Old lines of conflict will break up again. Therefore, I want to underline (...) that this is really an important topic that is in no way only linked to yesterday but that is really about shaping the Europe of tomorrow.

Using such terms such as “immigration country”, “international exchange” and “non-revanchist commemoration”, Fröschle signals that his project is in line with a world-open Germany. He applies the “jargon of worldopenness” Böckelmann identified in his book to a far-right agenda of a proud national memory regime. Yet, as he tells me later, his aim is not an open memory culture. Rather, he says, he initiated the workshops to have German students “experience how the Russians are dealing with war memory” and to show that it does not have to be a “memory burdened with guilt” as in “the pitiable official commemorations” and the

³¹ So-called *Russlanddeutsche* became German citizens after the end of the Cold War because of their ethnic German heritage. Many of them are supporters of the AfD or share racist and anti-Muslim views (Klimeniouk, 2018).

³² Name for the German and Nazi army until 1945.

collective memory encouraged by German schools. Instead the commemoration of the dead can be infused with pride. For far-right intellectuals, the future memory is not a critical but a sacralizing pride-driven memory. Embracing populist movements and using civil society institutions like the TU and the *Volksbund* to build an alternative memory culture for a proud white identity, far-right intellectuals in Dresden are central in making the far right's political memory resonate with the local level.

6. Conclusion

Taking bourgeois GDR dissidence as a meaningful template of past resistance is important for Dresden's intellectual far-right milieu and its aim to mobilize broader support. An impactful political mobilization depends on the salience of shared memories informing nostalgia (Assmann, 2006b; Olick, 2008: 24) and "memory regimes" (Langenbacher, 2010). States, movements and parties rely on "usable pasts", that is representations of the past that are "usable" for the legitimization of present political action and the founding of political authority (Wüstenberg and Art, 2008). A nostalgic reference to a collective memory is not limited to far-right or far-left populism (De Vries and Hoffmann, 2018: 5). Rather, it is a "generic thought practice which acquires complex meanings in relation to the discursive contexts and patterns where it is employed" (Kenny, 2017: 3). As part of a political discourse, nostalgia can challenge a dominant "usable past" and licit notions of *Kulturnation* by propagating subaltern collective memories. Merging today's dissent with memories of past activism enables local intellectuals to tell what Arlie Hochschild has called a "deep story" that, through historical analogy, legitimizes individual activism and politicization (Hochschild, 2016: 16). Nostalgia does not only collapse the distinction between past and present through this political dimension; directed to an alternative future, it also bears a prefigurative quality. In Dresden's far-right activism, nostalgia goes beyond idealizing the past. It informs an activism aimed at a far-right future, providing activists with a "generative temporal framing" and giving meaning to their activism (Gordon, 2018: 523).

Drawing on the past to re-elaborate a shared memory based on a purely positive commemoration of the past is a central strategy for the far-right in Europe and beyond (Caiani et al., 2012; Caramani and Manucci, 2019; De Cesari and Kaya, 2019). In Dresden, as Lengsfeld's interaction with her audience's social memories and Schürer's and Dagen's

framing of activism in terms of individual memories show, the far right can draw on local memory-cultural repertoires of dissent to design a white identity that resonates with the local context. Academics like Fröschle use their academic positions and networks to promote a pride-based white memory culture that is clad in a vocabulary of authenticity, counterculture, diversity and cultural exchange. Drawing on negative and positive nostalgias for local and national pasts, these intellectuals reassert their role as producers of a hegemonic, exclusive white nation while challenging an allegedly hegemonic multicultural left-liberal state. Central here is to replace a critical memory discourse that is seen as undermining white identity with a sacralizing commemoration that promotes a pride in a white *Kulturnation* and the idea of a white educated bourgeoisie as its guardian. This educated bourgeois identity simultaneously defends and transforms notions of a white national community by subsuming notions of cultural superiority, conservatism, religion and race, while also tapping into the identity of resisting the GDR.

The past three chapters have focused on the different ways past forms of nationalist and dissident activism and their use of notions of *Kulturaktion* are today remembered and reassembled by Dresden's intellectual far-right circles. An embracing of far-right populism goes together with a self-vision of a conservative, educated bourgeois counterculture that fights for the survival of the German *Kulturnation* they claim to represent. Drawing on these movements from the past helps to aesthetically prefigure alternative forms of society based on the defence of an implicit white identity that is turned into an explicit political identity. Drawing on the revolutionary and countercultural aesthetics of the 1920s "conservative revolution", the New Left and the GDR's anti-socialist educated bourgeoisie enables the idealization of Dresden as the space for a heroic cultural resistance against National Socialist and GDR-totalitarianism. Despite their ideological differences, both regimes "are seen to have shared one aim: the destruction of the cultural heritage" (Fuchs, 2012: 120). Today, Dresden's intellectual circles see a white *Kulturnation* as yet again threatened, this time by a left-liberal totalitarianism and its opening of borders to non-white "other". Here, Dresden intellectuals represent a broader trend in Europe that sees the relativization of fascism by seeing it as equal to communism (De Cesari and Kaya, 2019: 17). With their anti-totalitarian politics of aesthetics, both west German New Left and East German anti-GDR dissidence and counter-movements in literature, art and intellectualism emerge as cultural repertoires for new, unforeseen alliances between far-left and far-right intellectuals in the quest for a white identity.

The following three chapters will shift the focus from *mimesis* to the different ways the *poiesis* of a white national identity is expressed, performed, prefigured symbolically via literature, art and space. While the first three chapters focused on Dagen's bookshop and intellectual figures linked to it, chapters four and five introduce two different circles based in the Dresden suburbs Radebeul and Pirna. The final chapter six will then return to links between Dresden's local and national, as well as transnational, far-right networks to explore how the politics of aesthetics underpinning liberal and secular democratic visions of *Kulturnation* veil *Kulturnation*'s religious and racist heritages. The veiling of these tensions between a post-racist claim and racialized realities inherent in liberal and democratic visions of nationhood enable a more acceptable racial becoming in the guise of *Kulturnation* that explicitly embraces a biological racism. It concludes that these tensions in hegemonic visions of *Kulturnation* are not only legitimizing the far right's self-legitimizing shift from race to culture. They also open the space for non-white and Muslim-background intellectuals in Dresden's far-right circles.

PART II: *POIESIS*

CHAPTER 4: From an Educated to an Activated Bourgeoisie. Prefiguring the White *Kultur*nation through Literature

The group around Dagen's bookshop in Loschwitz is not the only circle that regularly gathers in a salon-like setting. In addition to Dagen's more institutionalized public space several private intellectual meeting spaces have formed throughout the city and its surroundings. One of them is Heimann's private circle in Pirna, a small picturesque city about a 20-minute train journey east to Dresden. Together with his wife, the wealthy businessman has renovated an old gatehouse of Pirna's castle and turned it into a local meeting space for far-right intellectuals mainly linked to the milieu surrounding Kubitschek's *Institut für Staatspolitik* (IfS) and a wealthy local bourgeoisie. Like Dagen, he is in regular contact with Kubitschek. His wife is a tax consultant for Kubitschek's far-right network *Ein Prozent*. In our conversations Heimann ironically calls Kubitschek "the devil [Beelzebub] from Schnellroda", referring to the way Kubitschek is portrayed as "ultimate evil".

It is only through Dagen, who throughout my fieldwork appeared as the main gatekeeper of Dresden's far-right intellectual circles, that I am able to get in touch with him. As he writes in response to my first email contacting him:

Mrs Dagen is of course a reference for me. I would not have answered if you had contacted me out of nowhere. (...) Next week, my family leaves for a skiing holiday. I will not accompany them because the masses of people there repulse me. And this is of course already a good conversational thread to follow: the massification of society, mass democracy and mass consumption versus true depth and solitary Dasein.

Like Dagen, he uses a Heideggerian terminology to criticize a mass of cultureless people as the outcome of a decline of *Bildung* in society and the political class (chapter one). Heimann claims to want his salon to provide this *Bildung*. "Reading has helped me to gain an alternative understanding of what is currently going on," he says. After German reunification the notion of *Kultur*nation, and its associated ideas of *Bildung* and literature have come to be seen as a central element in the cultural transformation and education of East Germany into a democratic and pluralist society (Büchner et al., 2008). For Heimann, *Bildung* is equally central. Yet, not for the grounding of a pluralist society, but for the formation of an alternative white identity that claims literature as both an essential marker of the German *Kultur*nation that has to be mimicked, reproduced and defended, and a transformative poetic practice that makes this whiteness explicit.

In Germany and beyond, literature, writers and their aesthetic ordering and rereading of reality have played a central role in the forming of alternative subjectivities, identities and spaces of “resistance”, not only in the New Left (McKay, 1996), but also within the educated bourgeois right. In France Michel Houellebecq’s best-selling novels *Lire*, *Plateforme* and *Soumission* mixed autobiographical elements, contemporary social developments and political issues in a way that spoke to far-right fears of Islam, western decadence, the decline of Christianity and the Occident (Armus, 2017; Betty, 2013; Gagnier, 2017; Lloyd, 2009; Sweeney, 2013).³³ Through its embeddedness in the present and its publication on the day of the Islamist terrorist attack on the French satirical weekly magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 in Paris, Houellebecq’s specifically *Soumission* has achieved prophetic status among the far right. He has emerged as an ideal author for educated audiences leaning to the far right as he exemplifies the move from an “apolitical” author to a writer whose work is engaged in cultural politics (Armus, 2017: 126, 127). The affinities between Houellebecq, the protagonists in his novels and his educated readership help to create shared identity and imagined subjectivity (Betty, 2013: 114, footnotes 12–13).

Following the previous chapters’ focus on *mimesis*, the remembering of past intellectual movements for present purposes, this chapter argues that, like Houellebecq in France, writers and activists in Dresden use literature for the *poiesis* of an ideal alternative far-right subject (Forchtner, 2016: 31–34) and a shared activist, white and educated bourgeois narrative identity (McAdams, 2011; McAdams and McLean, 2013) in the present. It looks at the way literary fiction and local activism feed into each other and create a hybrid space of “faction” that makes a clear distinction between fact and fiction impossible. It shows how writers combine an aestheticization of reality in their local activism with the poetic realism in their novels.

Doing so they blur the line between their novels’ aesthetics with the sensible perception of the present political situation and provide a local educated bourgeoisie with a narrative identity and deeper meaning for political activism. Fighting against an “uneducated mass society”, “cultureless elites” or “uncivilized” non-white immigrants, these writers and literary activists take a position of intellectual teachers and models who interweave present-day realities with utopian and dystopian distant pasts to imagine redemptive or catastrophic futures. The aesthetics of white *Kultur* are here used to make sensible and visible Romantic nationalist traditions that merge educated bourgeois notions of culture with the

³³ The envisioning of a Muslim future for France was first developed as a novel in Elena Chudinova's dystopian thriller *The Mosque of Notre Dame of Paris: 2048* which was published in France in 2009 (Rosenthal, 2015: 78).

notion of authentic popular culture. This is enabled by both the employing of an ethnopoetic realism in their literature as well as the idealization of GDR-based notions of *Bildung* and national becoming that aimed to overcome the distinction between a vocational working class and academic bourgeois education on the basis of a shared national culture. Referring to these past aesthetics not only permit these writers to simultaneously mimic and prefigure a local educated bourgeois *and* populist protest in the present; formed against an undeducated non-white and an uncultivated technocratic “other” it also aims to symbolically overcome past and present polarization between East and West and the people and the elites (Lewicki and Shooman, 2020) by prefiguring the becoming or *Bildung* of a shared white national identity.

To show this, this chapter first turns to how the rereading of classics in Heimann’s Pirna salon and local activism provide a useful repertoire for the *Bildung* of a white identity and a meaningful local activism. It then looks at the literary and political activism of three writers: Uwe Tellkamp, Monika Maron and Jörg Bernig. To assess how their work adopted by local activism, the final section returns to Dagen’s bookshop to assess the ways their work is received and interpreted by Dresden’s far-right intellectuals.

1. Pirna and the Rereading of the Canon

I first meet Heimann in a local brewery with an attached restaurant serving traditional local food. As he arrives, he quickly orders two big beers and insists that I don’t record the interview, but that I can take notes. “I take this as a first getting to know each other.” He is still sceptical but, at the same time, seems eager to talk. Like Dagen and other informants before, he explains his politicization with his biography. “I was socialized in the GDR. I am Catholic and a dissident by nature. I am successful and I am not afraid of losing anything. And I am surely not someone who has been left behind,” he says with a smile, clearly wanting to show that he does not correspond to the cliché of a right-wing populist. As he says, he was active in the ’89 resistance because of his strong anti-communism. “I was part of the *Neues Forum*;³⁴ I could have made a career in politics back then. But thank God, I did not do that.” He is clearly fed up with “politics as usual”. Until 2014 he was member of the Christian Democrat Union

³⁴ Name for one of the major parties forming against the late GDR regime.

(CDU). After the so-called 2015 refugee crisis he “formed a resistance group to defend our *Heimat*, homeland”, an association called *Pirna Pro Patria*.

As Heimann tells me, literature has helped him to see the world differently and to feel part of a broader community of “intellectual dissidents” and “lone fighters” against “the system”, a recurrent narrative in far-right thinking (Sedgwick, 2019). From Ernst Jünger to Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt and, more recently, Botho Strauss and Götz Kubitschek, this semantic figure is reflected in notions of “inner-emigration” that are popular among the German far right and was used by far right intellectuals after World War II to “re-interpret their more or less strong entanglements with Nazism to their favour” (Thomas, 2004: 126). It is this ideal of an educated intellectual, far-right subjectivity that today gives Heimann a deeper meaning to his activism. As he gives me his phone number I note that his WhatsApp account is entitled *Etiam Si Omnes, Ego Non* (Even if all, I don’t), a Latin proverb expressing this vision of a chosen few who see the real world as it is while the others – the mainstream – are blinded. The use of Latin proverbs is a central marker of community in the aesthetics of an educated bourgeois German nationhood. Those who use them regularly can be seen as part of an intellectual club that represents an idea of *Kulturnation* rooted in the 19th century. Heimann seems keen to show that he is part of an educated non-conformist elite that upholds *Kulturnation* against uncultivated masses. The motto is not only the name of his WhatsApp profile, it is also inscribed above the entrance to Heimann’s old gate house in which his Pirna circle meets regularly (Figures 47 and 48). The motto and his elitist aversion to the masses contradict his support for PEGIDA, which is or was, after all, a mass movement. Like many of Dresden’s far-right intellectuals he keeps a physical distance from the populist movement while embracing its core anti-Muslim message.



Figure 42: The so-called gate house of the old Pirna Castle, bought and renovated by Heimann, and the space in which the Pirna circle meets regularly (photo taken by the author).



Figure 43: “Etiam Si Omnes, Ego Non!” motto on top of the main entrance.

In addition to the private salon, the association organizes events and demonstrations and tries to influence local politics. One of the biggest successes, Heimann boasts, is that they changed the Easter decoration of the fountain in Pirna’s central market square. He uses the term “*Gutmenschen*”, do-gooders, to describe the way the fountain was decorated after the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. Children had decorated the fountain with calls for diversity and tolerance. “We managed to exert enough pressure on the municipality for them to return back to the traditional decoration,” he says triumphantly. He is proud to show that he and his wealthy co-activists are important enough to the local economy that they can have a say in the local politics.

At the end of our meeting, Heimann invites me to come to the salon for one of the meetings. “There will be a reading of Prof Dr Scholdt, a scholar of German literature and former director of the literature archive of the German state of Saarland. He will present his book *Literarische Musterung* (2017).”. Addressed only to chosen participants of the circle, the email invitation to the event that I receive shortly after our first meeting introduces the book as an “innovative rereading of classics novels against the mainstream”. In the book, it says, Scholdt provides a “rereading” and remembering of the contexts of Kafka’s *Process*, Orwell’s *1984* and de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* from a present far-right perspective.

When I arrive in Pirna on a dark February evening a few weeks after my first meeting with Heimann it is dark and snowing. From the train station to Heimann’s salon it is a 20-

minute walk through the small city and its old town centre. I climb up the steep stairs to the old castle, *Schloss Sonnenstein*. Under Nazism it housed a mental hospital, part of the Nazis' euthanasia programme. Now it is the seat of Pirna's administration.

As I finally arrive at the old gate house I have to wait for Heimann to give his OK for me to enter. As he opens the door I hear somebody playing the piano. The atmosphere is different from Dagen's bookshop. A lobby with cocktail tables that are topped with little snacks, wine and beer leads to the event space and is illuminated by a large chandelier. The guests are dressed up in suits and dresses except for Dagen's husband Michael Bormann. I see him standing at one of the tables dressed in his usual alternative style, unshaved and with an unironed shirt which contrasts with the posh atmosphere. In one corner of the room one can buy books from Kubitschek's *Antaios* publishing house. They are piled up next to flyers with the headline "Murdered and forgotten" depicting "victims of the open borders", young women who have been "killed by refugees" (Figure 49). I had previously received one of these flyers at a PEGIDA demonstration.



Figure 45: Little stand at Scholdt's book reading in Pirna, selling his books and other IfS publications and distributing a flyer commemorating the killing of white young women by refugees (photo taken by the author).



Figure 44: Close-up of the flyer called "mobile memorial plaque" that could be downloaded from far-right websites for public distribution. It reads "Murdered and forgotten?" and claims that the murdered young women are not discussed by "established media and politics" because they are for them "annoying 'collateral damage' in the social experiment of multiculturalism" (photo taken by the author).

As he starts his lecture Scholdt says that he is happy to come from “bright” to “dark Germany,” ironically referring to the labels given to East Germany by the former Federal President Joachim Gauck (Ondreka, 2015). “I always like to come here to detox,” he says, to distance himself from a West Germany that he sees as lost, unlike the East. Without going into further detail he alludes to the view that West Germany is dominated, in the far right’s eyes, by uncultivated leftist elites and multiculturalism – a view that was common among Dresden’s far-right circles during my fieldwork. Some in the audience show that this allusion is understood by nodding. During the reading he claims that literature “may not help to position oneself politically” but that it allows one “to spiritually survive in today’s half-totalitarian present”. The lecture that follows is full of references to such writers as George Orwell, Heinrich von Kleist and Dresden-born Erich Kästner who “all have described totalitarian and repressive realities similar to today’s”, and he laments a German identity rooted in guilt as a reason for the lack of resistance to multiculturalism and quotes the social scientist Colin Crouch to underline his claim of a contemporary technocratic undermining of democracy. By inviting far-right literature scholars and authors, Heimann provides this alternative vision through a politicized rereading of literature classics.

Heimann and his Pirna circle make use of what Mikhail Bakhtin described as the polyvalence of literature that allows a “new kind of artistic thinking” that “goes against the grain” of traditionally accepted readings (Buchanan, 2018: 370). Such alternative readings can open up widely known texts to new imaginaries and interpretations that help to prefigure alternative collective and individual subjectivities while holding on to and mimicking parts of a hegemonic culture. Since the 19th century the very notion of *Kultur* itself has been based on the rereading of ancient Greek culture to ground hegemonic visions of *Kultur* or the resistance to it in a longer civilisatory mission and tradition.³⁵ More recently this “reading against the grain” has mainly been associated with the New Left where it has played a key role in feminist and decolonial approaches to literature (Kayes, 1989; Stoler, 2010).

Yet, as Heimann and Scholdt show, such a rereading is equally central to the contemporary far right and thus points to a more general role that literature and its production and interpretation by far-right intellectuals can take up in local activism. Katherine Verdery, in analysing the role of writers in socialist Romania, argues that in times of social change literature and writers draw on the local as a “repository of national spirit” in their literature. In the case

³⁵ For the GDR, see for example Blankenship (2017). For the 19th century, see Schmid (2014). For Nazism, see Roche (2017).

of the Romanian writers, doing so enabled them to legitimate themselves as representatives of the “true” Romanian culture (Verdery, 1991: 29), to claim “cultural authority” and to undermine opponents in the “struggle over forms of cultural authority” (Verdery, 1991: 197). Here, writers were central in the aesthetic definition of an authoritative nationalist language framing a specific nationalist subjectivity. “Rereading” was part of a “civilising” of audiences into a preferred “distribution of values” and a “recivilising” of “already cognizant” audiences (Verdery, 1991: 198). By providing the space and intellectual networks for such a rereading Heimann aims to activate the political potential of local elites by offering an alternative *Bildung* for the formation of an alternative political subjectivities and white identity.

In Dresden, this rereading of classics for the aesthetic prefiguration of an alternative white identity goes hand in hand with the production of new literature by writers who have shifted to the far right. The following section looks at the examples of formerly well-respected writers like Uwe Tellkamp, Jörg Bernig and Monika Maron and the different ways their literature redescribes reality and, through the development of alternative aesthetics and narrative identities, gives meaning to educated bourgeois activism, such as Heimann’s, for the far right. The popularity of these writers as activists, as well as of their novels among my informants, makes them and their work key to understanding the meanings and motivations attributed by my informants to their support of the populist far right (Toscano, 2019: 144). Both in their work and through their own present activism all three writers tell and embody the story of an educated bourgeoisie that first passively observes the decline of the *Kulturnation* before joining grassroots protest. The protagonists in their works individually transform into local intellectual activists and thus represent the transformation and symbolic unification of educated elites and “the people” against cultureless technocrats and non-white immigrants. Yet, they do so in different ways. Tellkamp draws on his personal background in Loschwitz’s anti-socialist educated bourgeoisie and the detailed study of this educated bourgeois “counter-space” in his novel *Der Turm* to legitimize Dresden’s intellectual support for the populist far right in the present. Bernig’s novel, on the other hand, envisions a contemporary local educated bourgeoisie as a force against a contemporary generation of cultureless technocratic political elites. Finally, Maron’s novel narrates the “blindness” of educated elites toward Islamization and turns the revolutionary educated bourgeois subjectivity into one that explicitly embraces a white identity.

2. Uwe Tellkamp, Jörg Bernig, Monika Maron and the Rewriting of Reality

Kulturation's Eternity in Der Turm

The literary treatment and idealization of an educated bourgeois activism for the protection of the *Kulturation* did not emerge in the context of Dresden's intellectual far-right activism but was already present in a novel written in 2008 by Dresden's most prominent intellectual activist and friend of Dagen: Uwe Tellkamp. Long before being envisioned as the "rooted intellectual" leader of "the people" in the debate with Grünbein (chapter one), Tellkamp wrote the internationally acclaimed and best-selling book *Der Turm* (Tellkamp, 2008), a novel that describes in detail the late German Democratic Republic's (GDR) educated bourgeois milieu and its anti-socialist activism.³⁶ Today, this close-up description of GDR dissident culture not only feeds into the self-legitimization of Dresden's far-right intellectuals through its engagement in memory work; it also provides a style that writers like Maron and Bernig can emulate.

First, *Der Turm* links notions of an eternal cultural nationhood to concrete local activism and the ephemeral character of political "systems" and their policies. The academic scholarship on *Der Turm* has identified how in the novel different urban spaces come to represent different "chronotopes", "competing spatiotemporal constructions of reality" that are linked to the different classes inhabiting these urban spaces (Clarke, 2010: 493). Here Loschwitz and Weißer Hirsch, called *Turmviertel* in the novel, represent the chronotope of an educated bourgeoisie where "the past, and particularly the cultural artefacts of the past, are aestheticized and made into the objects of a depoliticized and interest-free contemplation" (Clarke, 2010). While this aesthetic remains free from present-day politics, it supports a nationalist politics of aesthetics as they conceive *Kulturation* as an eternal chronotope that gives stability to the individual as well as the national community and is independent from the "ephemeral" politics of the GDR regime. While *Der Turm* is thus not a political novel, Tellkamp shows that he not only remembers the role of the GDR's educated bourgeoisie in preserving the German cultural tradition; but also with *Der Turm* he wants to continue this tradition in the present (Kindt, 2012: 373). Today, Tellkamp does so as part of an explicitly

³⁶ Tellkamp's 2005 novel *Der Eisvogel* was not recommended to me, but it treats a vision of a conservative revolution close to the German New Right (Dotzauer, 2018).

political activism and is joined, as I show later in this chapter, by the writers Bernig and Maron who, in their activism and their more recent novels, reproduce temporal layering in Tellkamp's *Der Turm*.

In addition to this temporal layering, Tellkamp's style also provides a model for Bernig's and Maron's novels and their construction of a narrative identity that drives the transformation of an educated bourgeoisie into a politically activated bourgeois. Anne Fuchs has described *Der Turm*'s style as an example of an "ethnopoetic realism" merging a "poetic realism with an ethnographic perspective that focuses on countercultures in the GDR" (Fuchs, 2012: 123). Ethnopoetic realism insists on an aesthetics of "*Verklärung*, the poetic transfiguration of reality" (Fuchs, 2012: 129) that is positioned between *mimesis* and *poiesis*, an imitation of the past and the simultaneous creation of something new.

This ethnopoetic realism feeds directly into Tellkamp's temporal layering when the novel critically assesses the GDR from the perspective of conservative educated bourgeois circles in Loschwitz who continue to live their educated bourgeois ways of life at "a remove from politics and ideology". As in the anti-socialist bohemian figurative art (see introduction), the GDR's "teleological realist" vision of a society of social progress is challenged while the official aesthetics of realism are reproduced. This leads to a realist portrayal of Loschwitz as a romanticized leftover of a guilt-free and "apolitical pre-war Dresden" (Fuchs, 2012: 122), a "*lieu de memoire*" of a precarious *Kulturnation*, an idealized educated bourgeois past and a lost cultural homogeneity untouched by socialist urbanism and ideology. In contrast to that, the socialist architecture in Dresden's centre is aesthetically described as a meaningless "dysfunctional", "cheerless" space, drained of "urban vitality" (Fuchs, 2012: 122) that has fallen victim to a total embracing of modern progress. Toward the end of the novel this "lifeless" centre turns into the arena of 1989's popular civic street protest that, joined by a politicized educated bourgeoisie, "creates new social practices that overturn the state's hegemony" (Fuchs, 2012: 131–132). The mixing of eternal notions of *Kulturnation*, the educated bourgeoisie as its bearer and political activist, as well its embeddedness and politicization in realistically described historical and political contexts, are emulated by Bernig and Maron.

It is not only Tellkamp's writing that makes him a central model for other writers in Dresden's far-right circles, but also his personal transformation from a passive observer of society to an intellectual activist. Tellkamp is a trained doctor who grew up in Loschwitz. There

are many parallels between his life and the novel. In public appearances and interviews he uses this background to analyse the contemporary situation in Dresden. In an interview with the far-right newspaper *Tichy's Einblick* (Wendt, 2019) conducted at Dagen's bookshop, Tellkamp says that today there is again a passive bourgeois which does not show empathy with the ordinary people "that march with PEGIDA". The educated bourgeoisie that lives in Loschwitz and Weißer Hirsch today mostly moved to Dresden from West Germany and "votes for the Greens". Instead of embracing the popular protest they feel guilty for "living better than others in Africa". "But through the official antifascism there is no question of guilt" among East Germans, be it linked to the Holocaust or "colonial guilt". Tellkamp wants to overcome the "confrontation between a *Kultur-Dresden* and the *Normal-Volk*, cultural Dresden and the ordinary people". The educated bourgeoisie must realize that the threat to "cultural values and traditions" is driving PEGIDA, not material reasons. He says that he and most of Dresden's traditional educated bourgeoisie are close to normal people and ordinary workers as they had to go through working-class vocational training before studying – an education policy in the GDR. "I was a worker myself. I used to work in a mine. (...) So, I have always instinctively been on the side of ordinary people." Dagen's bookshop is today, in his words, a place of hope for a new educated bourgeois and a cultural rebellion that brings together a white educated bourgeoisie and PEGIDA's white populist protest (Anbruch, 2019a).

The ambivalence of Tellkamp's literary remembrance of Dresden's educated bourgeois counterculture oscillates between a passive mimetic recreation of a lost past and an active poetic envisioning of a new educated bourgeois activism in the present. 1989's revolutionary moment, initiated by the "ordinary people" and joined by a politicized educated bourgeoisie, is transposed onto the present. It is a narrative that also underpins Bernig's and Maron's novels. Following on from Tellkamp's ethnopoetic realism, both engage in a realist description of the present that is filled with romantic references to an idealized educated bourgeois past, folkloric aesthetics and a lost cultural homogeneity that unites both. As in Tellkamp's description of Loschwitz' pre-revolutionary period, Bernig and Maron develop the narrative identity for a passive educated bourgeoisie that is wakened up and politicized by popular protest. Like Tellkamp, their lives and present-day activism merge with the fiction of their literary works to prefigure the ideal of a white, educated bourgeois activism.

Kulturnation's Technocratic "Other" in Anders

Jörg Bernig is a Dresden-based author whose novels treat topics linked to the region. While not as prominent as Maron and Tellkamp, he has similarly become known to a larger audience as an intellectual far-right protagonist. He studied literature in Dresden in the 1980s after having been trained as a miner, like Tellkamp. He has been publishing on conservative and far-right blogs and printed publications such as *Cicero*, *Tumult*, *Achse des Guten* and the local press since the 1980s (Bernig, 2015). Bernig's history with the far right reaches further back than that of most of my informants. In 2000, he gave a presentation at Kubitschek's *IJS* (Rissmann, 2000). Yet, this barely had any consequences for his career. With a PhD in German literature, he has taught at several universities and was a member of the Bavarian and Saxonian academies of art – the central public associations of artists in both states. More recently Bernig was invited by Saxony's governing CDU to discuss what new guiding principles for German elites could look like (Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten, 2018).

I meet Bernig for the first time during a visit to Dagen's bookshop in February 2019. During one of my visits he sits in the back of the shop engaged in a discussion with Dagen. "Here we have our PhD student," says Dagen, expressing a certain degree of pride that someone writes a PhD about her and her circles and assuming that I was "one of them" without me ever having expressed my political support for their aims. It shows how my background and interest in Dagen's circles is taken as a sign of support. "Bernig is our poet in residence," she continues as she presents me to Bernig. "We give this scholarship that is funded by a private donor to writers who work on new literature and who want to be independent from the *Kulturbetrieb*," she explains. I briefly explain that my PhD is interested in the intellectual dimension of far-right populism. Speaking with a calm and soft voice that contrasts to Dagen's loud and boastful speech, Bernig says that he is very interested in my project and invites me to come to his private house in Radebeul at some point, asking me to email him so that we can find a date that works for both of us.

Before the start of my fieldwork I had already heard about a speech he had given in 2016 – the so-called *Kamenzer Rede* (Kamenz speech). Established in 2014, the *Kamenzer Rede* is an annual speech given by cultural actors. It has become an important event in Saxony, broadcast by radio stations and printed in newspapers. As explained on the website dedicated to the speech, the format wants to provide cultural intellectuals with a platform to respond to current problems and questions regarding the relations between religions (Arbeitsstelle für

Lessing-Rezeption, 2019). Bernig's *Kamenzer Rede* was, to many members of Dresden's intellectual circles, a first sign of a shared educated bourgeois support for PEGIDA's cause. It was recommended to me as a document that shows the legitimacy of the movement and its intellectual supporters. In his speech Bernig warns of a future imposed by "social engineers" who would see the *Volk* as a "mere population" that can be transformed at will. He paints the picture of an irrational "ideology" of multiculturalism enforced by a collision of media and politics and imposed onto rational critics who he sees as belonging to the tradition of enlightenment (Bernig, 2016: 3). As a writer he sees himself as an intellectual leader helping to overcome this ideology: "The 'job of the poet'," as he says, "is to speak between black and white, the disclosing of possibilities" (Bernig, 2016: 2).

The speech sparked local outrage as it was the first time that a public institution was used to propagate an explicitly ethnic concept of *Volk* and racist conspiracy theories of the "great replacement" of the white population by immigrants by social engineering. The notion of population exchange is captured by the term *Umvolkung* in the German far right and has its origins in national socialist ideology (Brandes, 2012). It has been reintroduced through the French *Nouvelle Droite*. Currently, it represents a "conspiracy theory (...) positing the 'Islam substitution' of biologically autochthonous populations (...) by Muslim minorities mostly coming from sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb" (Froio, 2018: 704). Bernig avoids the term *Umvolkung* and instead uses the English *ethnic engineering* (Bernig, 2016: 8) that would lead to the replacing of white Germans by essentially different Orientals (Bernig, 2016: 5). By claiming that a historically grown *Volk* is turned into meaningless mass, present-at-hand and objectively alterable by cultureless rationalist technocrats, Bernig applies a Heideggerian reading to the demographic changes in Germany and therefore conceives a sophisticated form of the conspiracy theory of the great replacement.

In the speech Bernig refers to his novel *Anders* (Bernig, 2014), which was published in 2014, less than a year before the so-called refugee crisis and a few months before the emergence of PEGIDA. My informants saw the novel as a "prophecy" that anticipated the way in which the opposition to mainstream opinions was ostracized in the so-called refugee crisis. The novel's title, *Anders*, translates as "different" and is also the surname of the protagonist. It can be understood as a pun alluding to an alternative vision of society represented by a *Querdenker* who, as in Heimann's self-vision, resists the conventional mainstream and thinks differently. The chapters are pervaded by a diffuse feeling of powerlessness in the face of an imminent catastrophe. Protagonist and teacher Peter Anders lives in the idyllic Labenbrod, a suburb of

an unnamed large city that strongly resembles Dresden and its suburb Radebeul³⁷ where Bernig lives himself. His life is destroyed when he faces allegations of having sexually abused one of his students – allegations that he sees as an attempt to mute his political activism.

The first part of the novel portrays Anders' life as perfect. Yet, after the allegations, this perfect life appears as an illusion to Anders as he enters a personal catastrophe. This catastrophe is alluded to in the first part, creating the feeling of a “precarious good life” presenting moments from the perspective of post-disaster hindsight, like “[a] year later nothing would be the way it used to be” or “the good life would be the beginning of something horrible” (Bernig, 2014: 20, 21). The 2008 financial crisis is constantly present through Anders' wife who works for a local bank supporting medium-sized companies and craftspeople. While their social milieu consists of doctors, architects, a wine merchant and a minister, his wife's job links him to “the ordinary people”. As a teacher Anders laments the decline of culture and education that he sees as the basis for a spreading “vandalism” (Bernig, 2014: 48). As an observer of the world he is in fear of global terror and financial capitalism (Bernig, 2014: 39) that reaches into his seemingly perfect world through his wife's work. Anders' last “islands of certainty”, the local educated bourgeoisie and cultural traditions, risk falling victim to outer forces of globalization and inner forces of cultural decline.

To regain agency over the developing chaos, Anders gets involved in local politics and announces his candidature for the local city council. Here, the politics of aesthetics Bernig develops as a writer become explicitly political. Anders is part of a group of local citizens who, as Bernig makes clear, are excluded from the aesthetic ordering of the sensible hegemonic German politics by being rendered invisible and inaudible. When they ask “to be heard” on a decision to build a new road that would fundamentally alter the local environment, their concerns are silenced because the road “serves economic interests and employment”. When the established politicians are faced with a collection of citizens' signatures, the local politicians ask the activists to “leave the stage to those who know what they are talking about”, the rational judgements of “experts” and not irrational concerns of citizens. In the face of this, Anders aims to run for the local council as an independent for “a local bourgeoisie that is not being represented anymore (...)” (Bernig, 2014: 23–24).

³⁷ As Bernig's friend Sebastian Hennig told me, Labenbrod is Slavic and represents *Elbfurt*, referring to the Elb River flowing through Dresden and thus identifying it as a fictional city representative of Dresden's suburbs.

Mainstream politicians are presented as a caste that, contrary to the local, educated bourgeoisie, has no “sense” for cultural questions. As Anders argues, “why should the world of the alphabetised always be determined by the world of those who don’t care about what is important for us and who would, if they could, prohibit it as useless stuff.” Culture, Anders argues, has become stifled by austerity and political correctness. Everything linked to national, local and folk culture is questioned, rewritten and destroyed by the “bannermen of the eternally enduring enlightenment” (Bernig, 2014: 28). These aesthetic questions are the fundamental driver for Anders’ political engagement. “We don’t want to close the theatre, we (...) want to be heard. It is about respect. Respect of art and ourselves, you see? Why should the *aesthetics of the ugly* be the norm?” (Bernig, 2014: 28, emphasis added). Attacking the predominant form of politics as being driven by an “aesthetics of the ugly” simultaneously legitimizes the Anders’ politicization as following a higher cultural ideal and delegitimizes “mainstream politics” as literally “insensible” to authentic culture. What is more, it symbolically delineates and fights for the visibility of the political community of an *educated* bourgeoisie (Rancière, 2004: 12).

In this narrative, the political “other” is not a specific political party. Rather, contemporary politics as a whole are seen as the threat. Politicians are uncultured technocrats who are neither interested in art nor political debates between left and right. For Anders, politicians are the expression of cultural decline. He thinks that “[m]aybe we live in a last stage of our society like all great societies, unprotected against upheaval and barbarians.” “Just listen to the radio and its constant good-mood programs. Or television. This is pure debility. It is still peaceful and entertaining, but [this debility] can develop a destructive power. Maybe that is already happening” (Bernig, 2014: 45). The decline of culture is synonymous with the decline of an *educated* bourgeoisie marginalized by an *income* bourgeoisie. As Anders’ co-activist Kramer argues:

Who can counter this [decline]? Those who describe themselves as bourgeoisie? (...) The “bourgeoisie”, only hearing this term makes me sick! They are reducing [the meaning of bourgeoisie] to the use of serviettes that match the make-up the hostess wears. (...). All they care about is money, a management job in the ministry or a promotion.

Kramer despises what he calls the “income bourgeoisie” – a bourgeoisie that defines itself purely through money. For him they are nothing more than “spiritless snobs” (Bernig, 2014: 46). Senkwitz, another activist, argues “not only the religious disappears, but also that what we call culture and in which people like us dwell”. Kramer replies that “all we can do is

to form little nests of defence [*Verteidigungsnester*] to use a military terminology” (Bernig, 2014: 47).

According to philosopher Gabriel Rockhill, those who feel invisible can only make themselves visible “via a mode of subjectivation that transforms the aesthetic coordinates of the community by implementing the universal presupposition of politics: we are all equal” (Rancière, 2004: xiv). Yet, in the case of Anders, this it is not a universal but rather a particular presupposition that he and his activists aim to implement. They aesthetically define who and what the people are based on their local accultured position, thus turning the particular into a universal norm. As Anders argues, in the end it is not only about the local context, but the whole country (Bernig, 2014: 28). He wants to fight for the “aesthetics of the beautiful”, to make visible what has been forgotten. What this means is defined by him and a conservative educated bourgeoisie that sees beauty expressed in a locally rooted culture and nature that is unspoiled by commercialization, technology, globalization and financial crisis. The educated bourgeoisie here appears as a redemptive figure of hope able to solve the problems of the country by providing “orientation and identification” (Bernig, 2014: 29). Anders and his co-activists emerge as *different*, as authentic educated bourgeois *Querdenker* defending the *Kulturnation* against technocracy and aesthetically opposed to a dominant bourgeois that bases its legitimacy on money and not culture.

The resource fuelling this cultural rebellion is German Romanticism and a celebration of 19th century folkloric, natural and military aesthetics. Anders uses a poem by Romantic poet Theodor Körner to teach his students about war. He leads his students to the school’s memorial for those who fell in World War I and lets them recite Körner’s poem ‘Swordsong’. Written during the German liberation wars in 1813,³⁸ the introduction of the poem echoes the earlier calls for a militaristic defence of the national culture by one of Anders’ co-activists. The novel is filled with Romantic descriptions of nature and the local environment as mythical homeland. Describing Anders’ trips into the natural surroundings of his city, Bernig writes, summons the “power of the landscapes, that was rising from the depth and radiated into (...) the present” and provides “order and a reassurance [*Beruhigung*]” (Bernig, 2014: 78). While the educated bourgeoisie is portrayed as a saviour of the *Kulturnation*, nature and *Heimat* are portrayed as “islands” of spirit threatened by infrastructure projects and modern architecture (Bernig, 2014:

³⁸ In the book Anders recites the first and last verse of the poem: “Thou sword at my left side, What means thy flash of pride? Thou smilest so on me, I take delight in thee. Hurrah! Now let her sing and clash, That glowing sparks may flash! Morn wakes in nuptial pride. Hurrah, thou iron bride! Hurrah!” (Bernig, 2014: 54).

245). Like Loschwitz in *Der Turm*, Labenbrod forms a chronotope of an eternal cultural nationhood that is threatened by technocratic elites and globalization and revived by Romantic references to a lost past. Bernig here shows how a Romanticism-inspired, ethnopoetic realist rereading of the present underpins the *mimesis* of past and the *poiesis* of present and future aesthetics of nationhood. He simultaneously challenges and consolidates hegemonic notions of *Kulturnation*. Anders uses his position as a literature teacher to make *sensible* and *visible* romantic nationalist traditions and aesthetics to his “audience” and to mobilize for their quasi-militaristic defence, like Scholdt at his real-life reading in Pirna.

It is this hierarchical teacher-student relationship that I experienced during the language game with Böckelmann (chapter two) that reemerges when I meet Bernig personally at his private home in Radebeul. When I enter his house – one of the neighbourhood’s many large 19th century houses – he briefly shows me around and proudly tells me that they have renovated everything themselves. “We have done everything ourselves. This was a great experience, to take off all these old layers of paint as if working through different layers of time,” he says almost poetically. “Was it difficult to find our house,” he asks me while he makes fresh coffee for us. I say that thanks to Google Maps this is not a problem anymore.

I always have the feeling that we just get dumber using things like Google. You don’t rely on your feelings anymore if you discover new places. You just rely on technology.

The house has a homely feel, a lot of old wood and pictures of landscapes that appear to be depicting the local region. When the coffee is done he me leads me up into his “writing chamber”, a room under the roof, full of books ranging from world literature to standard works of the far right such as *Die Selbstbewusste Nation* (Schwilk, 1995). In Bernig’s novel, the teacher Anders uses a room under the roof of the school to hold his office hours. As I walk up the quirky stairs leading to his writing chamber, I realize that the way the space was described in the book resembles strongly what I see. It seems as if the space I imagined when reading the book is becoming reality in front of my eyes. I feel like one of Anders’ students in Bernig’s novel. It becomes clear to me that the world Bernig describes in his novel is strongly inspired by his own reality, not only in terms of local aesthetics but also national politics. Bernig’s analysis of contemporary Germany chimes with much of what is written in *Anders*. Bernig, it seems, wants to teach me an alternative reading of national identity. As during many of my conversations with my informants, I can feel that the passionate explanations of their political activism is also meant as a means to convince me of their cause and to turn our implicitly

shared white, educated bourgeois background into to the politicized activism for a an explicit white German identity.

For Bernig, Germany faces cultural decline because of its lack of connection to traditions and history. Drawing on the Heideggerian terminology that is widely shared in Dresden's intellectual circles, he argues that since reunification Germany has not left a "being-without-history" that it entered during the Cold War. Here, Germany was not sovereign and could thus not act and exist as a nation, he says, echoing the New Left's vision of a colonized Germany (chapter two). Because of the rejection of a past overshadowed by the Holocaust, Bernig believes that Germany has not managed to reconnect to its historical legacy. Today he sees this lack of history expressed in "the ideology of multiculturalism" and global capitalism undermining national agency and borders. Borders, Bernig argues, are necessary for the cultural existence of a nation state and national history: "Universalism, multiculturalism, (...) this being-without-history, is a cutting off of what has been, from traditional connections." It is "a fundamental questioning of national culture". Yet, this national culture is a sensible regime for Bernig, an aesthetics that grants security and cognitive relief,³⁹ as a space "of identification and familiarity" that expresses itself "through culture". Each nation represents what he calls a "field of the recognizable", a space in which "we know where to find the light switch".

As Rancière argues, the definition of aesthetics is a political act, to see and make visible a way of doing and making politics. For Bernig, contemporary politicians are literally "blind" to a *national* regime of the sensible. Echoing Anders, Bernig argues:

German politicians are simply too stupid. (...). I do not need to have studied philosophy (...). Cultural rootedness starts at the local level, the little local association that continues folk dance events, or the literary association that organizes lectures in a bookshop (...). All these are forms of bonding on the one side and opening on the other, forms of explaining the world. Protagonists in media, culture and politics lack this in Germany.

Instead of embracing a national aesthetics rooted in such practices, German politicians are presented as cultureless:

³⁹ On how the nation represents an institutionalized spacetime that, through its quasi-natural givenness, allows for a "cognitive relief", see Weidenhaus (2015: 39–44).

We are living in a time, where the politicians demonstrate that they have no sense for [culture] anymore. But living together is not just about questions of infrastructure (...) This lack of sense has created a catastrophe and (...) They don't even see it!

Through Bernig's contrasting of a traditional *Volk* with the idea of a multicultural, ethnically heterogeneous Germany, the racialized understanding of German culture and *Kulturnation* that remained unmarked in *Anders* emerge as a central element in our interview. For Bernig, the personal "catastrophe" Anders talks about is, in today's reality, the so-called refugee crisis. Linking it to a perceived interior cultural crisis in Germany, Bernig's ethnic definition of white *Kulturnation* becomes explicit. Immigration symbolizes the ultimate "making invisible" of German tradition. Non-white migrants are an aesthetic threat to the aesthetic coherence of the nation. Like his protagonist Anders, Bernig wants to counter this by recovering 19th century Romantic traditions:

Referring to the 19th century is still very important. We had to understand the 19th century to interpret the 20th century in any way. (...) This means of course not in a limited leftist reading, as reactionary Romantics turning away from enlightenment (...) but the scepticism towards a totally rational interpretation of the world.

He was against the socialist regime as he thinks that its educational system was superior in that it brought together educated elites and the working class.

When I studied in the 1980s people from different social layers came together in circles against the system. There you met workers who read Nietzsche in their free time. (...) I myself am a trained miner and only studied literature later. (...) And today these circles come together again following this tradition. They say "here something is being attacked from the political leadership in concert with the big media, something that we have yearned for so long. And we risked a lot for this. And we will not give this up without fighting".

Just like Tellkamp, Dagen and Scholdt, Bernig emerges as a producer and teacher of an alternative aesthetics of nationhood that makes visible and consolidates the unmarked racial heritage of *Kulturnation*. Comparing Bernig's novel to his personal views reveals the transformation of his novel's countercultural aesthetics into an explicitly racialized vision of German culture. It shows how Dresden's far-right intellectuals make visible *Kulturnation's* racial heritage and turn it into the essential element of a white educated bourgeois identity. Tellkamp's and Bernig's novels aestheticize an educated bourgeois resistance that emerges out of a reunion of ordinary people and intellectual elites on the basis of an implicit shared white nationalist identity. While both novels do so in relation to sociocultural context prior to 2015,

it is Monika Maron's novel *Munin oder Chaos im Kopf* that makes the racial heritage of *Kulturnation* explicit and portrays it as an essential part of a political aesthetics that unites a polarized nation.

Kulturnation's Non-White „Other“ in Munin oder Chaos im Kopf

Monika Maron is a well-known German-Jewish writer who grew up in the socialist GDR, fled to West Germany in the 1980s and today lives in Berlin. Her books explore questions of German identity and memory in relation to environmental pollution, Germany's Nazi past, as well as non-conformist life in East German socialism (Anderson, 1995; Fuchs, 2006; Stimmel, 2005). Maron's work has been reaching a larger audience in West Germany since the 1980s and, after reunification, in East Germany where most of her work had previously been banned. In the so-called *Bilder* and *Literaturstreit* shortly after reunification, her writing was marginalized as underpinned by an ideological aesthetics, *Gesinnungsästhetik* (Schirrmacher, 1990; Thomas, 2013: 131). She also faced criticism because of a short cooperation with the Stasi in the 1970s.⁴⁰ Yet, she managed to become a known German writer who is still respected for her GDR dissidence. In articles for conservative and far-right media she has declared her political move from the Greens to the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) (Maron, 2017), speculated on Angela Merkel's use of drugs (Maron, 2015) and warned of a "spiritual suicide" facing Islam (Maron, 2010).⁴¹ Yet, in a documentary produced by the East German public TV channel MDR, Maron claims to be still a left-winger at heart. Echoing Tellkamp she argues that working people are not being taken seriously anymore:

I could never have imagined this hatred, that comes unashamedly and culminates in the word "left-behind". What is this supposed to mean? Left-behind? Those are people with a rightful claim to life. If you say that (...) they are regressive, they don't understand what we all want here. It is rather the other way around. They [academics] don't understand them [workers]. (MDR, 2019: 17:20–18:05)

In the documentary, Maron, who like Tellkamp and Bernig pursued vocational training to become an industrial cutter before becoming a writer, is portrayed as an intellectual who is "not afraid of the people's reality". Sahra Wagenknecht, former leader of the far-left *Die Linke* pays tribute to Maron as "a friend" and praises her criticism of a detached intellectual elite that

⁴⁰ During this cooperation Maron largely criticized the GDR, refused to spy on friends and family and agreed only to provide intelligence on West Germany (Cooke and Plowman, 2003: 229–230).

⁴¹ For a more detailed account of Maron's anti-Muslim racism, see Lewicki and Shooman (2020).

has come to neglect the people – a reference to a white working class that, as some on the left argue, has been forgotten by cosmopolitan elites. When confronted with her turn to the right Maron argues, “I would not have thought it to be possible to be labelled New Right. (...) I live in the tradition of the enlightenment, I am for the equality of women, I am for a secular society. Those are actually traditional leftist positions.”

These political positions also underpin Maron’s most recent novel *Munin or Chaos in the Head* (hereafter *Munin*) (Maron, 2018). Published in 2018, it reached the top 20 of Germany’s best-selling books (Buchreport, 2019) and was frequently recommended to me by my informants in Dresden. On its cover the book is introduced as a work that “reveals the insanity of the World” and as a “parable on the decomposition of society”. Before opening the book, the reader is led to think of it as a metaphorical representation of the real world, blurring the line between the aesthetic of literature and reality.

In the book the protagonist, journalist Mina Wolf, struggles with three temporal layers that inform her political imagination. First, her personal life that is disturbed by a “crazy” neighbour who claims to be an opera singer, practises daily on the balcony next door but cannot sing well. Second, the “cruelties of the thirty years war” (Maron, 2018: 16), which is the topic of an article Wolf is working on. And last, the chaos of the contemporary world, global capitalism, terrorism, gender mainstreaming and Islam that reaches her through the media. While the first layer is Wolf’s immediate surroundings in the present, the second introduces a distant past. The third takes the shape of a harbinger of a dystopian future. Together, they create a threatening environment that leaves the protagonist feeling powerless and incapable of acting in the face of an impending catastrophe. By situating the life-world of the protagonist in Berlin’s *Prenzlauer Berg* (Maron, 2018: 123), Maron builds a direct link to her own origins in the milieu of the GDR literary resistance that had its centre in the very same neighbourhood. Before turning to Maron’s book reading in Dresden I first focus on the passages of the novel read by Maron to show how the read text serves as a pre-political aesthetical ordering that informs a political discussion following the reading.

The novel starts by describing a diffuse feeling of change and chaos that is linked to an unmentioned event in “the last summer”:

Something had changed since the last summer. The people had become more irritated and, depending on their nature, fatalistic or aggressive. (...). This was not because the world had changed in the last 12 months, but because it had not changed. Because what had started years

ago and had discharged itself in the past year in war, crises and worldwide terror, had become part of everyday life. Nobody believed that this would change soon. At the same time, people had not lost faith, because this would have required that they had a belief. But belief, no matter if in God, an idea or simply in other people, was a taboo. What was left was only the disbelief, that there could ever be war in Europe, that our good life could have an end, that African tribal and religious wars could invade Germany. And now the war was very close, just like the feeling that this good life would not endure. The harbingers of those conflicts that were believed so far away were close. Slowly, the people even lost their disbelief, and everything seemed possible again. (Maron, 2018: 11)

The words “the last summer” refer to the summer of 2015, the climax of the so-called refugee crisis. In the parts she reads to the audience, Maron refers to real articles published in German newspapers and books popular among a far-right readership – such as Houellebecq’s *Soumission* – a book that has made the protagonist of *Munin* realize that “everything is possible” (Maron, 2018: 166). She portrays the present as a time just before the outbreak of an “African tribal and religious” war (Maron, 2018: 55). Refugees and immigrants are portrayed as sexually frustrated “dynamite” for Europe (Maron, 2018: 86–87) who, toward the end of the novel, intrude into the protagonist’s world as “southern looking individuals” attempting to rape a local resident (Maron, 2018: 207). Christians are depicted as victims of Muslims comparing them to Jews. Muslims, on the other hand, are presented as the new Nazis who, in terms of development, are where Germans were under national socialism and who “one day may become like” Germans today (Maron, 2018: 199). The idea of a general decline of “belief” is widespread in the far right and underpins its cultural pessimism (Woods, 2005).

Maron knows well how to embed her stories into the mainstream media discourses of 2018. She compares the cultural decline, chaos and conflict to the Thirty Years’ War to anticipate a religious civil war. The reading of the so-called refugee crisis as a new religious war happened in the context of the 400th anniversary of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648). Using the Thirty Years’ War as a means to interpret contemporary issues (the war in Syria) or to draw up dystopian visions of the future in Germany (“Tribal Wars”) was widespread not only in the far right, but also in mainstream discourses (Breuer and Weber, 2017; Hinz, 2018; Münkler, 2018; Seewald, 2018; Stürmer, 2016) and was even picked up by Angela Merkel (Schmidt, 2018). By reading the present through the lens of a dystopian past, Maron creates a vision of a dystopian future that resonates with far-right and conservative audiences without referring to politics.

This sense of a coming catastrophe is linked to a portrayal of a “derailed” society out of control and losing its “values”. Wolf laments the “daily news on insane financial transactions, of which I understood nothing, or on the constantly rising number of human genders, (...) or on a terrorist attack in Syria, Iraq, Yemen or also Paris” or arguments put forward in the public debate “to give up some self-evident secular values in consideration of Muslim co-citizens” (Maron, 2018: 14). Anxiety about globalization and terrorism are here mixed with anti-Muslim resentments and the claim that gender mainstreaming would be more important than “defending” secular values against Islam. Wolf’s fictional reality can hardly be distinguished from the vision of reality propagated by the AfD. By mentioning this catastrophic scenario on the side and linking it to a “daily” routine, Maron creates a feeling of both a crisis of normality and a normality of crisis.

Part of this catastrophic subtext is the development of an intellectual and artistic precariat shaped by financial hardship and the neglect of culture. The protagonist not only curses her incapacity to handle the complexities of the Thirty Years’ War, but also her “difficult situation and the poor remuneration, which the newspapers paid, because they would, allegedly, not be earning any money themselves because of the internet” (Maron, 2018: 17). This anxiety about losing relevance and intellectual influence speaks to an audience of intellectuals who suffer from cuts in funding in academia and culture, something that also finds a place in Böckelmann’s *Tumult* (chapter two). The fear of subjective decline is transferred onto a collective level by linking it to the notion of general decline.

The “crazy singer”, Wolf’s neighbour who spends her day singing on the balcony, is a central symbolic figure in the book. She is portrayed as a “snowflake”, a popular term in the far right used to characterize the left-leaning youth as a “generation of people who became adults in the 2010s, viewed as being less resilient and more prone to taking offence than previous generations” (Collins English Dictionary, 2019; Serwer, 2017). In Maron’s novel, however, the neighbour not only represents the left, but also the kind of country Germany has become under the influence of the left. Having been told as a child by her family that she will become a famous singer she, in the end, failed to do so because of her “horrible” voice. Because of “disappointed self-love” she is now angrily “singing on her balcony, to prove herself to the world”. Wolf’s description of the singer is telling. She portrays her as “wearing a turban-like hat, trousers at knee-length and an African-looking outer garment, mounting a bicycle. She had legs as a Man, muscular, thick calves, bony hobbles and, for a woman, surprisingly big feet. (...) What if she was a man, who dreamt to be a singer?” (Maron, 2018: 25). The singer

becomes a metaphor for a decadent left-liberal society “gone crazy”, idealizing the “other” while hating oneself, and promoting a gender mainstreaming. Next to non-white immigrants, leftist activists similar to the singer represent further intruders into the peaceful life in Wolf’s street. They damage cars and prevent the deportation of refugees so that “only 18 of 1 million refugees” were deported in 2016.⁴²

The second part of Maron’s reading focuses on the appearance of the crow Munin with which the protagonist holds dialogues at night. As an animal named after the two crows and prophets of the Germanic God Odin, Munin takes the role of a “truth-speaker” and objective observer of Germany. Where the protagonist is in doubt about what she perceives, the crow gives clear guidance. To Wolf’s question on why human history is always a history of wars the crow answers:

Because you [humans] always learn the wrong things (...). This is why you are not able to deal with the woman who with her singing is driving you as crazy as she already is. You cannot even call her crazy anymore. But it is in fact a perfectly apt word: something, in this case reason, is not where it belongs. And such a good, right word you are abolishing (...) One of my maternal ancestors nested for some time next to a madhouse and saw horrible things. Poor creatures were beaten, enchained, locked into ice-cold basements. My ancestor said that one would have done better to kill them. And this is what you have done, as you know yourself (...); eliminating the weak and crazy, simply killing lovely, stupid humans. And if you hadn’t also murdered six million Jews and lost the war on top of that, the rest of the world would probably never have noticed it. Many were thinking this way back then. But you were shocked about your misdeeds and swore lifelong atonement to yourselves. Since that moment you want to protect all you think is weak and helpless. (Maron, 2018: 111–112)

The crow speaks its truth against the current state of Germany, misled in the present by its shameful deeds in the past and muzzled by political correctness. Again, we see here common far-right narratives of German self-hatred due to the Holocaust. The helping of others is portrayed as a sign of weakness and an expression of an unwillingness to face the realities of life. Germany, so the subtext suggests, has turned into a nation of snowflakes, *Gutmenschen* (do-gooders), who have lost the means to assert themselves.

Another truth-teller is a cab driver who speaks with a strong local Berlin dialect. Contrasted to the educated inhabitants living in the *Altbauten* – the name for pre-war buildings

⁴² In reality 25,375 refugees were deported in 2016 (Geißler, 2018).

in Berlin that symbolize a more affluent, educated bourgeois social milieu – he represents the “ordinary people”. They live in the *Neubauten*, newer buildings that represent the housing constructed under socialism.⁴³ They are now inhabited by lower social classes, whose critical thoughts and worries are not listened to. Prior to all the other residents of the bourgeois street the cab driver puts the German flag in the window of his cab, an act for which he is strongly criticized in the beginning. He sees the danger of refugees coming to Germany before anyone else (Maron, 2018: 142–143) and complains that more attention is being paid to “crazy singers and those who cannot speak German” (Maron, 2018: 95) than to ordinary people like him.

Wolf gets in touch with this class conflict in a neighbourhood assembly that discusses the issue of the “disturbance” by the singer (Maron, 2018: 92–102). The meeting attendees are separated into two groups: those living in *Altbauten* represented by an affluent “Audi-driver” and those from the *Neubauten* led by the cab driver. While the former group tries to find a respectful solution to silence the singer, the cab driver is simply fed up. He finally leaves the meeting full of anger when his concerns are not listened to and the singer “is not named as what she is: crazy”. Wolf, who unintentionally took seat among inhabitants of the *Neubauten*, does not hide that she sees herself on their side.

Speaking out against political correctness, the cab driver is ostracized during the meeting. However, at the end of the novel the entire street joins the cab driver, rising against the “crazy” singer and, symbolically, a leftist Germany gone crazy. When, toward the end of the novel, chaos reaches the once peaceful street, and rape and crimes are committed by Arabic clans, all the inhabitants follow the cab driver. Now even the educated bourgeois inhabitants put German flags in their windows and sing traditional German folk songs from the 19th century. This collective singing is contrasted to the “crazy” singer-snowflake: “The singing was not a disgrace but sounded harmoniously and well-practiced, more than you could expect from a spontaneous gathering” (Maron, 2018: 209–210). In the face of the threat from refugees and immigrants, the repoliticized educated bourgeoisie reawakens, joins in with “ordinary people”. Echoing Anders’ reference to 19th century Romanticism and folkloric culture, they together reassert a “harmonious” and homogenous white national culture bonded in the strong

⁴³ In the GDR, *Altbauten* represented more individualist ways of life and a continuity of pre-war ways of living that were cherished mainly by the remaining bourgeois milieus. *Neubauten*, on the other hand, stood for socialist progress, higher living standards and the realization of a new way of life that united formerly bourgeois milieus with the working class in a more egalitarian society that was meant to overcome, morally, aesthetically and politically, bourgeois-dominated society and to be detached from individual and traditional backgrounds (Mau, 2019: 27–47). After reunification they lost their status as prestigious living spaces (Mau, 2019: 167).

symbol of collective singing. The cab driver clearly represents “the street” and movements such as PEGIDA muted by a politically correct affluent elite. By letting the inhabitants of the neighbourhood join in his nationalism Maron shows that the ordinary people on the street were right in the end. Blinded by the “crazy singer”, the educated bourgeoisie did not see the danger until it had to face the threat in its street.

The power of Maron’s novel lies in the realist way these representations of the contemporary world are portrayed. The world that becomes visible through the book cannot be distinguished from her political, anti-Muslim discourse but appears as a factual description, as *common sense*. The protagonist becomes the representative of an intellectual class estranged from the present and succumbing to a dystopian cultural pessimism. Maron expresses the attempt of a far-right educated bourgeoisie to regain agency in defining the “harmonious” aesthetics of a national community in union with “the people”. The “leftist” and racial “other” is excluded from this aestheticized community on the basis of “craziness” and non-whiteness. The novel ends as a utopian vision uniting an intellectual bourgeoisie with “the people” for a national rebirth

It is this vision of a symbolic reunion of a polarized nation against a Muslim “other” that Maron has argued for in her public appearances (Lewicki and Shooman, 2020) and that also informs her readings of *Munin*. During my fieldwork Maron did one of her readings in Dresden, organized in close contact with Dagen. When I visit Dagen in her bookshop in early May she is very excited that Maron is coming. “You should come,” she says, proudly pointing at the library’s programme that, on the back also has the key dates of Dagen’s cultural programme at the bookshop (Figure 51).



Figure 47: Monika Maron's book reading advertised in the official library brochure (photo taken by the author).



Figure 46: Dresden's Cultural Palace (photo taken by Dresden Marketing GmbH).

Dresden's municipal library is full when Maron presents *Munin* on an evening in late May 2018.⁴⁴ The library is located in the Cultural Palace (Figure 52), where the debate between Tellkamp and Grünbein took place. As a place that was designed to unite popular and high culture, the Cultural Palace was once the pride of the GDR – a system that Maron, as the dissident stepdaughter of the GDR's sometime interior minister, was tied to and opposed to at the same time. Living in Berlin, Maron has a less strong link to Dresden but has become a close friend of Dagen. Her book was positively discussed in the literary YouTube show by Susanne Dagen and Ellen Kositzka⁴⁵ only a few weeks before Maron's book reading in Dresden. Dagen is present during the reading with a little bookstall selling Maron's book and literature from Kubitschek's *Antaios* publishing house.

Just as the book blurs reality and fiction, the reading shifts between Wolf as the book's protagonist, Maron as a writer and the audience's projection of the novel onto reality. What seems to be shared by all is a dystopian vision of the future and the perception of non-white immigrants and Islam as an existential threat to the German *Kulturnation*. The audience

⁴⁴ The reading took place on 24 May 2018.

⁴⁵ The literature review is produced by the far-right *IfS* in close association with *Ein Prozent* and the Identitarian Movement. It is a monthly production that is normally filmed in Dagen's bookshop. Dagen and Kositzka, who is the partner of Götz Kubitschek, always participate and invite guests to discuss three books.

consists of a largely middle-aged and older, white and well-off, educated bourgeoisie. While many of the other events tend to be dominated by older men, here the audience is more mixed in terms of gender and age. It is not a fringe event of a marginal radical right group but an event that takes place in Dresden's central venue for cultural events. Before I enter the room, I see Dagen with her husband behind their bookstall. In one of our conversations Dagen had praised Maron's book for capturing the central questions of our time. She admires Maron for "standing above things", as someone who does not have to care about where she is situated in the political debate. After briefly greeting Dagen and her husband, I find a seat in the crowded room.



Figure 48: Monika Maron at her book reading in the Cultural Palace (photo taken by the author).

The event is structured into a first reading, followed by a discussion, then another reading that is followed by a Q&A. Moving between readings and discussions, this structure conjures a mixing of the "book's world" with the contemporary situation in Dresden and Germany. The discussion of the book seamlessly shifts to a general discussion of politics. Maron oscillates between the role of the author and taking the identity of Wolf, the protagonist of the book. When the discussion chair asks her if the protagonist is not trapped in dystopian thinking her answer is telling: "Well I think no, well, actually why do I say 'I', it is my figure, not me." While at the beginning of the discussion she still makes a distinction between herself and the protagonist, as time goes on she increasingly starts to speak in her personal capacity during the discussion. She argues that one "can only see parallels" between the Thirty Years'

War and the Syrian war. She says that, just like the protagonist in her book, she is afraid of Islam, a religion she believes to be “political, ideological and not an enlightened religion”. She warns the audience that a political Islam is spreading in Germany. As a result, she argues, wars will inevitably be imported to Germany. The distribution of the sensible in the book becomes the aesthetics underpinning the sensible perception of the present reality in the Cultural Palace.

Maron draws on her background as a GDR dissident, claiming that this experience has strengthened her. “I am well trained,” she says, “and I don’t care if I am called far right.” At this moment, the reading turns into an open support event for the AfD. She argues that “the AfD is only rejected because it is the AfD. This is not right. The AfD would not be here if the CDU implemented the right policies”, insinuating that the AfD does implement the right policies. All her claims are listened to by the audience without critical interruption. Maron argues that circumstances would be better if more people joined protests on the streets, as in the book. She cannot understand how 58 per cent of votes still support Merkel. “How is this possible?” She continues, saying that if things do not change soon, there will be a catastrophe.

Maron’s personal history as a dissident anti-socialist intellectual and her popularity endow her with a privileged position to speak “truth” against a perceived new rise of totalitarianism, this time from the “liberal left”. Through a shared fear of a coming tribal war, common racist perceptions of the “African”, “Muslim” or “Arab” “other” and the feeling of being overwhelmed by a world of crises, the audience identifies with the protagonist and Maron. Through the political character of the reading, the book’s fiction and the “distribution of the sensible” propagated of by the AfD become one.

3. Dagen’s Bookshop and the Rereading of Reality

For Maron the use of the autobiographical novel genre is a key aspect to the effect and affect of her books, some of which are openly autobiographical while others contain autobiographical elements (Cooke and Plowman, 2003: 227). While in the past the use of the autobiographical was a means for Maron to defend her public self in the face of Stasi allegations, the autobiographical elements in *Munin* and also in Bernig’s *Anders* and Tellkamp’s *Der Turm* insert an aura of truth into their fiction and invite readers to make connections between the fiction presented and the life-worlds of the authors. This hybrid form questions “the traditional distinctions between biography, personal history (...) and novel” and makes a clear distinction

between fact and fiction impossible (Childs and Fowler, 2006: 21). Given the political activism of both Bernig and Maron and the multitude of figures in the books that pronounce populist far-right discourses, the author's self is fragmented "living partly in society and partly in a world of fiction" – a narrative strategy common to many East German writers grappling with the socialist past (Cooke and Plowman, 2003: xx). Referring to Maron's earlier works, Plowman argues that "autobiography is a genre centrally concerned with the relationship between private and public, between self and world" and that Maron "performs an act of autobiographical self-invention designed to reconcile [her] life and her work, her private self and her public reputation" (Cooke and Plowman, 2003: 236). Fact and fiction are mixed into a coherent but fictitious narrative of the author's life (De Man, 1979: 921; Plowman, 1998: 519–520; Renza, 1977), turning the protagonist into a "surrogate author" (Bellonby, 2013: 204) and inserting political discontent into her fiction. Like Scholdt, Heimann, Bernig and Tellkamp, Maron becomes an inspirational model for her educated bourgeois audience. She and her protagonist prefigure a vision *Kulturnation* that makes it possible to bridge notions of culture and race as well as "educated elites" and "the people" by constructing a shared white identity.



Figure 49: Susanne Dagen, Caroline Sommerfeld and Ellen Kositzer (from left to right) in Dagen's BuchHaus discussing Monika Maron's *Munin* for the YouTube show *Mit Rechten Lesen* (screenshot taken by the author).



Figure 50: Jörg Bernig, Susanne Dagen and Uwe Tellkamp sitting in front of the BuchHaus (photo published on the Facebook page of the BuchHaus, screenshot by the author).

Tellkamp's, Maron's and Bernig's ethnopoetic realism transforms reality through the application of utopian and dystopian aesthetics. This blurring of reality and fiction is celebrated not only by Dagen but also by larger far-right networks. For example, in a literature show produced by Dagen's bookshop and Kubitschek's IfS (Figure 54), Maron's novel is presented as the account of a person who had to "change her lifestyle due to the invading factor of disturbance", referring to the immigrants (BuchHaus Loschwitz, 2018: 9:20), and arguing that

“it is clearly Monika Maron who is speaking here” (BuchHaus Loschwitz, 2018: 14:00). Dagen, Kositzka and philosopher Caroline Sommerfeld refer to the book as portraying a “proxy war” reflecting on the cultural struggles of contemporary German society. They celebrate the novel and the protagonist herself for embodying a solidarity between the privileged and the underprivileged, the people and intellectuals. Referring to the scene from Maron’s reading analysed earlier, Kositzka argues:

Maron is great at keeping a balance, she is politically engaged but at the same time she fully remains a poet. (...) What is also great is the fracture that runs through society from the start of the book and showing itself in the way the singer is being dealt with. There are those inhabitants of the Altbauten who say “we have to bear with this, we should be respectful with all people among us” and then those living in the Neubauten, the underprivileged (...), who say “I cannot sleep, I cannot bear this because I need to work at night, I cannot adapt to what is invading my life” (...). And she [Wolf] says, “I am an inhabitant of the Altbau, one of the privileged (...) but here I am among the [underprivileged] and this is in fact also the position that corresponds to me”. This is beautiful. And Monika Maron has shown from a very early point in time onwards that she was not participating in PEGIDA but understood PEGIDA. (BuchHaus Loschwitz, 2018: 19:04–20:30)

Bernig’s *Anders* was reviewed by Muhesin Sebastian Hennig, the Dresden artist and author, a resident of Radebeul and close friend of Bernig and Dagen, for the far-right journal *Junge Freiheit*. In the review published in 2015, shortly after PEGIDA was formed, Hennig praises Bernig and *Anders* for “presaging emerging fault lines and (...) moods” that “have now become manifest not only in Dresden as a peaceful but determined protest on the streets” (Hennig, 2015b). The book captures an “underlying mood” that has “not yet found its ultimate expression” and “carries a sinister premonition [of what is to come] into the present”. For Hennig, Bernig’s novel, which appeared shortly before PEGIDA’s first demonstration, prefigured and gave intellectual form to what PEGIDA would become.

The reception of both novels shows that the books’ protagonists embody the self-perception and self-understanding of far-right intellectuals as carriers and articulators of a far-right counterculture. As aesthetic artefacts, the protagonists and the novels represent what Hebdige and Hall have called a stylistic homology: objects homologous with the values, “focal concerns, activities, group structure and collective self-image of the subculture” (Clarke, 1976; Hebdige, 1979: 114). While the main characters of the novels embody the intellectual positive and hopeful self through their embracing of “cultural dissidence”, siding with “the people” and

calling for a romantic-idealistic revolt against technocracy, the dystopian worlds they inhabit prefigure a world of war-like crises. This interpretation may appear radical, but it draws on feelings of crisis that, as the example of the Thirty Years' War analogy shows, reach into the mainstream. As Dagen says in her YouTube literature show, Maron's use of the Thirty Years' War and the "parallels to our situation today" are obvious:

The frontlines [and] the alliances permanently change. This (...) is essentially linked to our situation today. (...) [Maron] constantly brings up the notion of "pre-war situation". All feel that something is in the air. The lunacy of the singer mirrors (...) the lunacy of this time. (...) [N]obody knows but everybody feels that something is happening. And she says very clearly [about the refugees]: "they bring us war". (BuchHaus Loschwitz, 2018: 20:30)

In the novels and the far right's perception of reality, hegemonic representations of reality in the mainstream media that implicitly carry racialized readings are incorporated. Their unmarked racialization is here rendered explicit while the mainstream media are criticized for hiding them (Hebdige, 1979: 85–86). Turning fiction into "faction", a hybrid of fiction and facts, their dystopian novels hold the readers in a "mesmeric uncertainty" (Dyer, 2015) about the reality of the worlds presented in the books. Reinforcing widespread feelings of insecurity and uncertainty by the summoning of worlds of imminent dystopia, they contribute to the performance of crisis in populist politics (Moffitt, 2015) against which the resisting innocent local community and nation are pitted as places of certainty.

Doing so has earned the three authors a central space in the far right. Two years after my fieldwork, in 2020, all three authors published essays in a special edition, which emerged from the collaboration between Dagen's bookshop and Kubitschek's Antaios publishing house, to celebrate the bookshop's 25th anniversary. Entitled *EXILE* the edition is to "open new spaces of freedom, thinking and dreaming" (BuchHaus Loschwitz, 2020). In styling the intellectuals as lone dissidents that have found an inner exile in the far right's intellectual milieu, the essays treat the marginalization of artists in Dresden by "politics and ideologues" (Tellkamp, 2020), increasing intellectual pressure through a homogenizing mediasphere (Maron, 2020) and the (re)rediscovery of Eastern Europe as a signifier for European cultural diversity and identity against mainstream discourse (Bernig, 2020). Since the end of my fieldwork, the three authors have become central intellectuals, not only in Dresden's intellectual far right, but also in Kubitschek's networks. In May 2020, Jörg Bernig was elected by the local Christian Democrats and the AfD to become the new director of Radebeul's cultural office, thereby stirring a debate

on the local influence of the far right increasingly reaching beyond Dresden (Laudenbach, 2020). While Bernig withdrew from the post after massive protest in the local cultural scene, the Bernig's election reflects the growing importance of local far-right intellectuals in shaping culture, specifically when backed by local politicians and large parts of the local population.



Figure 51: Bernig's, Maron's and Tellkamp's new novels published as EXIL – Edition BuchHaus Loschwitz and sold by the far right publisher Antaios (screenshot taken by the author).

4. Conclusion

After the Q&A that followed Maron's book reading, I start talking to one of my neighbours in the audience. She tells me that she has come to see "Maron because she is a *Querdenker*" who looks at the reality in new and surprising ways. She tells me that in the GDR "it was difficult to meet people like her who were non-conformist". Her comments show how Maron legitimizes the idea that the far right is the locus of non-conformist resistance. Maron's past as a GDR dissident and her status as a writer give her a powerful position to introduce an alternative politics of aesthetics embracing the populist far right. How strongly this is linked to Maron's self-perception becomes clear one day after the book reading. When I meet Dagen at her bookshop, she is happy about the good turnout and that she was herself able to get to know Maron better personally. She proudly shows me a text message from Maron thanking her for the event, and ending with a quote by the Polish poet and Nobel Prize winner Czesław Miłosz: "To become a dissident, you don't need a superior intelligence, but a stomach that tends to

throw up in case of an ideological diet.”⁴⁶ The message underlines the self-perception of Maron, Tellkamp, Heimann, Bernig, Dagen and the populist far right in Dresden as new dissidents in the tradition of anti-socialism speaking out against power to (re)establish a common sense.

The novels and their protagonists contribute to the construction of narrative identity as white educated bourgeois guardians of *Kultur* that both the writers and intellectual activists emulate in their political activism. By blurring the line between their political activism today, the activism of their protagonists, and of their audiences, the rereading of classics in Pirna, as well as Tellkamp’s, Bernig’s and Maron’s redescrptions of past and present realities, prefigure an educated bourgeois embracing of “the ordinary people” against a totalitarian “other”. Their literature provides a model for the aesthetics of local resistance against processes of globalization.

Using literature as a pre-political means to generate aesthetics of resistance can facilitate a sensual experience that drives transformative political action through “acts of aesthetic ordering”. As can be seen in the Arab Spring and Occupy movements, aesthetic politics are a powerful subversive means for political mobilization and legitimization of collective action (Raunig, 2014; Shilton, 2013; Werbner, 2014). As Winegar shows, the concept of “dirt” or “dirtiness” can be used as a linguistic tool to exclude disturbing elements from the regime of the sensible in order to form a stronger collective (Winegar, 2016). Tellkamp, Maron and Bernig use terms such as “cheerless”, “crazy” and “ugly” to demarcate what should be visible and/or audible in their preferred regimes of the sensible – their vision of *Kultur* that unites “ordinary people” and an educated bourgeoisie.

A look at the German past shows that in the context of real and perceived national crises “the self-sufficiency of literature is (...) called into question and a closer link between literature and politics is envisioned, if not even demanded” (Hohendahl, 2014: 615). Using their novels as aesthetic means to bridge between the abstract and the everyday, local and global writers can have a strong impact on political imagination and one’s own position and place in face of larger processes of globalization. Through its direct engagement with everyday life, literature gives a unique access to the sensible that is superior to philosophical arguments as it links abstract ideas to concrete situations of human life. This link with literature provides an effective means for “redescription”, that is the persuading of people to adopt alternative principles and

⁴⁶ My translation, original quote: “Um Dissident zu werden braucht es keine überlegene Intelligenz, sondern einen Magen, der bei ideologischer Schonkost zum Erbrechen neigt.”

practices by modifying prevalent descriptions of reality (Baumeister and Horton, 2013: 11; Rorty et al., 1991; Rorty and Richard, 1989). In Scholdt's rereading of classics and Bernig's, Tellkamp's and Maron's novels, the linking of anti-hegemonic far-right populism with literature leads to an aesthetic mediation of a white popular immediacy by the aesthetic means. Past unions between "the people" and "the educated bourgeoisie" are here recast for the present purpose of a white identity defined against totalitarian and socialist technocrats within the nation and non-white immigration from without.

Dresden writers thus form "enunciative collectives" calling into question the dominant distribution of the sensible by rendering visible a romanticized and racialized community of the *Volk* under threat. They not only represent an educated bourgeoisie as the central agent in the imagination and *Bildung* of a national people in its own image and as an anticipation of a community to come (Rancière, 2004: 25); they also help to articulate both in their fiction and their prefigurative activism ethnocultural national selfhood through the "literary disincorporation" (Rancière, 2004: 36) of ethnic ("African tribes"), cultural (Muslim) and political "others" ("crazy singer", "cultureless politicians"). Their novels serve as the aesthetic embedding of a populist politics as a form of "active citizenship and empowerment of the individual" through "the creation of counter spaces for the emergence of alternative 'sensorial modes'" (Virmani, 2015: 6).

The following chapter five maintains the focus on aesthetic prefigurations of white identity by looking at the intersection of art and aesthetic activism in urban and natural spaces. At the centre will be a third intellectual circle formed by the painter Muhesin Sebastian Hennig in Radebeul. The second part of chapter five looks at a project of art activism that brings together all three circles from Pirna, Radebeul and Loschwitz.

CHAPTER 5: From Precariousness to Empowerment: Prefiguring the white *Kulturnation* through Art and Space

Like the Loschwitz and Pirna circles, the last intellectual far-right circle I am introduced to is not based in Dresden's centre but a suburb: Radebeul. A 15-minute train ride from the city, Radebeul is, like Loschwitz, a white, wealthy middle- and upper-class neighbourhood on the shores of the Elbe River. Like Loschwitz, it has a long history of art, literature and wealthy and famous residents. And, like Loschwitz, Radebeul resembles what Germans call a *Heile Welt*: an idyllic, seemingly perfect or intact world untouched by larger political, social and cultural shifts. After I get off the train, I pass shops that sell German folk art, *Volkskunst*, little bakeries, butchers, wine sellers and other specialized shops. I recognize the atmosphere that Bernig described in his novel *Anders*. The novel's principal location, *Labenbrod*, was clearly modelled on Radebeul. I remember how *Anders*' seemingly perfect world represented highly precarious *Heimat*, constantly at the edge of catastrophe and threatened by the opaque forces of a global financial crisis and uneducated technocrats; and how, in the face of these threats, the "intact" suburb and its natural surroundings emerged as spiritual realms to regain strength for resistance.

In many ways the Radebeul circle tries to translate the activism in Bernig's novel into reality. Its central figure is Muhesin Sebastian Hennig, a painter who studied at Dresden's prestigious art academy and has specialized in painting aquarelles. Today Hennig is less known for his work as a painter. He has made himself a name as an author writing for such well-known far-right media as *Junge Freiheit* and *CATO*. During the time of my fieldwork he gained national prominence by co-authoring Björn Höcke's book *Nie Zweimal Über Denselben Fluss* (chapter one). His local activism in Dresden spans from regularly participating in the PEGIDA movement to organizing a hiking group and regular private meetings with book and poetry readings and film screenings. Hennig converted to Islam in the 1990s as part of the al-Murabitun movement. This Muslim group emerged in the context of bohemian circles in nationalist New Left currents that appropriated post-colonialist discourses to portray Germany as colonized by western powers (Betz, 1988: 129–133; Müller, 2000: 215) and subscribed to an ethnically and culturally homogenous Germany (Chin et al., 2009: 111). It stands in the tradition of earlier forms of hybridization of Islam and German educated bourgeois cultures in the 1920s that saw in Islam an inherently educated bourgeois religion (Motadel, 2019).

Al-Murabitun mainly consists of white European converts who sympathize with an Islam-inspired “conservative revolution” to defend the ethnocultural diversity of indigenous European cultures against a globalizing capitalism and postmodern nihilism (Dutton, 2014; Lau, 2004; Özyürek, 2014: 55; Sedgwick, 2004). Al-Murabitun is a Sufi Muslim sub-organization that unites a large number of German converts and is driven by the aim to unite Muslim and German spirituality. It was founded by the Scottish actor Ian Dallas in the 1970s. The movement has strong links to the German Muslim newspaper *Die Islamische Zeitung*, for which Hennig regularly wrote in the past (Klatt, 2015). A central figure of the movement is Abu-Bakr Rieger who, together with Jürgen Elsässer, is co-founder of the far-right populist magazine *Compact*. He withdrew his editorship in 2014 shortly before the magazine became a central organ of the PEGIDA movement. Rieger is equally the founder of the so-called Weimar Institute where he aims to bring together German Muslims and the classical spiritual tradition of Weimar and Goethe to further a spiritual vision of German identity (Göppfarth and Özyürek, 2020: 11–14).

Hennig lives in a flat in an old 19th century mansion in Radebeul together with his wife, who is also an artist. He welcomes me at the door and as I enter his kitchen a big breakfast table awaits me. His wife greets me, and as we start chatting she tells me that she had also been at the birthday of Böckelmann’s wife, the publisher of the far-right magazine *Tumult* and author of the pre-word to Höcke’s book, and that she had also participated in Böckelmann’s language game. I had met Böckelmann just about a week earlier, so we share the experience of playing the Böckelmann’s “ethnopluralist game” (chapter two). “I made it to the third prize even though I have not studied anything linked to that. I was very proud because there were so many language scholars,” she claims.

Over breakfast, Hennig criticizes leftist-liberalism and its denial of roots and borders for paving the way for a homogenizing capitalist globalization. He celebrates PEGIDA’s nationalism and Islam’s spiritualism as tools to counter a global liberalism and to reassert the importance of immaterial values, fight German self-hate and liberal nihilism. What he tells me echoes the views he laid out in his book on PEGIDA, entitled *Walks over the Horizon* (Hennig, 2015a). In the book he interprets PEGIDA and Muslim resistance to globalization as the same expression of a deep yearning of a spiritual belonging to a *Volksgemeinschaft* and *Heimat*, or Homeland. He sees PEGIDA and the German far right as being on the same side in a struggle of underdogs against a rationalist imperialism. Islamists attacking Germany would not

understand that the “German Empire was never involved” in “colonial crimes”. Yet, the left would want Germany to carry colonialism’s “main burden” (Hennig, 2015a: 30–31).

Despite his Muslim background, the painter has become one of the central figures in Dresden’s intellectual far-right milieu. He is valued specifically for his artistic talents and for aesthetically re-evaluating the rural surroundings of the city. In his writings and activism, space and art converge in narratives of *Heimat* and a locally rooted spirituality. In many ways, Hennig translates the ethnopoetic realism of Bernig’s, Tellkamp’s and Maron’s novels into a concrete aesthetic activism that celebrates the essence of a self-celebratory German *Heimat* in relation to non-European Muslim “other” and a colonial past.

After chapter five’s focus on writers and their prefigurative cultural imaginaries of a white identity, this chapter examines the role art and aesthetic activism play in Dresden’s far-right intellectual circles. I argue that local art and heritage are central to the *poiesis* and racial becoming of *Kulturnation* among Dresden’s intellectual far right. Local art and heritage are reinterpreted to construct “authentic” aesthetic experiences of what it means to be a white local citizen by collapsing historical knowledge about, and emotional attachments to, Dresden and its natural surroundings. Both emerge as a mythic place of re-empowerment and “resistance” (Lomnitz, 2001: 184) against a “colonization” from a rationalist globalization and non-European “other”. A “typical German character” is identified in Dresden’s natural and urban aesthetics and the local school of figurative art.

Drawing on the entanglements of Dresden’s local with Germany’s colonial heritage, Dresden’s local intellectuals construct a white identity that, in their vision, has turned from a colonizer into a *Kulturnation* “colonized” by a non-white and technocratic “other” whose fate, as the AfD’s “party philosopher” Marc Jongen put it in a speech in 2017, is today comparable to “North American indigenous people (...) living in reservations” (Bednarz, 2020). Framing Islam either as an essential threat or co-victim of Western globalization, far-right “defenders” of a white *Heimat* claim to be victims of a reversed racism and colonization. The first two sections look at the historical role of Radebeul in the construction of German symbolic repertoires of *Heimat*, its continuation in the German Democratic Republic’s (GDR) officially supported figurative art and the far right’s contemporary discourse on art. I then look at how these local and figurative aesthetics of *Heimat* are mobilized by Hennig’s Radebeul circle, its hiking group and its art activist project that was jointly organized by the Loschwitz, Pirna and Radebeul circles.

1. Radebeul, Karl May and the Enduring Colonial Aesthetics of *Heimat*

In Germany, the notion of *Heimat* has a long history of serving as a romanticized essence and symbolic repertoire for a national cultural and racial renewal in the face of existential threats. In the late 19th and early 20th century it was central to the so-called *Heimatschutzbewegung*, the homeland protection movement (Olsen, 1999; Wolscke-Bulmahn, 1996). It took multiple meanings and underpinned nationalist, bourgeois and racist discourses of social emancipation and empowerment (Koshar, 1996: 114; Rollins, 1996: 88). As historian Alon Confino has argued, *Heimat* was constructed as a timeless, apolitical and “interchangeable representation of the local, the regional and the national community” (Confino, 1993: 50) that integrated lower and higher classes and enabled an ethnically and culturally diverse population to form a transcendent national community (Confino, 1993: 50–52). Combining 19th century scientism and anti-modernist notions of belonging, the aesthetics of *Heimat* mixed “history, nature and folklore, or ethnography” with an emotional local attachment (Confino, 1993: 55) that was often contrasted to or reflected in the construction of an imagined colonial “other” (Bechhaus-Gerst, 2017) and defined against a non-European Islam that, as Germany’s “shadow identity”, has either been idealized as essentially the same or demonized as essentially different (Kesinkılıç, 2019: 5). Emerging in the context of a globalizing colonialism, *Heimat*’s aesthetics are thus deeply entangled with 19th century colonial, racial ordering and othering by the educated bourgeoisie (Dejung, 2019: 259).

These visions of *Heimat* were not only part of literary production, but were also transmitted through the school curricula, *Heimatmuseums* and associations such as the *Heimatschutz*. German regions emerged as signifiers of both the essential distinctiveness of the local and the oneness of the German nation (Confino, 1993: 54). In this context the figure of the *Heimatforscher* emerged as a sort of aesthetic *Heimat* activist. The *Heimatforscher* researched local history, not as a detached and objective analyst, but as an “integral part of the narrative, the landscape and the history” (Confino, 1993: 55). Both an explorer and narrator of local nature and history, this figure contributed to the aesthetic envisioning of *Heimat* as a “poetic space” or “ethno-scape” that sees terrain, culture and people in a symbiotic relationship (Smith, 2009: 50).

Contemporary authors such as Jörg Bernig or Muhesin Sebastian Hennig are thus not the first to draw on the aesthetics of *Heimat*. In fact, Radebeul, the suburb that is so central to Bernig’s and Hennig’s literary and activist aesthetics, has long been one of the centres of this

Heimat construction and thus provides contemporary intellectuals with a rich symbolic repertoire to redefine a white identity in the 21st century. The neighbourhood's name has become synonymous with Karl May, a late 19th century popular writer. May made a fortune writing about German village life before authoring a large number of "adventure novels" set in the *Fremde*, adventurous foreign lands in the "Wild West" or the "Orient". In May's books, written in the context of Germany's rise as a European colonial power, the racialized "other" is imagined not as a threat, but as an exotic "other" that is essentially different from the "white man". May sold his books as his own authentic travel experiences where his alter egos Old Shatterhand and Kara Ben Nemsî fight side by side with Native Americans or travel the Ottoman Empire. The novels' protagonists are Germans who changed their names to mimic the North American and the Middle Eastern population "to epitomize a uniquely German ability to master colonial conditions" (Krobb, 2020: 112).

The claim that he lived all the "adventures" himself turned out to be a hoax. May only left Europe after his travel literature had appeared (Schneider, 1995). His literary worlds were thus "colonial fantasies" (Zantop, 1997) developed from his Radebeul Mansion, based on the context of 18th and 19th century western colonization and informed by reports written by colonizers (Berman, 1997: 41). The novels idealize a colonized ethno-scape as essentially different from a "white world" of progress (King, 2016: 25; Lutz, 2002) and thus doomed – a fact that May laments. He wanted his novels to be "memorials" to these perishing "races" (King, 2016: 29). Written in the context of a belated colonial nation, his work stands in a 19th century tradition of German identification with the colonized "other" as fellow underdogs against western imperial powers (Zantop, 1997: 193) – a tradition that was later picked up by the white converts of the al-Murabitun movement.⁴⁷ Published in the second decade after the foundation of the German empire, the highly successful novels were central in legitimizing the young state's imperialism and identity formation. *Heimat* was imagined via the fantasies of exotic lands (Berman, 1997: 49) that emerged as the homeland's strange but familiar replica (Krobb, 2020: 113).

As one of the Nazi's favourite authors (Schütz, 2015: 95), May later came to embody the ideal *Volksschriftsteller*, a people's author who represents "a chauvinist, 'healthy' German literature tradition" (Schneider, 1995: 52) that engaged positively with notions of the

⁴⁷ The idea of Germans as the eternal underdog reaches back even further. For example, Herder saw Germans as the "New Greeks" who were mastered by the "New Romans", i.e. French imperialism. The vision of "the Greek" as the ideal German was also picked up by Hölderlin, Schlegel and Nietzsche (Hien, 2015: 288–304).

environment and *Heimat* (Uekötter, 2006). He remains one of the most widely read and translated German-language authors. His novels and the innumerable movies, TV series and theatrical adaptations based on them have shaped the ways generations of Germans, both East and West, have imagined the colonized, non-western, non-white “other” and the colonizing self (Krobb, 2020: 113). At the same time, *Heimat* remained part of a post-fascist self-legitimation (Frei, 1996) and detached from the Nazi past and guilt (DeWaal, 2016; Gregor, 2008) yet keeping an explicitly ethnic dimension in place (Fisher, 2017). In West Germany, *Heimat* was interwoven with notions of German *Kulturnation*, a Christian-influenced western world and Europe (Dewaal, 2018: 247).

However, *Heimat* was also a central notion in the New Left where it served as a symbol, a carrier of local, authentic resistance against an alienation caused by “soulless” and imposed capitalism (Reichardt, 2014: 60–66). In fact, this trope is still echoed in the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Green movement, the far left (Gmeiner and Micus, 2018) and contemporary environmental protection. As the so-called Vilmer Theses of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation in 2007 show, (Emde, 2007; Piechocki et al., 2010), the aim here too is to de-taboo and democratize the concept of *Heimat* in order to place it in the “service of nature conservation”.⁴⁸ Parallels to the far right’s concept of *Heimat* and notions of alien colonization become apparent when it is diagnosed that “in view of globalisation and the anonymity of the industrial mass society [...], the longing for familiar landscape and surroundings” is growing. Following a Habermasian reading, *Heimat* is here constructed as a “critical category” in the age of globalization and as the “epitome of resistance” against the “colonisation of the lifeworld” by “the system” (Piechocki et al., 2010: 12). A critical examination of the racialized concepts of the self-inherent in *Heimat* and beyond Nazism is, however, absent.

Yet, both in the past and more recently, the far right in Germany and beyond has engaged in an aesthetic embracing of nature and the environment and politicizing taken for granted notions of *Heimat* and colonialism in Germany (Forchtner, 2019a, 2019b). Most recently, members of the Identarian Movement have collaborated with former GDR dissidents like Michael Beleites to develop *Die Kehre*, a new far-right “magazine for environmental protection”, which is published in Dresden (Figure 57; Göppfarth, 2020d). Its title and content

⁴⁸ This is also necessary because nature conservation cannot only be justified by ecological or economic factors but also requires a justification in ethical, aesthetic and cultural-historical elements. It was, therefore, essential to contribute to a “charge of meaning for nature” (Emde, 2007).

is, as the magazine says (Die Kehre, 2020), “inspired by” Heidegger’s *Die Technik und die Kehre* “in which he sees in Technology the emergence of the highest danger” for “our human being”. Supported by Thuringian AfD-leader Björn Höcke (Figure 58), the magazine aims to establish an understanding of environmental protection that overcomes a “narrow focus of ecology on climate change” and that includes the “teaching of the environment as a whole, including cultural landscapes, rituals and customs.”



KONZEPT

Die Kehre ist eine Zeitschrift, die die Ökologie aus ganzheitlicher Perspektive betrachtet. Das Periodikum leistet einen Beitrag dazu, der aktuell stattfindenden Verengung der Ökologie auf den »Klimaschutz« Einheit zu gebieten und den Blick dafür zu weiten, worin ihre ursprüngliche Bedeutung liegt: daß sie eine Lehre von der gesamten Umwelt ist, die Kulturlandschaften, Riten und Brauchtum, also auch Haus und Hof (Oikos) als ihren Namensgeber einschließt.

Figure 57: Website of Die Kehre – Zeitschrift für Naturschutz with the concept of the magazine (screenshot taken by the author).



Figure 58: Thuringian AfD-leader Björn Höcke posing with the magazine for a Facebook post, 28 May 2020 (screenshot taken by the author).

The far right has engaged with the environment in three ways: first, by underlining the local environment as an enjoyable aesthetic experience; second, by symbolically claiming through it a white national supremacy and the historical primacy of the ethnonational community over the territory; and finally, by seeing it as the source for material resources for the population and economy (Forchtner and Kølvrå, 2015).

In Radebeul the aesthetic and symbolic dimensions are not unique to the far right but underpin established cultural institutions. May’s colonial view and sympathy for the “noble savage” can be “learned” in the local Karl May Museum. Opened in the 1920s, the Museum tells visitors about May’s life in the so-called Villa Shatterhand, his former residence named after one of his novels’ protagonists. As its website says, the museum wants to preserve, maintain and teach “the memory of Karl May, his life and work, dedicated to spreading tolerance, intercultural understanding, respect and love of peace”. His novels are celebrated as “a significant contribution to interest in other cultures in German-speaking countries” – a heritage the museum wants to “multiply” by educating “children and young people” via an “emotional edutainment experience” and “scientifically backed teaching” (Karl May Museum, 2018). As in the concept of *Heimat* knowledge, knowledge, fiction and emotion are being

collapsed into binary visions of the “self” and “other”. In a separate building named Villa Bärenfett (mansion bear fat) and modelled on wooden colonial log cabins in North America, one can visit “ethnographic collections” (Karl May Museum, 2018) consisting of life-size figures of indigenous Americans and artefacts such as tools and weapons and listen to stories about chiefs, their tribes and geographical settlements that play a central role in May’s novels. Until recently the collection displayed scalps and human remains that were only removed after protest from indigenous Americans (Knight, 2016). They are yet to be repatriated.

As the museum claims to be based on scientific research, it gives Karl May’s colonial fiction and its construction of a native Indian or *Indianer* the aura of truth (King, 2016: 27). The use of the colonized “other” as a “foil for the positives and negatives of civilization, of progress” (King, 2016: 28) and German identity is not questioned in the museum, but perpetuated and legitimized. The museum experience is a bizarre amalgam of May’s luxurious mansion and Radebeul’s 19th century aesthetics of a civilized *Kulturnation*, the Elbe River’s natural beauty, May’s white supremacist colonial fantasies and contemporary claims of scientific research and emotional education. It brings together and perpetuates 19th tropes of *Heimat*, imperial nationalism, colonialism and the exotic “other”. It exemplifies how a benevolent colonial racism is still entangled in the ways a German civilization, *Kulturnation* and white identity, is constructed through notions of *Heimat* and against an exoticized “other”.

Radebeul thus has a long history as a local neighbourhood that provides the immediate setting for the literary and artistic imagination and prefiguration of the “us” and “the other”. Dresden’s far right can draw on Dresden’s entangled symbolic reservoirs to oppose a timeless vision of white *Heimat* against a colonization from without. Dresden’s far-right intellectuals express anxieties about the “dethroning” of a superior European self and demographic shifts (Gingrich and Banks, 2006: 9), East German submission to a West German capitalist “colonization” and a nascent “anti-East German racism” (Kalmar and Shoshan, 2020; Thiel, 2018) that the far right merges with its transnational trope of white ethnocide (Holmes, 2019: 75). The constructions of white and non-white identities and their aesthetic notions of *Heimat* and *Fremde* are essential to Karl May’s colonial fantasies and Radebeul’s urban space. Far-right intellectuals draw on Radebeul’s heritage to mobilize for the defence of a colonial aesthetic ordering that either idealizes or demonizes the non-white “other” and whose primacy is seen as under threat (Hage, 2016: 45).

2. From Figurative to Prefigurative Art – East German Art and the Far Right

As the continued popularity of Karl May in the GDR shows, the political of aesthetics of an anti-imperial *Heimat* continued to be central to the GDR's visions of nationhood and also underpinned its officially supported vision of a teleological realist art. Dresden's local art school and its aesthetics of *Heimat* were central in shaping East German art. Yet, after reunification the artistic style of figurative realism that was also central to Dresden's school of art was linked to totalitarian ideology and opposed to an essentially liberal western abstract art (see introduction). Echoing Marcuse's and Dutschke's anti-totalitarian critique of both the capitalist West and the Soviet Union (chapter two), some East German art historians have tried to correct this image by claiming that the GDR's artistic subculture challenged "the establishment – no matter if the enemy appeared as the 'norm' backed by financial capitalism or satraps of the SED's politburo". This resistance would have been shaped by a specifically "East German cultural self-will (*Eigensinn*) that is rooted in Saxony" to resist (Kaiser, 2017).

The lamenting of the marginalization of East German art has often gone hand in hand with adopting a (post)colonial discourse. East German artists have claimed that after the post-reunification years of "conceptual re-education" and "defiant colonial attitude" (Kaiser, 2017) they should finally be recognized as the expression of an postcolonial "alternative modernity" (Rehberg, 2013: 66) and "counter-worlds that developed out of loosely connected formal and informal projects, islands and places of refuge" (Kaiser, 2017). Using the totalitarianism argument themselves, East German artists saw themselves as victims of a new West German totalitarianism of abstract art, saying that the way East German art was exhibited in the early 1990s was, in effect, a new version of the Nazi exhibitions of "Entartete Kunst" (Rehberg, 2013: 67). These views were supported by some West German conservative intellectuals who hoped that East German art would lead to a rejuvenation of a West German postmodernism that they saw as sterile and aimless (Rehberg, 2013: 68).

At a more general level, the opposition of a locally rooted figurative to an abstract detached art is based on a fundamentally different epistemology of aesthetics that underpins holistic and nationalist notions of socialism on the one side and pluralist liberalism on the other. As art theorist Keti Chukhrov argued, while western liberalism places the aesthetic ideal in the abstract and universal, socialism sees it in the local and in everyday life: "In this case, there is no split between body and idea, since the ideal manifests itself via material externality and

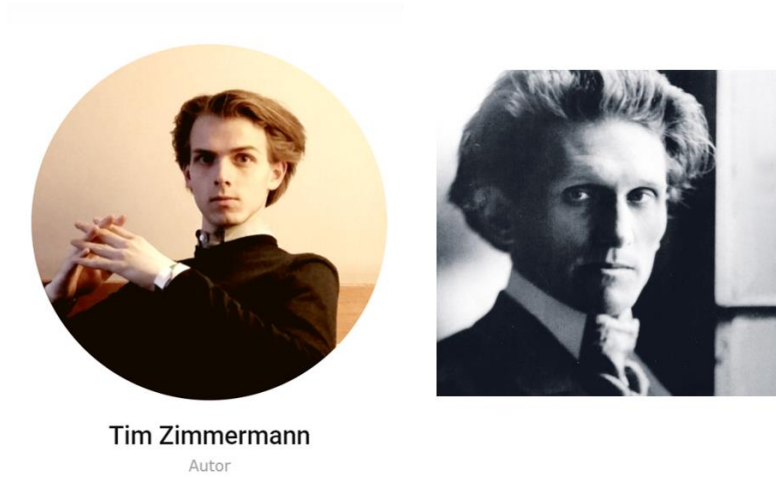
occupies the ‘body’ and its empirical existence. Such an understanding of the ideal does not position it as something sublime or as superseding reality” (Chukhrov, 2013). By doing so the dualism between mind and body and the Cartesian differentiation between subject and object is overcome – an epistemology that is not only underpinning socialist art but equally Heidegger’s critique of western rationalist metaphysics (chapter one). The far right has traditionally favoured an art that is immediately comprehensible and builds the basis for an anti-modern “aesthetic fundamentalism” and understanding of “beauty” that aims at the uniform shaping of all expression of life (Breuer, 1995).

Today, this heritage of a socialist realist aesthetics, its “rootedness” in local visions of *Heimat* and its self-construction in relation to a colonial “other” provides far-right intellectuals with ideal types to re-enact and prefigure a white popular identity and “anti-imperial resistance”. The feeling of East German devaluation and marginalization in art converges with a transnational far-right art activism that aims to fight the “diminishing of Western culture and tradition” (Gogarty, 2017). Here, the far right’s closeness to popular, locally rooted forms of art also underpin the Austrian populist far-right Freedom Party of Austria’s (FPÖ) cultural policy making (Fillitz, 2006) and the official support of specific artists representing a figurative style⁴⁹ and increasingly inform the *Alternative für Deutschland*’s (AfD) attacks on cultural institutions (Apperly, 2020). Seen as the continuation of an essentially European and German tradition of ethno-realism, socialist art is celebrated as a form of art that is rooted in local traditions and symbols.

Yet, it is not only through political institutions that the German far right attempts to gain broader influence; in the “alternative” far-right media sphere that has developed in recent years some cultural publications have also been established. One example is the magazine *Anbruch*, or Beginning, the magazine that Markus Schürer writes for and that has close links to Dagen and Tellkamp (chapter three and four). Founded by Tano Gerken, a former student of history and religion with links to Kubitschek’s *Sezession* and the Identitarian Movement, the publication is described as a “conservative cultural magazine” that aims to “open perspectives in the European cultural and intellectual landscape” by “looking not only at what has been, but also at the future” (Anbruch, 2020). Central repertoires for this cultural prefiguring are classic far-right references such as Ernst Jünger, Martin Heidegger and Stefan George, whose thoughts appear as central tenets of a nationally rooted culture. Some of the contributors to the magazine

⁴⁹ See for example, Odin Wiesinger, the FPÖ’s preferred artist (Weiss, 2019).

even style themselves following their idols such as Tim Zimmermann who tried to mimic the young Stefan George (Figure 61). This *mimesis* goes hand in hand with the depiction of an “oriental” space as a space of *Abenteuer*, “adventure” (Figure 59).



Tim Zimmermann
Autor

Figure 54: One of the authors of *Anbruch* on the magazine’s website (left, screenshot by the author) styled, dressed and posing like far right icon and poet Stefan George (right, photo by Rhein Neckar Zeitung, screenshot by the author).

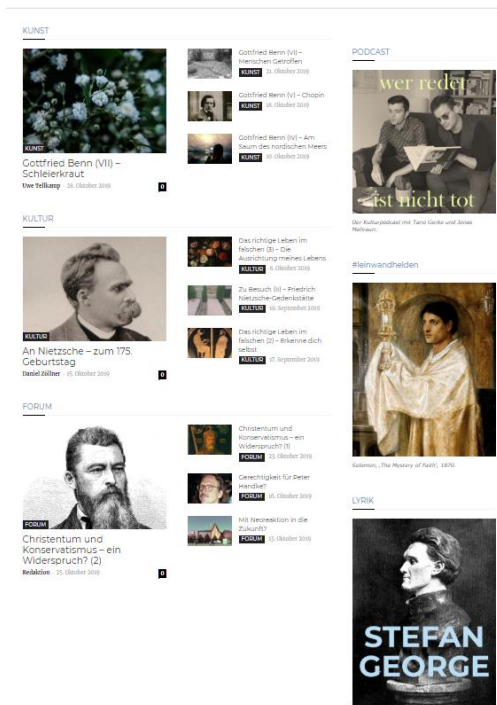


Figure 53: Screenshot of the website with articles on far right icons Friedrich Nietzsche, Gottfried Benn and Stefan George (screenshot taken by the author).

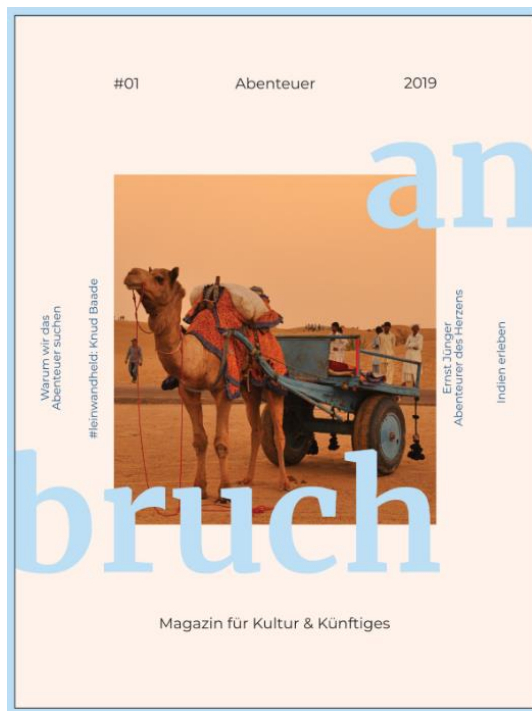


Figure 52: *Anbruch* cover of issue 1 2019 entitled Adventure (screenshot taken by the author).

Two contemporary artists given a central place in the magazine both follow a figurative style and have declared their sympathy with the far right: Neo Rauch (Figure 62), an internationally renowned artist and representative of the figurative Leipzig school of art, and Axel Krause (Figure 63), also a Leipzig-based painter who was ousted from a gallery for his open sympathies for the AfD (Lorch, 2019). Together with Tellkamp, both were presented in *Anbruch* with long interviews or articles as supporters of the right-wing cause (Anbruch, 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Rauch has called Uwe Tellkamp a re-incarnation (*Widergänger*) of Stauffenberg, putting PEGIDA, supporting intellectuals and the AfD in the tradition of an anti-totalitarian conservatism – a narrative that resonates with Dresden’s intellectual far right that sees itself as resisting a new leftist totalitarianism and calls Nazism a leftist dictatorship.⁵⁰



Figure 56: Painting *The Butcher’s Dream* by Axel Krause (photo taken by *Leipziger Internet Zeitung*, screenshot by the author).



Figure 55: Painting *“The Joint”* by Neo Rauch (photo by *BOMB magazine*, screenshot taken by the author).

In their *Anbruch* interviews, Rauch and his wife, the artist Rosa Loy Rauch, underline their connectedness to *Heimat* they see threatened by a “Talibanisation of our life” (Rickens and Schreiber, 2018). Referring to the GDR, Loy argues that “we know this very well”, adding that “*Mitteldeutschland* is our *Heimat*, our *Scholle*”, employing a term that Dagen also often uses.⁵¹ Rauch explains that he is deeply worried about refugees and migration. “I have to watch

⁵⁰ The German New Right claims to stand in the tradition of Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, an aristocrat with links to Stefan George’s poet’s circle, whose attempt to kill Hitler failed in 1944.

⁵¹ *Mitteldeutschland* is a term that refers to the region that includes Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg. The states are today in Germany’s east. Before World War II and the loss of German territories in the east this region formed the middle of Germany. Today the term is often used by the far right as a code for the revision of this loss of German territory.

not to let this enter too much into my paintings,” and adds “but this is probably the definition of the conservative form of *Dasein* (...), this corresponds to my inner structure: to prevent the new, the unfamiliar until it is not dangerous anymore. And the dangers that are surrounding us and that we will face in the future are, of course, obvious.” What motivates his work, he says, is:

the need of Heimat, of appropriating-the-world, of securing property. (...) Today we see a transition into catastrophe, an acceleration into a direction that I, as a citizen, feel to be extremely un-good and dangerous.

He says that he does not like situations of insecurity: “I want my house and court to be secure. If there is something moving in the bushes, I go outside with a bat!” Rauch shows here how he sees himself as an intimate and integral part of *Heimat*, anthropomorphing it through the metaphor of an organic body, family or house (Confino, 1993: 55; Hart, 2010; Musolff, 2010; Wodak, 2015: 70–96).

In Dresden, the notion of a figurative, locally rooted art representing a *Heimat* under threat also underpinned the so-called *Bilderstreit*. In late 2017, this *Bilderstreit* erupted as a polarizing debate in the city. The debate turned around the question as to whether Saxony’s state art collections, today curated by West Germans, would systematically degrade GDR art and artists by not showing their work. At the centre of the debate was the renowned Albertinum, Dresden’s Museum for modern art and its director Hilke Wagner from West Germany. Many years of perceived devaluation of East German art and East German identity came to the fore in the debate. It lay bare a yearning for forms of art that represented the local identity. Since 2006, private galleries have followed this demand by organizing highly successful exhibitions that include iconic figurative GDR paintings (Neustadt-Geflüster, 2018; Wahl, 2006). Art depicting visualizations of local life, heritage and nature, so it is claimed, is taken seriously by West German elites – a logic that fitted the far right’s antagonism of rooted versus uprooted, local versus globalist understandings of art. As a response to the strong interest in East German art and the criticism levelled at it, the Albertinum opened an exhibition entitled “East German Painting and Sculptures – 1990” (Albertinum, 2018).⁵²

The mostly figurative and realist paintings show a cultural imagination that is familiar to Dresden’s population (Figures 63–67). Motifs of an idealized everyday life in the GDR are

⁵² Since, my fieldwork the museum director has been trying to alleviate the polarized debate by inviting right-wing critics to debate in the museum (Apperly, 2020).

combined with the depiction of local urban and natural spaces. Workers are central motifs. They are used to portray the ideal of an educated working class that brings together notions of high and popular culture. This is done, for example, by emanating the realist style of the famous 16th century German painter Albrecht Dürer to depict workers (Figure 64) or by showing workers who engage in intellectual activities such as playing chess (Figure 66). Many paintings depict known local buildings and landscapes (Figure 65 and 68). As one display note explains, this “emphasis on the depiction of the city and its surroundings” was typical for the so-called Dresden School of art. In GDR times, many of the paintings were displayed in public buildings so they “could be seen by as many working people in the GDR as possible” as one explanatory note reads. The displayed art thus shaped all who grew up in the GDR and, as the success of this and preceding private exhibitions shows, has become a popular symbol of a nostalgic look at a vanished society.

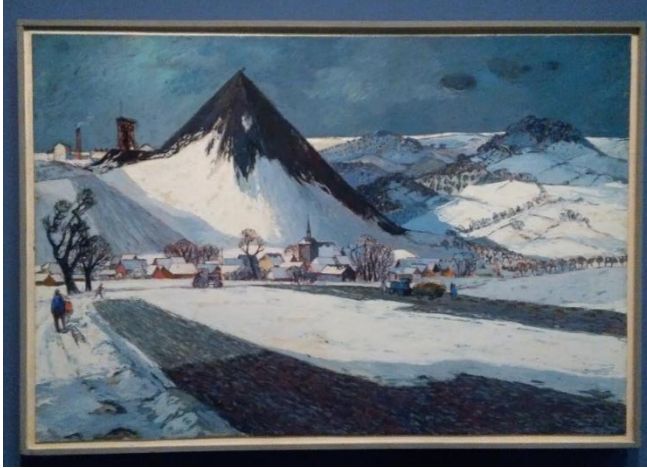


Figure 58: Landscape painting in the exhibition (photos of Figures 63-67 taken by the author at the exhibition in the Albertinum).



Figure 60: On the beach, one of the most iconic paintings in the GDR by Walter Womacka, 1962.



Figure 57: Group picture (carpenter brigade Schirmer) by GDR-painter Werner Tübke, 1972, depicting a group of carpenters in the style that was used to depict nobles in the renaissance, thus symbolizing the elevation of simple workers into noble professionals and the ideal of the socialist society.



Figure 59: The chess-player by Willi Neubert, 1964 depicting the ideal of an educated socialist worker.



Figure 61: Painting of the destroyed Dresden.

3. Hiking and “Sein” – The Radebeul Circle and the Aesthetic Experience of the Self

In Dresden’s far-right intellectual circles it is the Radebeul circle around Muhesin Sebastian Hennig where the aesthetics of *Heimat* and their experience and representation through art are most explicit. For Hennig, an admirer of Karl May, Radebeul is once again the setting for the intellectual aesthetic production of “us” and the “other”. Here, an idealization and demonization of a non-European “other” go together with the search for the essentialized aesthetics of the self.

Rootedness in the local is important for Hennig. He complains about the selection of leaders of local art institutions and the marketization of culture: “The *market* is actually more important than coming from here or at least really knowing the local art collections. The leaders of local art institutions are museum *managers* and part of a cultural *business*.” He also views the local cultural establishment with scepticism, claiming that they are not part of a truly German intellectual tradition: “I find it horrible that [established artists] do not recognize the current situation. After the war, Dresden’s intellectual were critical and followed an intellectual ideal that formed in imperial times,” he says, referring to the marginalised bourgeoisie in Dresden during Socialism. “But today there is a gigantic decay and egocentrism in these circles” focused on career rather than artistic quality and ignoring local cultural traditions: “This is what shocks me, this historylessness. (...) I have no problem with living in a poor, difficult or unhappy world. But to live in a world without meaning, this is my main problem. This is what disgusts me,” he says.

Hennig’s vision of a locally rooted art that unites local heritage, popular sentiments and natural beauty with a mythology of a 19th century white *Kulturnation* is shared by other members of Dresden’s intellectual circles. In one of my conversations with Markus Schürer (chapter three) he claims that “Dresden has always had a specific local cultural habitus that was exemplary for an East German understanding of art as a whole.” For Schürer, this national habitus is culturally expressed in Dresden’s central role as the capital of GDR art. He points me directly to Hennig as an expert on this question and to a book Hennig has written on the local artist Ernst Lewinger who was largely active in the GDR.

In this monography, Hennig describes very beautifully this specific Dresden milieu of locally rooted artists. Lewinger was a protagonist of that. He was a Querdenker, never belonged to Dresden’s cultural bourgeoisie (...), but at the same time he embodied it, as an ideal type. This

combination of an educated bourgeois habitus with a simple background, this artistic dimension is what Hennig shows in an exemplary way with Lewinger.

In the book (Hennig, 2016), Hennig clearly outlines his vision of valuable art. Mirroring Dagen's notion of *Kulturbetrieb* (chapter one), he says that the *Kunstbetrieb*, the art business of the contemporary art scene, is undermining a meaningful art. The term *Betrieb* refers to a machine but can also be used for "business". Hennig uses it to delegitimize Germany's modern art culture as machine-like and commercialized. For Hennig, both elements are characteristic not only of the contemporary conception of art that he despises, but also shaping contemporary research on art. As he writes, the products of the "newer research in art history" have totally ignored local artists like Lewinger who was left in the "blind angle of a frantic *Betrieb*" that has overtaken local art (Hennig, 2016: 9). For Hennig, Lewinger is an example of a local artist representing the identity of a *Mitteldeutschland*. He was marginalized both in the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) – two systems that Hennig sees as equally dictatorial. Today, "Instead of 'Socialism wins'" a

new but equally apodictic slogan is "Anything goes". (...) Who is not heard in this system, does not exist. (...) This dictatorship of the contemporary, the loquaciousness and the noise has steadily exacerbated in recent decades. (Hennig, 2016: 15)

This "noise" has, for Hennig, become more audible than what should really be heard: the aesthetics of the local.

Local artists like Lewinger serve as examples prefiguring the far right's ideal of a local artist who creates meaningful art that resists a meaningless and homogenizing globalization. In his books, Hennig has tried to apply an aesthetic reading to what he sees as a marginalized white local and rural population by idealizing PEGIDA as a popular uprising against this meaningless present (Hennig, 2015a).⁵³ Hennig sees PEGIDA as a spiritual force that, like Muslim resistance fighters, struggles against the totalizing forces of a globalizing capitalism. The essence of Germanness as a mythical homeland surrounding Dresden is more than that of a nation state but of a specifically German cultural aesthetic that he sees as fundamentally opposed to a western rationalism that he observes at work in fundamentalist Islamism. He sees both the Quran and German identity as fundamentally aesthetic and spiritual.

⁵³ Michael Beleites, the former GDR dissident and now contributor to the far-right eco-magazine *Die Kehre* has written the introduction to the book.

Central in aesthetic resistance is, for Hennig, the (re)appropriation of knowledge and sentimental attachment to local culture and nature. He sees in PEGIDA and the AfD the means of turning this cultural resistance into a political one. During our breakfast in Radebeul, Hennig points to the fact that Saxony's current AfD leader Jörg Urban was the director of the so-called *Grüne Liga*, Green League (Lang, 2018; Müller, 2014), "a union of local environmental associations, smaller associations who attempted to go against the leftist environmentalism of BND [*Bundesnachrichtendienst*, Federal Intelligence Service] and NABU [Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union]." Hennig himself has joined the *Landesverein Sächsischer Heimatschutz*, an association sponsored by the state of Saxony that aims to protect the local natural and cultural heritage. "They own about 200,000 hectares of soil, a significant number of protected spheres. Owning the environment is the best way of protecting it. They were founded in 1908 and not deleted legally as an association during GDR times. They could just be reactivated after reunification." Being part of this is very meaningful for Hennig, especially today: "I have always been a passionate hiker, specifically in times of today's cultural struggles (...) so now I have formed this hiking group." He invites me to join them on the next hiking tour of the "Hiking Fellows of the Saxonian Union for Homeland Protection",⁵⁴ as he calls the group, clearly to establish a link to the *Wandervogel* and *Heimatschutz* movements but also the new Left (introduction, chapter two).

Through his activism he wants, like the figure of the *Heimatforscher*, to reawaken a national historical consciousness that is experienced and appropriated by hiking. This mission, as he says, is itself a thread that connects the AfD to the 1968 Movement.

For me there is a clear continuity running from the 68 Movement to the Greens and the AfD. (...) I believe that the 68 Movement never really had a big problem with the national revolutionary aspect of the Nazis (...). And you can see this with the personal continuities, not only with the Greens; there are many continuities from the reform movement via the völkische movement to the 68ers. Take the adoptive mother of Ulrike Meinhoff. She was the last PhD student of Johann von Leers (...). He was not only an early national-revolutionary but also one of the boldest and wittiest race-anti-Semites that emerged during the NS [National Socialist] time. He was also active in the research of folklore and peasantry [Volkstums- und Bauernforschung] (...). He later went to Cairo and converted to Islam.

⁵⁴ German name: Wanderburschen des Sächsischen Heimatschutzes

Hennig draws a connection between Nazi social-revolutionary ideas, West Germany's New Left and Islam, seeing all as different forms of resistance to an imperial western rationalism. To express this, Hennig adores playing with allusions to Nazism by using such terminology as *Volksgemeinschaft*, the people's community. To show me that the Nazis had a deep appreciation for the beauty of nature, and, as I assume, to test my reaction, Hennig sends me an extract of a book written by a member of the *Waffen-SS* on the "Ornithology of Auschwitz" (Figure 69).

Beobachtungen über die Vogelwelt von Auschwitz (Ost-Oberschlesien).

Von Günther Niethammer (z. Z. bei der *Waffen-SS*).

Mit 4 Figuren auf Tafel XI und XII.

In der Zeit von Oktober 1940 bis August 1941 hatte ich Gelegenheit, die Umgebung von Auschwitz kennen zu lernen und dabei besonders auf die Vogelwelt zu achten. In den Herbst- und Wintermonaten und auch im zeitigen Frühjahr ließ mir mein Dienst bei der *Waffen-SS* nur wenig Zeit zu ornithologischen Beobachtungen. Dagegen konnte ich mich ihnen in der letzten Maiwoche, im Juni und Juli eingehend widmen, wodurch es mir möglich wurde, ein ziemlich vollständiges Bild von den ornithologischen Verhältnissen dieses interessanten und noch ganz unbearbeiteten neuen deutschen Ostgebietes, insbesondere von den hier brütenden Vogelarten, zu gewinnen. Ich verdanke dies dem großen Verständnis, welches der Kommandant des K. L. Auschwitz, *SS*-Sturmbannführer Höß, und sein Adjutant, *SS*-Obersturmführer Fromm hagen, der wissenschaftlichen Erschließung dieses Gebietes und den Forschungsaufgaben, die der deutsche Osten an die Wissenschaft stellt, stets entgegenbrachten.

Die Stadt Auschwitz liegt am Flusse Sola kurz oberhalb der Einmündung der Sola in die Obere Weichsel. Bis zum Weltkrieg gehörte Auschwitz zu Österreich (Galizien), die Grenze mit dem Deutschen Reich verlief längs der Weichsel. Das Gebiet, von dem hier die Rede ist, schließt direkt im Osten an das alte deutsche Reichsgebiet an; es wird im Westen von der Weichsel, im Osten von der Sola begrenzt. Das Feld meiner ornithologischen Tätigkeit liegt in diesem „Zwischenstromgebiet“. Es reicht von der Mündung der Sola in die Weichsel nach Süden Sola aufwärts bis über das Dorf Raisko hinaus und über die Ortschaften Babitz, Birkenau, Plawy und Harmense bis zu einem Wald nördlich Brzeszcze. Dieses etwa 5500 ha große Gebiet, dessen höchste Erhebung 245 m und niedrigste 230 m NN beträgt, setzt sich nach Süden in das hügelige Vorland der West-Beskiden fort, das ich nicht berücksichtigt habe. Auch das im Norden und Osten an die Stadt Auschwitz anschließende Land habe ich, wie überhaupt alles außerhalb des Weichsel—Sola-Winkels liegende Gelände, nicht mit in meine Untersuchungen einbezogen, da ich der intensiven Erfor-

Figure 62: Screenshot of the PDF file that I received from Hennig.

Yet, the linking of nature to tradition is far from being a particularity of Dresden's far right. It also is a channel of politicization that seamlessly connects to Dresden's citizens. Hiking is a popular activity and on weekends one sees large groups of people of all ages getting on local trains to explore the surroundings. Hennig organizes his hikes every second Sunday. I join four hiking tours. Hennig knows the region very well. He has written a book about the little villages that we pass on the way, many of which seem deserted yet embedded in an often stunning landscaped (Hennig, 2017). In the book, he roams these "forgotten places" and rediscovers them through historical anecdotes and their links to world history.

On his hikes Hennig always carries a notebook with him with a sticker saying *Volksgemeinschaft*. He dresses up in hiking clothes like those of the pre-war hiking movements (chapter two). For Hennig the hiking is more than just a walk through nice landscape. It is travel in time that connects the participants to a deeper notion of Germanness. As we take the train together to reach Dresden's natural surroundings for the hiking tour, we see participants of the so-called Science March at the train station. Hennig jokes, referring to Heidegger, "They do the Science March, we do the *Seins*-March", the march of being. While they stand up for a rational world, Hennig's joke says, the hiking group is to discover the mythical sources of a German *Dasein*.

The other participants are mostly male, young students, professionals or retirees like Wolle and Kalle, two men in their early 70s who regularly participate in PEGIDA demonstrations. Wolle is a retired locksmith who worked at the Semper Opera house. He is a member of the centre-right Christian Democrat Union (CDU) and strongly supports their coalition with the AfD. Kalle is a former teacher. Both can be described as hobby *Heimatforscher*, and have detailed knowledge about the landscape, the old castles, bridges, parks, memorials and deserted houses that we pass on our way. Many of these heritage sites were built in the late 19th century romantic period to shape a *Kulturlandschaft*, a cultural landscape merging human-made artefacts with nature.

In addition to Hennig, Kalle and Wolle are the other main guides sharing their knowledge with the younger participants. The group regularly stops in front of memorials or significant buildings, some of which have recently been renovated: "Long time they were ruinous and forgotten and now they are resurrected," Kalle says. Both Kalle and Wolle tell me that they have been passionate about exploring Dresden's surroundings all their lives. As Wolle tells me, "I have always kept my distance from the political systems but remained in touch with nature." To avoid the system, he "cycled to work very early in the morning. So, I could see the sunrise over the Elbe River. This gave me strength." As Hennig hears this he repeats what Wolle said in a more poetic language: "Yes, to seize this holy moment of being alone in the face of nature! This fills oneself with energy for the hard-working day and all the shit that awaits oneself in society." Hennig loves to tell stories of meeting peasants and inhabitants of the villages and romanticizes "the poetics of the simple man".

Another participant is Baal Müller, a known fascist publisher. He joins one of my conversations with Richard⁵⁵, another regular participant and Hennig's close friend. When Marcus, another hiker, praises Höcke's assessment of German memory culture as undermining a natural national identity, Müller says:

Höcke is right. Bad things happened in the past but one day this whole remembering is enough. One should be able to simply honour one's fallen soldiers just like all normal countries do. I travel to Bulgaria once a year to remember the fallen soldiers. My father used to be part of the SS.

He invites Richard to come with him the next time he goes. "It is a truly uplifting experience."

For the participants of the hiking group it is self-evident that a spiritual relationship and the aesthetics of *Heimat* should underpin politics. During one of the hikes Hennig tells us about the book he is writing together with Höcke. With him as an ally he hopes to return the national spirit embodied by PEGIDA back into politics. Bringing together workers, teachers, students and artists, CDU members and fascists, Hennig tries to form his idealized version of *Volksgemeinschaft*, a people's community. In the hiking experience politics merge with the knowledge about and an emotional attachment to *Heimat*.

This national essence the hikers want to experience in their exploration of *Heimat* is seen as under threat by the colonization of barbarian non-white immigrants and technology. This becomes most apparent as we walk through the park of an old castle that has been restored. Memorials in the style of classicism are scattered through the park (Figures 70–74). Yet, the romantic aesthetics are disturbed when, instead of fellow hikers, a group of young players of the online game *Pokémon Go* swarm into the park (Figure 75). They neglect the surroundings and stare into their mobile phones. Hennig's hikers are shocked. "They destroy the magic of this place. They are not even experiencing this wonderful space anymore." The logics of a globalized capitalism and technology have reached one of their most sacred places.

Yet, it is not only the spread global technology that lets *Heimat* appear as precarious; as one of the participants says, his biggest fear for the future is "that I will meet a black man when I am hiking here". *Heimat* is thus not only a space free from the pressures and global circuits of capitalism. It is a safe white ethno-scape that is protected from the anxieties of changing demographics and the undermining of a white, Eurocentric culture. *Heimat* emerges

⁵⁵ Name changed to protect his anonymity.



Figure 66: Hennig inspecting one of the many memorials for the fallen soldiers of World Wars I and II embedded in the landscapes of the Sächsische Schweiz.



Figure 65: Hennig, Kalle and Wolle (from left to right) admiring the bust of King Anton of Saxony erected in the Romantic period in the 19th century close to the Dittersbach Castle.



Figure 64: The group passes an anthroposophic institute during one of our hikes.



Figure 63: Hennig looking over the landscape of the Sächsische Schweiz.

as a precarious utopia that is mythically interweaving space, ethnicity and local culture against a meaningless modernity and a cultureless non-white “other”.

It is with the above-mentioned Richard that I have a longer conversation about art during one of our hikes. Richard is in his early 30s and works for one of Dresden’s municipal theatres as an accountant. He frequently participates in PEGIDA and Hennig’s hikes. He got to know Hennig at a local *Stammtisch* organized by the *Blaue Narzisse*, a well-known far-right

journal that started out as a student magazine. Today it is a central publication among young far-right followers and is supported by Kubitschek's *Ein Prozent*.



Figure 67: A group of Pokémon Go players in the park, ignoring the castle and the natural surroundings and staring at their mobile phone screens (photo taken by the author).



Figure 68: Kalle (on the far right), our tour guide, explaining the history of a bridge during one of our hikes. Hennig (on the far left) listens together with the other participants.

Richard joined far-right circles as early as 2010. He describes his move into the scene as one that happened through music, a common way to enter the far right (Miller-Idriss, 2017; Spracklen, 2013). He later started reading alternative media online.

I used to consume the mainstream media but then I moved into my own flat and I didn't have a TV anymore. I started reading many things online and then in 2010 or 2011 I entered this far-right scene, which then became a main source of information. I started reading Junge Freiheit, Blaue Narzisse, Sezession and other publications of this sort. But I initially got into it through music. I used to be part of the black and gothic scene. And there is this music genre Neo Folk. There are quite a lot of bands that are proud of their Heimat and who say that it is only "the self" that counts and not "the other". Some have runes in their logos. And some sing about personalities of the fascist Italy. (...) Through this music scene I discovered new media and so it all started.

Richard started going to PEGIDA shortly after the management of his theatre sent out emails encouraging employees to join counterdemonstrations. Due to these pressures he hesitated to join PEGIDA. "But Sebastian took me with him a couple of times, the first time in December 2014. Also, to see Björn Höcke's speech. I really liked it", he tells. At PEGIDA he found answers to his uneasiness about his employer.

I remember one playwright who said that in the future there will be a multicultural society and that there is nothing to avoid that. That we will have to accept it and that ever more people will

want to come to us. I felt as if this was presented as without alternative, (...) that everybody who says or does something against it is bad or evil. (...) But then I see countries like, for example, Japan⁵⁶ that have similar problems with demography and they still say they don't want immigration. (...) So there are other possibilities. That's all PEGIDA wants to say.

Then, our conversation turns to the debate about the exhibition of GDR art in the Albertinum. Richard is attached to some of the paintings that are shown as they were part of his parents' life, as he says. "What was important in the GDR was culture and museums," he claims, arguing that he knows that from his parents. "Even if people weren't so keen on going to a museum themselves, they participated at least in some kind of activity such as art, drawing, painting, or they played an instrument." He insists that this was the case for all, no matter if you were a lawyer or from the working class: "Work and culture were thought together." His words make me think about Bernig, Tellkamp and Maron and their primary training as workers before becoming writers; and the painting of a worker playing chess exhibited in the Albertinum. Widespread among my informants is the idea that the GDR, despite its socialism, followed the German ideal of a *Kulturnation* that is open for all. Like Richard, they idealize the GDR as a *Kulturnation* that aesthetically forms different classes and social backgrounds into a *Volksgemeinschaft*, a community of the people.

I ask him what he thinks about the *Albertinum's* new exhibition. "I really like it," he says.

It made me realize one thing. Next to two or three paintings there was written that they were life-affirming. This is something I only know from the Third Reich. Culture there was more positive towards everything that is German. But working at a youth theatre I have the impression that today children are being told: "Look, the world is really only stupid, unjust, there are only problems." This life-affirmative art is somehow not there anymore. Instead there is constant criticizing. (...) But a real order, a calmness accepting things as good as they are, this just doesn't exist anymore.

Referring to the paintings in the exhibition he says that the exhibition deeply touched him, unlike most of contemporary abstract art:

⁵⁶ While countries like France, the UK and Sweden are often treated as dystopian places (Thorleifsson, 2018) where immigration and multiculturalism have brought chaos and insecurity, Israel and Japan are often described as utopian ideal types as they represent examples of ethno-states kept alive with a restrictive immigration policy or/and because they are marked, as the former director of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and now far right activist Hans Georg Maaßen put it, "by a readiness to hold on to partially archaic rituals and traditions" (Musharbash, 2020).

I could relate to most of the paintings unlike contemporary art. (...) Because I always only take as a starting point what I see on a painting. Some stripes or circles, this is something I cannot get along with.

In Richard's analysis, the vision behind the far right's notion of art becomes clear. Art is not supposed to be critical, undermining or questioning social inequalities, injustices, hierarchies or conventions; rather, art should celebrate, reaffirm and re-establish a common sense by figuratively depicting it and making visible a local white identity.

4. With White Vests against a Black Horse – Local Art Activism and the Aesthetic Experience of the “Other”

Yet, aesthetics do not only play an important role in the affirmative experience and construction of the “self”, as for Dresden's far-right intellectuals the aesthetic experience of the “other” is equally important. Stefan Klinkigt, a close friend of Dagen and writer for Lengsfeld's blog *Achse des Guten* (Achse des Guten, 2020), was born in a small village close to Dresden. He was an artist in the GDR but had to give up his work as he was facing repression by the state. Shortly before reunification he was expelled from the GDR and moved to West Germany. I first meet Klinkigt at Heimann's Pirna salon and get to know him better during one of my visits at Dagen's bookshop. Like Hennig, he loves nature and regularly hikes in the *Elbstandsteingebirge*. His Facebook page is filled with photos of Dresden's natural surroundings taken during his hikes; they are posted next to the caricatures he is drawing. During my fieldwork these caricatures are widely shared in Dresden's intellectual circles. They hang behind Dagen's till and can be purchased in the bookshop.

Klinkigt tells me that he was already drawing caricatures of the GDR elites back in the 1980s. Today his caricatures portray Germany's current political system and Muslims as dystopian and threatening figures, as primitive barbarian and bearded men that lead to the “extermination” of European culture (Figure 81). This is symbolized by their destroying of a classicist bust like the ones that I have seen during my hikes with Hennig (compare Figures 72, 80 and 87). In the background one can see piles of skulls. The destruction of culture equals the end of human life. German politicians are depicted as a homogenous class of crazy, soulless and evil figures of power (Figures 76–79). Klinkigt also draws caricatures of representatives

of the far right, such as Henryk M Broder. Yet their depictions appear friendly and benign (Figure 78).



Figure 69: Angela Merkel (Figures 76–80 screenshots taken by the author).



Figure 70: Leading politicians of the German Green Party.



Figure 72: The then German federal president Joachim Gauck, the director of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany Aiman Mazyek, Chancellor Angela Merkel and then leader of the Social Democrats Sigmar Gabriel (from left to right).



Figure 71: Henryk M Broder.



Figure 73: A widely shared caricature of Muslims.



Figure 74: “Extermination” symbolized by the destruction of a bust by radical Islamists, similar to the one we visited with Hennig on one of our hikes (compare figures 72 and 38).

Klinkigt's imagination of the "main enemies" is widely shared among all three circles. Even Hennig, although a Muslim himself, sees Islamists as driven by a modernist ideology that he deeply opposes. As mentioned before, the circles in Loschwitz, Pirna and Radebeul do not exist as isolated groups. The shared aesthetic vision of what constitutes "the self" and the "other" forms the basis for collaborations between them. Yet, each circle has a slightly different audience and role to play. Dagen's bookshop, with its links to Dresden's educated bourgeoisie, its cultural establishment and German far-right networks, forms the central place to organize activities, to reach out to a broader audience and to bring known far-right figures to the city. Heimann's private circle is centred on the local life in Pirna, bringing together an audience of local business leaders in touch with far-right thinkers. Finally, Hennig's circle is the most radical one and brings together fascists, PEGIDA demonstrators, young students and professionals. Members of all circles are regular guests at each other's events; common projects are often organized in close strategic consultation with Götz Kubitschek.

One of these projects takes place in early April 2018.⁵⁷ During one of my visits at the bookshop, Dagen tells me about a "trojan horse project" – "art activism", as Dagen calls it:

I have long been preparing it with Heimann. All the relevant media are informed, Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten, Junge Freiheit, Compact, Tichy's Einblick. It was not easy to coordinate. So many different people from different backgrounds that I never imagined collaborating have come together. When you share a goal, this is possible. We all fight the same struggle at different levels. There are of course some crazy people whom I had to calm. They wanted to talk about conspiracy theories, the UN and all the "great connections". You cannot do that if you want to be taken seriously. We had one last meeting last night. Everybody had to read out their speeches and we made sure that they delete words that could be misunderstood. We must be careful not to lose the support of important people. We have worked with the municipality and did all the paperwork. Most are on our side anyways, especially the police.

She tells me that they themselves had to secure the place where they were building the "artwork", as if to underline the idealism and bonds this project has built over the past months. "We all had shifts to patrol the space. And we designed our own white vests [laughs]. *White vests*, isn't that a nice image?" she says, underlining both the symbol of the white vest as a sign of innocence and a white resistance.

⁵⁷ 13.4.2018 [[is there a reason not to put the date in the text?]].

I think the project will have a big impact, especially since it is not political. The plan is to turn it into a moving object and place it in central squares in Meissen, Pirna, Cottbus and maybe Berlin. But I don't think this is possible. Berlin is lost. But Halle for sure, there the Identitarians⁵⁸ have their headquarters.

She is proud that one of the speakers is Hans-Joachim Maaz, a prominent psychologist and expert of East German identity who is also widely quoted in the Anglo-Saxon literature. “He will speak just like Rene Jahn, a janitor and one of the initiators of PEGIDA. I am curious about the reaction! These petit bourgeois leftists will probably ask ‘is this really allowed? Who allowed this?’ But we need to have *Querdenker* and freedom of art!” she exclaims. This is also why they chose the motto “art is free”.

While Dagen uses her professional experience as a well-established cultural entrepreneur to deal with the municipality Heimann takes care of the finances. Hennig will write articles for the far-right media. Dagen’s direct links to local and far-right media make sure that the project will get at least some attention. She is also aware of the political power of pre-political aesthetics and art through which she hopes to reach a maximum of citizens from the educated bourgeoisie to PEGIDA.

The Trojan Horse chimes with the Sparta symbolism that has a central place in the far right’s activist iconography and aesthetics of rebellion (Zúquete, 2018: 7–104). In Dresden it is a cultural reference that resonates with cultural elites and popular protests anxious about a threatened, precarious *Heimat*. To reach a maximum impact, the horse is placed on the *Neumarkt*, one of Dresden’s central squares in front of the *Kulturpalast* where only a month before the debate between Grünbein and Tellkamp had taken place.

On the day of the event I decide to arrive a bit earlier to observe the setting up from the public library in the *Kulturpalast*. At first, I only see a small white tent with a sign reading “Art is Free” (Figure 82). In front of it stands a tiny model of a black horse (Figure 83 and 84). As I observe the scene a woman who turns out to be the director of the library starts feeling concerned. “What is this?” she asks. A young man standing close by says, “they want to have an activist project here.” It seems instantly clear to the director who “they” are. She does not ask who the man means. The central actors and figures in Dresden’s cultural milieu have got used to the polarization. It is clear who “the enemy” is. “We need to do something,” says the

⁵⁸ Dagen is here referring to the Identitarian Movement’s house project that existed in Halle an der Saale between 2017 and 2019 (Bennhold, 2018).

young man who appears to be a student. The woman agrees: “This is unacceptable! We have banners to distance ourselves against such things as an institution.” After years of PEGIDA such counter reactions have become ritualized.

While the library seeks solutions to show their opposition to the activists, the small horse model has been replaced by a large black wooden horse (Figure 85). Disco music from the 1970s and 1980s roars out of the speakers. Little posters are being placed around the horse. At first, people stop to see what is happening, take selfies and one can see a TV team interviewing some of them. So far there is no sign of a counterdemonstration. Dagen, it seems, has taken her opponents by surprise. She arrives about an hour before the official start of the event. Shortly before, employees of the *Kulturpalast* have placed large banners into the windows saying, “Dignity is unconditional”, and “Open hearts”, “Open doors”, “Open eyes.” (Figure 88).



Figure 76: The beginning of the installation on the Neumarkt seen from the library in the Cultural Palace (Figures 81–87 photographed by the author).



Figure 77: Pavillion with “Art is Free” printed on it in front of the Cultural Palace.



Figure 75: Model of the trojan horse that in the course of the afternoon was replaced by a large construction.



Figure 78: The big Trojan Horse figure shortly after its arrival on the Neumarkt.

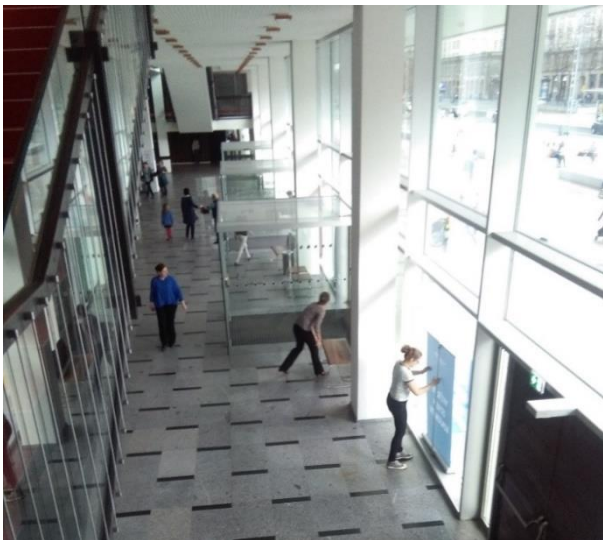


Figure 80: Employees of the library and the Cultural Palace putting up banners.



Figure 79: View from the lobby of the Cultural Palace with the banners about the Trojan Horse.



Figure 81: Photo of the banners put up by the employees: "Open your hearts", "Open your doors", "Open your eyes".



Figure 82: Close-up photo of the Trojan Horse with the inscription "Developed and produced by Dresden citizens, 2018."

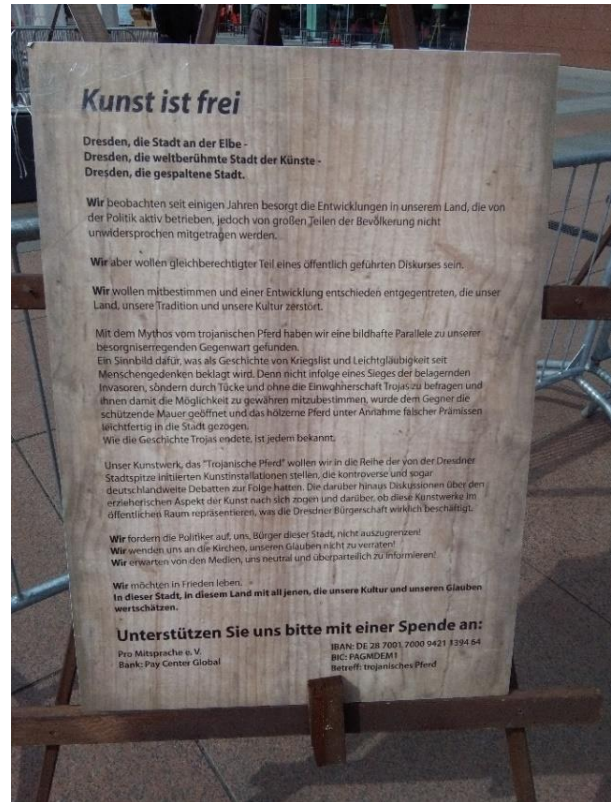


Figure 83: "Art is free." Posters that explain the project to those passing by.



Figure 84: A crowd gathering in front of a small stage in the pouring rain to listen to the speakers.

Right when the event begins rain starts pouring down. Nevertheless, a large group of about 200 people gathers under the roof covering the entrance of the *Kulturpalast* (Figure 91). I notice Hennig running around and taking pictures. As Dagen had told me, he will write an article reviewing the event for the far-right newspaper *Junge Freiheit* (Hennig, 2018). The disco music has given way to Mozart and I decide to go downstairs. As I exit the *Kulturpalast*, security personnel tell people not to wait in front of the entrances. “When *they* don’t like what people are doing, they have to leave,” one man complains, this time about the far right’s “enemy”, the corrupted local institutions. An old lady standing next to him says “But when foreigners are loitering here nobody says everything.”

As I pass through the crowds, I see Wolle and Kalle, Hennig’s hiking companions, before I run into Bormann who is standing next to Böckelmann and Rene Jahn, smoking a cigarette. As the event begins, Mozart is replaced by a heroic music that sounds as if it is a Hollywood movie score. As the music fades, a strong male voice starts to tell the legend of the Trojan Horse. In the background one hears war and fighting. It is clearly a professional production. The voice finishes with the threatening undertone: “Let us hope that this legend will remain a legend.” While there is no clear reference to immigration the message is clear. The so-called refugee crisis is portrayed as a new Trojan Horse, an invasion of barbarians destroying Germany from within.

Those who do not yet understand this message are helped by the posters that, headed by the slogan “art is free”, are put up around the horse (Figure 90). Here, Dresden is celebrated as “the world-famous city of arts” that is torn apart by a polarization that has marginalized and silenced one part of the population:

We have been observing for some years with worries the developments in our land that are being pushed forward actively by politics, but not accepted without objection by the population. We want to be an equal part of the public discourse. We want to take part in the decision making and stand up against a development that is destroying our land, our tradition and our culture.

The symbolic boundaries are clear. The political elites are portrayed as naïve and detached from “the people” who want to protect Dresden and with it the heart of *Kulturnation*. The horse, painted in a dark paint, symbolizes the threat of a non-white invasion, who, with the help of political elites, have come from without to threaten the precarious *Heimat* from within.

The text puts the horse in line with “those art installations that were initiated by the leaders of the city and that caused controversial debates all over Germany”. Here, the text refers

to art works that were installed on Dresden's central squares, above all Manaf Halbouni's "Monument" (Figure 92). Halbouni's installation was put up in 2017 in front of Dresden's landmark, the Church of Our Lady, and consisted of three buses symbolizing a barricade against snipers attacking the inhabitants of Aleppo (Peitz, 2017). The artwork was met with hostility from PEGIDA supporters who saw it as an attack on Dresden's beauty. The text denounces these art works as "pedagogical", "imposed" and not "representing the concerns of Dresden's citizens". The Trojan Horse, so the message says, is supposed to be a true piece of art that immediately mediates the will and concerns of the local population. As in Richard's vision, true art is here not to be a critical engagement with the present but rather an affirmative celebration of "the people" and its concerns.



Figure 85: Balbouni's "Monument" in front of the Dresden's iconic Church of our Lady in 2017 (photo in Wikimedia Commons).

The atmospheric introduction is followed by several speeches by Rene Jahn and Angelika Barbe (chapter three) who sends greetings from Henryk M Broder. He is a known German journalist writing for the established newspaper *Die Welt* and is part of the Berlin circle with Thilo Sarrazin, Fröschle had told me about (chapter two). Barbe is followed by a judge from Meissen, who talks about the increasing insecurity and erosion of public order in Germany, and DJ Happy Vibes, a popular former radio host who stirs up the crowd. After him Hans-Joachim Maaz claims that German society is shaped by a normopathy where everyone is pressured by norms curbing the freedom of speech. He compares the present with the time after "World War II when democracy was imposed from outside and the hate between the west and east German siblings was stoked by the allies," presenting the popular trope of allied colonization of an innocent German "family" that was popular in the New Left (chapter two).

He claims that today “we have again a polarization between east and west and an imposition of an ideology from above.” The programme ends with Heimann who underlines his Catholic faith and the symbolic role of Dresden in defending “our faith”.

After the event I join Dagen, Bormann and Heimann for a beer in the bar of the *Kulturpalast*. Even if the turnout was not great, Dagen is happy about the project. “It was very diverse, so many different speakers. We were a great team, even if it was difficult.” Heimann is less excited. “Yes, I also think we were a great team. (...) But I just cannot understand why more young people are not on the street. Maybe they first need to live an existential threat. But for me it is not about that. It is about the spiritual poverty that we live through,” he says with anger. His barely hidden frustration soon turns into a nostalgic remembering of the late GDR. “All these times I had to run away from the Stasi during the demonstrations in ’89. When I got home, I was full of adrenalin and had to drink a schnapps to calm down.” Dagen answers, “I know what you mean. I went to some of the demonstrations (...). This feeling of adrenalin, I had it in Berlin when we were protesting in the *Frauenmarsch* the women’s march, a few weeks ago. There I saw how an old man with a German flag was beaten and how a migrant took away the German flag and said, ‘No Germany, you Nazi’. This would have been a perfect photo, so symbolic. But I was paralysed.” “I don’t even go to Berlin anymore,” Heimann replies, “you are only being treated as Nazi there, you can eliminate that city if you ask me. And just look at the young generations, they are not up to these things anymore,” he laments, sipping on his beer and sounding more and more frustrated.

In this moment it becomes clear that the hopes of a ground-breaking event that would shake up Dresden and Germany did not come to fruition. Dagen says,

You have all these people signing the Erklärung 2018 [Broder et al., 2018]. (...) They should go to the streets. There are too many individualists, too many elitists. They meet in their little circles, but don’t want to come into the streets.

But Dagen also has good news. “Today I talked to Kubitschek on the phone. He met with Alexander Gauland⁵⁹ to discuss the question of establishing a foundation for the AfD,” referring to the Desiderius-Erasmus-Stiftung. “I have decided to join the foundation’s board. Not for money of course, just to give advice and organize projects.” Dagen is keen to underline that this will not limit her independence. It is important for her not to appear as a party-political figure. “Once it is about politics it gets dirty,” says Heimann, “with all these careerists,” he

⁵⁹ Then the party leader of the German AfD.

laments. “I am happy that we didn’t have anybody from the AfD here. Some of them only want to earn money, so arrogant.” Bormann adds, “Yes, they’d rather slurp oysters than get their hands dirty on the streets!”

While the art project created a feeling of empowerment and community among Dagen’s circles, it failed to mobilize as many people as the group had hoped for. The following frustration and lack of trust in the AfD as a party that, as they fear, would just become part of the system, undermines their aesthetics of resistance. The aesthetics of a utopian *Heimat* and a dystopian *Fremde* that threatens to reverse the colonizer-colonized relationship may resonate with many citizens. Yet, the Trojan Horse project failed to turn feelings of precariousness into mass mobilization. The far-right intellectuals’ ideals of a white social movement, prefigured in their “art activism” and characterized by a community in which class and social background did not matter, failed to materialize. Maron’s and Hennig’s utopia – an educated bourgeoisie joining the ordinary people on the street – the formation of a *Volksgemeinschaft* through an aesthetic experience remained, at least on this rainy day, an unfulfilled dream.

5. Conclusion

A few days after the event, I see Dagen sharing the article Hennig has written on it for the *Junge Freiheit* (Hennig, 2018). Hennig does not seem to share the frustration that seeped through Bormann’s, Heimann’s and Dagen’s discussion. Instead, he claims that the aim to bring together an educated bourgeoisie, *Querdenker* and populist activists has succeeded. He clearly idealizes the event, writing that project has “brought together supporters from different milieus” who “represent the pride of the Dresdeners in their special relation to *Bildung* and culture” that “in the past has been humiliated so many times” by artists who wanted to “teach an involuntary audience”. By relying on the “power of a symbol they proved a more artistic instinct than their pedagogical opponents”. Yet, as the organizers’ frustration shows, the reality looked bleaker. The organizers’ frustration about the vulgarity of some of the PEGIDA activists, intellectual elites’ refusal to join the street and an AfD that turns out to be just another careerist party reveals the illusionary idealism that carries much of their activism. Just like the hikers encounter with Pokémon Go, the utopia of a united, homogenic resistance of the people and an educated bourgeoisie here meets the reality of the 21st century.

The “art project”, the hikes and the notion of an “authentic” Dresden concept of art that is defined against a technocratic and non-European “other” nevertheless shows how Dresden re-emerges as a heart not only of *Kulturnation* but, simultaneously, as a central space for a white colonial ordering by those whose primacy is seen as under attack. Dresden’s far-right intellectual circles engage in artistic politics of aesthetics by drawing on notions of *Heimat*, figurative art and art activism to design an aesthetic experience of a positive self and a threatening “other”. In doing so they can draw on widespread and largely unmarked notions of the “other” and “the self” that, far from being marginal, are interwoven in Dresden’s cityscape, its local school of art and aesthetics of *Heimat*. Both, in the far right and “mainstream”, the art project and the Karl May Museum, notions of the “self” and the “other” are racialized through an essentialized vision of culture and *Heimat*. Embedded in a local tradition of aesthetic ordering that puts *Heimat* and *Kulturnation* in a direct relationship with a colonized “other”, Dresden’s intellectual far-right activists thus show how *Heimat*’s colonial aesthetics form a symbolic reservoir for a shared project and racial becoming of a white identity that resonates with both the far right and an educated bourgeoisie.

The past chapters have shown how far-right intellectuals draw on mainstream and educated bourgeois visions of *Kulturnation* and its *unmarked* entanglements to a colonial and racist past to occlude their racism and to move from a biological racism to an essential culturalism. The following and final chapter will show how this move feeds back into the explicit construction of a white identity that is turned from an *unmarked cultural* to an explicitly *marked political* claim that is embedded in mainstream discourses of secularism and liberal democracy.

CHAPTER 6: From Culture to Race. Ethno-Poiesis and Racial Becoming in a Globalizing Culture and Multicultural Reality

The Trojan Horse project was, in addition to the Tellkamp-Grünbein debate (chapter one), one of the most important events organized by Dresden's far-right intellectuals during my fieldwork. Yet, while Heimann's, Dagen's and Hennig's art activism led to frustration and received little to no echo in media beyond the far-right spectrum, the Tellkamp-Grünbein debate was an event that gained wide publicity in Germany's national media. One of the reasons was that it represented the first public debate between two well-known intellectuals in the context of a perceived national crisis. This crisis was widely represented and nurtured by Germany's leading media. Many magazine covers of issues published during my fieldwork directly linked the so-called 2015 refugee crisis to the crisis of a national self (Figure 93). On these covers this crisis was symbolized, for example, by a stormy sea painted Germany's national colours and ridden by a refugee boat, by knife attacks by refugees on white German girls that are directly linked to Merkel and her policies, by a garden dwarf symbolizing the average German claiming that Islamization has estranged him from his "own land" and *Heimat*, and by a national flag losing its contours and entitled "There once was a strong country", thereby linking a general feeling of crisis to an even broader anxiety about the underperformance in the economy, politics and football.



Figure 86: Der Spiegel and Stern covers from 2018: “It this still my country? Legitimate concerns, exaggerated angst – the facts for the debate on Islam and Heimat” (top left); “The torn country. The murder of Susanna F. and the end of Merkel’s refugee politics” (top right); “The German question. How do we deal with migrants? The refugee crisis threatens Merkel’s chancellorship” (bottom left); “Football, politics, economy. It once was a strong country” (bottom right) (photos taken by the author).

This feeling of crisis also formed the context for the Grünbein and Tellkamp debate that I discussed in the introduction to chapter one. Officially envisioned as a debate on democracy and free speech, it became the first clash of two well-known intellectuals who publicly tried to answer what one of the Spiegel-titles framed as “The German Question,” (Figure 93, bottom left), that is the question of what defines the essence of German identity? A progressive, secular, liberal-democratic “Weltbürger”, citizen of the world who celebrates world openness and diversity, here represented by Grünbein; or a closed “Sorgenbürger”, a worried citizen who

embraces their nationhood and defends its traditions in face of a dark future, here represented by Tellkamp (Reinhard, 2018).

Yet, the distinction between a “progressive” and a “past-oriented” discourse in Tellkamp and Grünbein’s statements was not as clear-cut as many newspaper headlines suggested. Grünbein, in his opening statement, looked at the past, and referred to Germany’s democratic tradition and drew a direct line to Greek democracy to analyse the value of free speech in a democracy. Tellkamp, on the other hand, did not even react to Grünbein’s words and directly looked at what he saw as the “concrete present” and the future that, for him, is and will be shaped by Islamization. Grünbein, in other words, referred to a hopeful past, while Tellkamp focused on a dystopian present and future.

Similarly, the debate following the opening statements, initially only between Tellkamp and Grünbein but later opened to the whole audience, did not discuss freedom of speech and its value for democracy, as the title suggested and Grünbein’s initial statements suggested. Instead, it followed Tellkamp and focused on Islam and immigration. It seemed that the ideal of a democratic self, rooted in a Greek tradition, Germany’s post-war and post-reunification identity was an uncontested given, not worthy of discussion. What was central, instead, was the question of the “barbarian other” and how, in the face of this otherness, the German self is defined either as essentially open or closed. Despite their opposing views on what an ideal German identity would look like, both writers, as well as the audience, seemed to assume a present crisis of an unmarked white identity whose whiteness was made visible only implicitly by the direct relationship of the question to the presence of non-white, Muslim refugees. The debate was, in the end, the attempt by two white writers to define this white identity as either cosmopolitan or traditional without including the perspective of those who were generally seen as its presumed threat.

This chapter argues that the unmarked whiteness implicit in dominant debates on German identity, such as the one between Tellkamp and Grünbein, are rendered visible and politicized by far-right intellectuals. While the preceding chapters looked at the different ways Dresden’s far-right intellectuals aesthetically prefigure a white cultural identity through literature, art and space, and the *mimesis* of past revolutionary and countercultural movements, this chapter shows how these aesthetics and the implicit politics inscribed in them are turned into explicit political claims to a white identity. As this chapter shows, this making visible of the whiteness of widely shared symbolic repertoires in politics enables these intellectuals to

move from a discourse that claims essential cultural differences marked by both religious and secular democratic traditions to an explicit biological racism. I first look at how Dresden's intellectuals are part of wider German far-right networks that, in close exchange with the US alt-right, expose and claim the tensions between positive hegemonic visions of a liberal secular democracy and the racist and religious heritage implicit in it. I then look at how the attempted mitigation of these tensions opens up spaces for non-white and Muslim-background intellectuals in Dresden's far-right circles who simultaneously challenge and reproduce notions of a white *Kulturation*. I conclude that the making explicit and reclaiming of the racist and religious heritage of secular democracy and turning it into a positive marker of a white identity permits Dresden's far-right intellectuals to create racialized hierarchies in the reality of liberal democracy, globalization and multiculturalism.

1. Religion and Secular Democracy as the Essence of a White *Kulturation*

As the previous chapters have shown, the complex entanglements between culture, religion and race in the political aesthetics of *Kulturation* provide Dresden's far-right intellectuals with a rich repertoire that is shared beyond the far-right spectrum to design their ideal of a homogenous and reactionary white identity. Yet, their vision of an *explicit* white identity remains not only at odds with Germany's dominant self-perception as a secular democratic *Kulturation*, but also the reality of a globalizing and increasingly visible multicultural and multi-religious Germany.

First, Germany's dominant self-perception as a democratic modern nation is not only based on the idea of a unique *Kulturation*, but also on the idea that a *democratic* nation cannot be racist. As racism is seen to be essentially linked to the Nazi past, this idea holds that a true German democracy is rooted in a serious engagement with the past. Here democracy and the rejection of the racist past are inextricably linked. If the Nazi past is relativized, democracy is in danger. If it is upheld, democracy is fine (Chin and Fehrenbach, 2009b: 21). Anxieties about a relapse into an undemocratic past are soothed via a management of far-right hate on the one hand (Shoshan, 2016) and, on the other hand, an externalization of a fascism, illiberalism and irrationalism both onto East Germany and Islam which are both seen as regressive (Glaeser, 2000; Kalmar and Shoshan, 2020; Özyürek, 2019). West Germany, in turn, has come to be

idealized as an essentially liberal German self that has overcome its dark past and reached the status of a modern, enlightened and democratic nation.

Yet, this vision veils the fact that xenophobic and racist politics are not exclusive to the far right. They not only are deeply entangled with the history of democracy (Vickery, 1974) and liberalism, but also can underpin liberal-democratic politics in the present as an exclusive uniting force of a white population (Mazzarella, 2019: 49) in times of polarization and social change. This is specifically true when an unmarked white European superior self-perception and the hegemony of its worldview are perceived to be in crisis. The racialization of the Muslim “other” is here not only a means of “devaluation[,] but also about the defence of privileges and exclusion” at a moment when non-white minorities claim political participation and representation (Shooman, 2014: 74). In times of crisis, the constitution of a liberal, democratic self is less marked by a “tolerant” overcoming of notions of an essentialized “other”. Rather, to soothe anxieties about the ambivalence and disunity of the democratic polity a negative “foreign founder” can be used for the symbolic positive self-constitution of liberal democracies (Honig, 2009: 12), often through the silencing of non-white voices (Hesse, 2011). As the example of the Grünbein-Tellkamp debate shows, this also holds true for Germany where, in the face of a threat of a disintegrating *demos*, a shared white identity is constructed as either closed or open. Non-white voices are seen, by both sides, as the cause for disintegration and are thus excluded. Established notions of democracy and liberalism are thus not diametrically opposed to racism but can reinforce each other in the attempt to create symbols of national unity in times of perceived crisis and polarization.

As Grünbein and Tellkamp show, intellectuals are central to defining this symbolic self. In the context of post-reunification Germany, far-right intellectuals like Lengsfeld and Maron have tried to discursively build a new nationhood drawing on a discourse of democracy and progressive feminism that overcomes both past guilt and present polarization between an East and West German population against a Muslim “other” (chapter three and four; Lewicki and Shooman, 2020). At the European level, the far right’s discursive embracing of a liberal, rational and democratic Europe has allowed them to defend an explicit white identity while at the same time portraying themselves as defenders of a modern European civilization (Brubaker, 2017) that is essentially opposed to past or marginal far-right biological racism.

Second, the dominant contemporary vision of *Kulturnation* has not only been defined against a racist “other” that is situated in the past or the political margins; but also as societies

where “unbelief or “nonreligion” (Casanova, 2009: 1053) have been naturalized, Germany and other European societies have come to be seen as the embodiment of a rational, *secular* modernity that is essentially opposed to religion-based, irrational politics. In these secular models of nationhood, religious claims are only accepted as a private affair and as an object of individual choice rather than of a collective national identity displayed in public (Amir-Moazami, 2016: 156). Yet, the naturalized character of rational secularism and its construction in opposition to a regressive Islam veils the exclusionary Christian legacy it is built on (Asad, 2003). This seemingly contradictory entanglement partially explains that claims of a secular European self have increasingly gone hand in hand with references to Europe’s transnational, exclusively Christian heritage (Krzyzowski and Nowicka, 2020; Viefhues-Bailey, 2015).

Just as current visions of liberal democracy are thus not immune to racist narratives, the claim of rationality and secularism do not void European politics of their religious or racist heritage. Instead, widely unmarked, shared and taken-for-granted racist and religious assumptions can be part of an abstract rational-democratic habitus and language (Partridge, 2010: 823) that has a long history of being “racially constructed as exclusively white” (Goldberg, 1993: 118) and that formed against the backdrop of “European domination and subjugation of (...) human nature” in 19th century imperialism and colonization (Goldberg, 1993: 119). Employing a discourse of “rational democracy” in this context enables far-right intellectuals to simultaneously embrace abstract values of democracy and secularism *and* to assert and make visible its racist and religious legacies. By making visible the white racist and Christian heritage, far-right intellectuals can translate their explicit biological and cultural racism into the hegemonic idiom of secular democracy. By drawing on the unmarked entangled history of race, secularism, liberalism and religion and their widely shared political aesthetics, far-right intellectuals are able to prefigure the ethno-*poiesis* and racial becoming of a white secular *and* religious, democratic *and* racist self, opposed to a racialized non-white and Muslim “other” (Rana, 2016, 2020). Far-right intellectuals can here draw on what David Theo Goldberg has called the Paradox of Modernity, that is the tension “between modernity’s expressed commitment to universal values and its more hidden particularism, that is, between the claims of rationality and irrationality” that has been used to differentiated between rational liberal-democratic Europeans and uncivilized, irrational non-white “others” (Goldberg, 1993: 119). The racialization of religion, culture and democracy thus coexists with the idea of a liberal, democratic and post-racist Europe (El-Tayeb, 2011: xv–xxiv).

In Dresden, these entanglements enable Markus Schürer to claim *both* a Christian heritage *and* an enlightened and secular culture and politics as “part of Europe’s DNA” (chapter three), to defend, like Heimann (chapter five) and Faust (chapter three), a Catholic heritage in the name anti-totalitarianism and the freedom of speech and to advocate for a spiritual politics in the name of a racial pluralism (chapter one). As this last chapter shows, in the face of an Islam that is perceived as essentially different, these notions of political culture, European religious heritage and their inherent politics of aesthetics take “in racist world views a similar position as the biological notion of race” (Shooman, 2014: 81). Symbolized by refugees and Islam, “[t]he non-European, non-white, non-Christian is not simply the political enemy but, in its radical alienness, becomes the enemy of the political itself” (Hesse, 2011: 46). As Böckelmann argued (chapter two), it is the “attack on Europe” by the refugees as the symbol of the foreigner (Honig, 2009) that helps to constitute a European self. In what follows, I look at how this racialization becomes explicit and linked to biological notions of race. I then turn to how these essentialized political aesthetics are simultaneously challenged and reified by non-white and Muslim-background intellectuals.

2. Revealing and Claiming Liberal Democracy’s Racist and Religious Heritage

Bettina Gruber and Embracing Whiteness

During my fieldwork I did not have to wait long until the far right’s claim to be interested in cultural, not biological differences, was revealed as a myth. Most of Dresden’s far-right intellectuals believe that they are not racist. As Dagen tells me, “They always call me racist. But how stupid is that. My father was Croatian. How can I be racist?” In a context where racism is mainly equated with the anti-democratic Nazi past and its biological racism, such a claim can credibly be made while embracing a white identity against a Muslim “other”. Yet, only a few days after the Tellkamp-Grünbein debate, where explicit references to race and biological racism were absent, a reading by Bettina Gruber (also known by her pseudonym Sophie Liebnitz) in Dagen’s bookshop revealed how far-right intellectuals draw on past entanglements of biological and cultural understandings of race to define an explicitly racial identity.

Like Fröschle (chapter two), Gruber is professor for German literature. She worked as a visiting professor at Dresden’s university and several German and European universities.

Recently, she has made herself a name in the circles around Kubitschek's *Institut für Staatspolitik* (IfS). Originally from Austria, she now lives in Dresden and is a regular guest in Dagen's bookshop. Her reading on this evening is entitled "Loving Dead White Men" and is based on an essay she published with Kubitschek's *Antaios* publishing house (Liebnitz, 2018). Dagen's programme announces the reading as the critique of an "explosive mix of racist, anti-men and anti-traditionalist tendencies" in the left-liberal mainstream. As usual, Dagen's event space is packed. I see many familiar faces such as Böckelmann, Heimann and Bernig.

Gruber starts the reading claiming that "we" would currently live the attack on dead white European men.

This attack is nothing else than the attack on the west's heritage. It is not only driven from the outside but also from the inside, by groups driven by a deep suspicion towards the 'self' and a historical complex of guilt.

Gruber claims that this "devaluation of the 'self' and the idealization of the 'other'" is itself part "of the European DNA". While in the past this barely had an impact on European culture, she today sees it as an existential threat. She refers to her experience as a visiting professor at the Emory-University, Atlanta.

In the US, political correctness has become like a second inquisition that is aimed at a total equality. Once this critical-equality machine is started it will not stop. It will destroy western heritage claiming that white Europeans are responsible and guilty for all past evils. Take the planned dismantling of the Columbus statue that New York's mayor De Blasio plans. Here the heritage of white Europeans is literally erased.

The audience is outraged. Many in the audience shake their head with disbelief.

This attack on European heritage, Gruber argues, is driven by a new notion of race that was shaped by the postcolonial left and that drives an anti-white racism. A racism that attacks everything linked to whites and idealizes everything that is non-white. "Take the example of East Germany. Some of post-colonialists claim East Germany is too white," she says. The audience is in uproar. "If this is not racism, I don't know what else is," she says, echoing claims of a new colonialism and racism against East Germans (chapter five). "To abolish whiteness also means to abolish wisdom," she claims, using the German words *Weisheit* (wisdom) and *Weißheit* (whiteness) to make a pun that is greeted with applause by the audience.

Böckelmann raises his hand and states: “It is true that the white race was very strong and expansive in the past.” Another member of the audience shouts: “Unfortunately not anymore today!” – an exclamation that is met with laughter but no objection. Böckelmann continues. He argues that the tendency of whites to criticise themselves is just another sign of superiority. “The left’s self-critique allows them not to feel as the root of all evil anymore. They feel redeemed, which leads to a feeling of superiority. This is the hypocrisy of the left.” Gruber agrees, but says “the difference is today it is destructive”. Echoing the dissatisfaction that parts of the conservative educated bourgeoisie felt with a liberalism, that is that was seen as too weak to handle colonial uprisings in the 19th century (Dejung, 2019: 269), she argues,

It comes together with a cultural weakness that is due to our prosperity, the long period of peace and the perception of life as a comfort zone. People simply don’t know any existential threats anymore. Instead we see a perpetual questioning of the status quo that constantly reimagines new inequalities. Take the blacks in the US. The more freedom they are given the more inequality they claim.

In turn, leftist whites would try to make all whites feel guilty for being white. “This ersatz religion of homogenization converges with the interests of capital and globalization and is a fundamental threat to our national cultures.”

To counter this threat, Gruber recommends the formation of grassroots resistance groups that resemble those in Bernig’s novel *Anders*. “I recently read a political science study that said minorities are more resistant. We should organize politically as minority resistance groups. We already are in fact. We are discriminated against as whites. So we might as well claim this ethnicity as the basis for our resistance and reject this hollow universalism. It should be normal to pledge allegiance to your countrymen,” she says, underlining that being white is what defines “countrymen”.

This is the only way we can defend our religious and democratic identity, our European capitalism that brings together welfare state, citizens’ rights and free market against totalitarian Chinese and Muslim capitalisms.

In other words, Gruber argues that a new, liberal political self should be formed against a non-white totalitarian “other”, a self that brings together free market and welfare, religious heritage and secular present as well as a racial essence and democracy under the banner of white identity.

In Dagen's kitchen after the reading, Dagen, Bernig, Bormann, Böckelmann and Gruber reflect on the reading and the debate between Tellkamp and Grünbein. Dagen and Bormann serve wine and "Mediterranean snacks" as Dagen calls them – baguette, dried tomatoes, olives, cheese and an organic spread called "Sultan's pleasure" that I know well from my childhood and that is a product popular among German middle-class families. While the group enjoys this "spread with oriental spices", as it reads on the cover, the group laments the increasing Islamization that is increasingly visible in Dresden. Shaking her head, Dagen says,

Just look at the neighbourhood next to the train station. I don't like to go shopping there anymore with all these dark-skinned people. And then they have opened all these Shisha bars.

While sipping on his wine and referring again to the debate between Grünbein and Tellkamp, Böckelmann praises Gruber, saying

You and Tellkamp have shown perfectly what is really at stake. Not like Grünbein who was talking about abstract politics like a cool and detached dandy. Whenever Tellkamp talked about Islam, Grünbein called him to return to the topic of the debate: democracy and free speech. As if this were not linked!

For him and all who are present, it is Islam and its "supporters from the left" who attack democracy and free speech, "essentially European values" as Gruber claims. This evening at Dagen's bookshop shows how far-right intellectuals blend notions of white supremacy, reactionary gender models and tradition with claims of democracy, civilized culture and freedom of speech. In face of a manly non-white "Muslim" and a weak, self-denying "leftist" threat a cultural self is explicitly racialized and politicized.

Jared Taylor and Racial Democracy

The idea that a functioning democracy depends on an ethnic and cultural homogeneity strikes a chord with a white educated bourgeois audience and paves the way for its further radicalization. As the former left-liberal Markus Schürer told me in one of our conversations (chapter three), German democracy is under threat because the *Staatsvolk*, the national people, is diluted through immigration from a cultural background that is "diametrically opposed" to a European culture of freedom. If one defends democracy, one cannot be racist, so says the underpinning thinking. Another example is *Tumult* (chapter two), where racist American-

German authors like Johannes Scharf regularly publish alongside Dresden's far-right intellectuals. Scharf has written for well-known international far-right websites and publishers such as *Arktos* and the German *Europa Terra Nostra* publishing house. In his Heidegger-inspired writings on "How I developed my white consciousness" (Scharf, 2019a) and the "struggle for *Dasein*" (Scharf, 2019b), he claims that essentially different views on democracy, religion and culture among whites and blacks would have made him realize that "race is real". In his *Tumult* article "The Enemies of Democracy" (Scharf, 2020), Scharf argues that an exclusive definition of a *Demos* or *Volk* is deeply democratic as a "flooding of Europe with Africans and Orientals" in the name of a universal multiculturalism would lead to "dissolution" of the German *demos* and thus the basis for a democratic nation state. The *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), he claims, is the only party that opposes this "dissolution". It is, therefore, he concludes, a deeply democratic party and in the tradition of the US founding fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson, who also opposed a democracy of mixed races. Like Gruber, Scharf draws on the US context to point to and positively re-evaluate democracy's racist heritage in order to call for a "struggle over white identity" and to legitimize the far right's concept of ethnopluralism. During my fieldwork the US served as the template for both a utopian *and* dystopian future. While the alt-right's white resistance movement is portrayed as a model, the multicultural "reality" in the US is depicted as one of conflict and chaos.

In addition to their links to Germany's national far-right scene, Dresden intellectuals like Gruber also establish intellectual ties to the transnational far right. At Gruber's reading I hear about a conference organized by the IfS entitled "The USA under Trump. Where to Europe?" Announced as an introduction to the US alt-right, it will take place in Magdeburg, the capital of Saxony's adjacent federal state of Saxony-Anhalt. The day after Gruber's reading, I apply to be a participant. A few days later I receive a confirmation. On a grey and cold April morning I head to Dresden's Neustadt train station. It is very early as I need to catch the direct train to Magdeburg to be on time for the one-day-conference. The station is deserted. Waiting for the train I have a closer look at the conference's programme (Figure 94) that I received with an email welcoming me to the event. Speakers include well-known representatives of Germany's intellectual far right such as Martin Lichtmesz and Ellen Kositzka, as well as the US alt-right intellectuals such as Millennial Woes, Roger Devlin and Jared Taylor. According to the programme, the day finishes with a closing panel with Matthias Matussek, formerly a well-known *Der Spiegel* journalist. As an email I received prior to the congress says, the conference is to shed an alternative light on Trump's presidency beyond the "distorted media coverage".

Magdeburg was chosen as a venue as the AfD faction in Saxony-Anhalt's state parliament was the biggest in Germany in 2018. In Saxony-Anhalt's 2016 state elections the AfD surged to 24.2 per cent, making it the second strongest party. "Reason enough for us to intensify our educational work there and to strengthen the connection between politics and metapolitics," says the email.

When I look up after reading the programme, I notice that another person making her way up to the platform. I realize that it is Bettina Gruber. A few moments later she gets on the train with me. When I see her again as I get off the train in Magdeburg, I realize that she is going to the same conference. On my way out of Magdeburg's train station I also see the young law students I had met in Schnellroda and Berlin's library of conservatism (chapter one) as well as other individuals I vaguely remember from both venues.

IfS Staatspolitischer Kongreß 2018
in Magdeburg

»USA unter Trump – wie weiter, Europa?«

10.00 Uhr »Zur Einführung« **Dr. Erik Lehnert**

10.30 Uhr »Die US-amerikanische Rechte unter Trump: eine Bestandsaufnahme« **Martin Lichtmesz**

11.30 Uhr »Was ist die »AltRight« und wie kam sie zum Erfolg?« *(englisch)* **Millennial Woes**

12.15 – 13.00 Uhr Pause

13.00 Uhr »Die sexuelle Revolution und ihre Folgen« **F. Roger Devlin**

14.15 Uhr »Warum ethnische Bruchlinien in den USA ein Thema sind« *(englisch)* **Jared Taylor**

15.00 – 15.30 Uhr Kaffeepause

15.30 Uhr »Rußland, USA, Europa. Von Souveränität und Hegemonie« **Manuel Ochsenreiter**

16.15 Uhr Schlußplenum mit **Matthias Matussek**
Moderation: **Ellen Kositzka**

17.00 Uhr Ende

Bücher der Referenten über antalos.de
Infos zum Institut für Staatspolitik: staatspolitik.de
und der Zeitschrift *Sezession*: sezession.de

Institut für Staatspolitik | Rötttergut Schnellroda | 06208 Steigra | tel: 0345 68079794 (Büro Halle/Saale) | mail: institut@staatspolitik.de

Figure 87: Programme of the IfS' so-called Statepolitical Congress 2018 (screenshot by the author).

While Gruber takes a taxi, I chose to walk to the venue. Making my way from the train station to the conference venue the grey sky is mirrored by a grey austere architecture and bleak urban spaces. Here and there one can see colourfully painted walls that, with their almost neon or fluorescent greens and blues, seem to want to overcompensate for the surrounding greyness. I pass posters calling for demonstrations against urban development projects and an international capitalism that is seen as disrupting local communities (Figure 95). The redevelopment projects they oppose resemble projects I know from London and Berlin. “Against excessive rents and displacement from our areas. For the preservation of neighbourhoods and more social free spaces! Living space for all!” says one. Others call for ending “the rule of the capital” – political claims that resonate well with those parts in the German far right that merge the defence of a white identity with the call for a moral social market economy.



Figure 88: Posters on the way from Magdeburg's trainstation to the event venue (photo taken by the author).

The Halberstädter Straße, the street on which the conference venue is located, is a large street with four lanes and a tramline. I wonder why the IfS chose a venue in this neighbourhood

given the movement's careful attention to space, urban iconography and its politics of aesthetics. The area, Sudenburg, is accessible but not central. It is clearly not a wealthy neighbourhood. The street has some leftover pre-war buildings. Some gaps have been filled by German Democratic Republic (GDR) buildings. Many other gaps remain and are occupied by car sales or improvised snack stands. Restaurants and bakeries – “1000 and 1 night” (offering baklava), Shisha Palace, Maharadscha Palace and Viola's Pizzastübchen – stand next to labour agencies, opticians and hairdressers. Restaurants with traditional German food, like the Sudenburger Potato House and the Schnitzel Temple, are on streets leading off the main road. Was the neighbourhood chosen to make visible “impoverished German culture marginalized by foreign cultures and threatened by global capitalism” as the far right likes to see it?

The conference venue, *Halber85*, a big, 19th turn-of-the-century industrial building, is slightly set back in the row of pre-war houses and framed by a shisha bar, a lawyer's office, a baklava café and a Thor Steinar shop.⁶⁰ A look at the venue's website shows that previous events ranged from weddings to Christmas parties, from political events to academic conferences. The liberal party has used *Halber85* for a meeting in the past. A few days before the IfS congress, civil society organizations discussing human rights in times of the digital economy used the space. On this April day, the IfS welcomes 250 participants who listen to panellists such as Jared Taylor, a well-known American racist and propagandist of a “white identity” (Nieli, 2019).



Figure 89: Jared Taylor talking at the conference (photo taken by the author)

⁶⁰ On the importance of these kind of shops and spaces for radicalization see Miller-Idriss (2017).

As I enter the space, I see the typical mix of young students, Identitarians and apparent neo-Nazis with Thor Steinar clothing, some of them gathering around Götz Kubitschek. Gruber has taken a seat in one of the front rows. Yet, as in Schnellroda, the majority of the audience appears to be from a well-off, white, educated bourgeois background, including mainly men in their late 30s to early 60s. Antaios is present with a bookstand. From the loudspeakers comes soft French pop music, while the buffet presents a mix of goulash, spaghetti bolognese, vegetarian pasta and coleslaw salads. As Millennial Woes gives his thoughts on racial resistance and calls for a European civilization that has to be carried by “European and thus white genetics” the audience is served water and coffee by waiters of colour.

The day’s most prominent speaker – Jared Taylor – is introduced by Martin Lichtmesz as a “race realist” and is the head of American Renaissance, a US alt-right think tank. Taylor has been trying to scientifically relegitimize a biological concept of “race” for decades, and, under Trump’s presidency, has expanded his influence in both public and scientific discourse (Nieli, 2019; Saini, 2019: 111–133). He calls himself a “race realist” and is the author of *White Identity. Racial Consciousness in the 21st Century* (Taylor, 2011), a bestseller on the American alt-right, and the cover of which cover features a painting symbolizing *Heimat* by the German 19th century painter Caspar David Friedrich. In Magdeburg, Taylor presents himself as a proud descendant of “those who fought for the confederation”, which is met with applause from the audience. “I am delighted to be in Germany where a new brotherhood of Europeans is blossoming.” He argues that the true history of race relations in the US is unknown to most Americans and Europeans.

US history is distorted as a history of immigration and multiculturalism. This is completely false. The tradition of the US is not multiculturalism or egalitarianism but racism. One of the core policies of the US until 1965 was to keep the US European and therefore white.

This was based on the normality of slavery in previous centuries.

Today one has forgotten that there once were black slaves everywhere in the western world. (...) Today the worldwide practice of slavery is being veiled mainly to portray the southern confederate states as the only evil deviation from the norm of egalitarianism.

Like Scharf, Taylor refers to Jefferson who is:

idealized today because of his sentence that ‘all men are created equal’. But he was not a universalist referring to humanity. He was referring to the English colonizers. He is also idealized for having argued against slavery. But this is only half of the truth. He said that both

racess cannot live under one government. Black slaves should be freed and expelled from the US so it could remain white.

Taylor concludes that “Jefferson was in fact a white nationalist who is today being turned into an egalitarianist.” He quotes several other American presidents to prove that race is not a social construct but part of the US’s history’s reality. This reality of racism should be made visible and proudly owned rather than denied, is his message.

For Taylor, the vision that racial discrimination was part and parcel of US democracy changed with a new immigration policy in 1965 that opened immigration to non-white non-Europeans. Since then, notions of diversity and multiculturalism have entered the political mainstream claiming multiculturalism as an ideal. “This is crazy. Diversity is a source of conflict and tension. The claim for more diversity is idiotic.” He continues enumerating statistics showing higher crime and unemployment rates among blacks.

Those are the facts; multiculturalism is moralism. And the “best” is that these differences are today blamed on white racism. But this cannot be true,

he says ironically.

There are in fact barely any racists left in the US. Who could then exploit the blacks? Prevent their emancipation? Where are the laws that discriminate against them? Because there are no white racists left, the idea of an institutional, systemic or unconscious racism based on an alleged white privilege that leads to blacks shooting each other, taking drugs, failing exams or getting pregnant while in school is invented.

Like Gruber, he sees one of the drivers of this “cult of diversity” in the emergence of black intellectuals:

There is a new class of non-white intellectuals, who hate whites. And there is also a class of whites, who love to hear that their own race is evil. These new intellectuals are earning loads of money with writing how horrible the whites are. Such things are written – and believed! – while whites still form a majority, are still dominant in the government and the economy.

Taylor concludes with the question of what Europe can learn from the US. “Europe must remain Europe,” he exclaims equating Europe with “white”.

You still have the chance to remain the majority in your country, to preserve your culture, to avoid the deep and unbridgeable trenches that exist in the US. You have to encourage your co-Europeans to say: “This land was built by our ancestors for us, not for you! Our culture reflects

our way of life, not yours! We wish you all the best, but you need to stay where you are!” Of course, we would like that all peoples form strong societies with their own traditions, to live in nations that bring forth the best in them. We don’t want that they are penned up with strangers only to struggle for their place in a society that doesn’t work for anyone. The task is to convince all other Europeans of this truth. This is the biggest challenge of our generation. We are indebted to our forefathers and our children. If we fail, our people and culture have no future.

Taylor propagates the far right’s ethnopluralism that calls for the coexistence of ethnically and culturally homogenous nations that do not mix. A realization of this ideal would mean the deportations of millions of non-White Germans, something the AfD leader Höcke has openly called for in the book he wrote with Hennig (chapter one; Höcke and Hennig, 2018). Höcke’s and Taylor open calling for ethnic homogeneity shows how the often-implicit invocations of white identity – referring to “our culture”, “the authentic Germany”, “European civilization” – become here explicitly marked as white. In this conception of white superiority, notions of race and culture are intrinsically linked. Instead of critically assessing the unmarked entanglements of race and Europe’s democratic past, Taylor marks them as a heritage that must be defended.

The congress and the audience’s positive reception of Taylor show that Germany’s educated bourgeois far-right calls for cultural resistance are deeply entangled with biological racism. The biology of race is linked to a with a cultural educated bourgeois way of being and thus creates a transformed and transformative racial thinking that is embedded in the context of the 21st century. Looking back into western history, Taylor and Scharf can draw on a rich repertoire of racism that is inherent in western and European notions of culture and democracy. As non-white intellectuals critically expose this heritage, they reassert it as a part of a proud white identity. Notions of white privilege and whiteness are being introduced as tools of a postcolonial left that aims to destroy this identity and with it the basis for democracy and freedom of speech. The close ties between these networks and Dresden’s educated bourgeoisie lay bare the entanglement of notions of superior whiteness and educated bourgeois visions of *Kulturnation* and civilized democracy. Instead of refuting the concepts of “whiteness” and “white supremacy” those concepts are being turned into a positive self-description. “White supremacy” becomes a concept describing the “realism of natural racial inequality” and “whiteness” as a positive resource for the formation of a political identity. This use of critical concepts for the construction of a positive self goes hand in hand with the externalization of racism onto the past and the political “other” – a discursive strategy that is also constitutive of

many dominant narratives of liberal democracy and that thus, as the following section shows, enables self-defined liberals to embrace racism.

3. Being a Liberal Democrat, Becoming Racist

During my fieldwork the exhibition “The Invention of Human Races” in Dresden’s so-called Hygiene Museum⁶¹ marked another occasion of this confrontation between a critical assessment of racism and its reassertion from the far right. I had read about the exhibition in the local newspaper. I decide to go there together with Ferdinand, a former student of Markus Schürer (chapter three). Like Durs Grünbein he grew up in Hellerau, the left-liberal counterpart to the conservative Loschwitz. He now lives in Cologne where he is doing a PhD in architectural history. While he took part in demonstrations against PEGIDA in 2014, he is now a fervent supporter of the far right. As Markus Schürer’s former student, he is still in close touch with him and closely follows Dresden’s intellectual milieu by reading *Tumult* and via Dagen’s Facebook page. I had wanted to interview him on his move from the left to the far right. When I mention the exhibition, he tells me that he is keen on going too. So we decide to go together and do the interview afterwards.

The Hygiene Museum is deeply entangled in the German “scientific” development of the concept of race in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was established by a rich Dresden factory owner who wanted to democratize the health system (Deutsches Hygiene Museum, 2020). This democratization was closely linked to ideas of the shaping of a pure and healthy body politic or *Volkskörper*, specifically under the Nazi rule. The exhibition does not only want to reflect on this problematic history, but it also aims to take the notion of race out of the context of national socialism to mark its presence in western and German history up into the present. The exhibition emerged out of a conference and was initially prepared by white researchers and curators only. After massive criticism, the concept was rethought, and non-white perspectives were included (Rietzschel, 2018).

According to the organizers, the exhibition is no response to PEGIDA and the surge of the far right in Saxony (Die Welt, 2018). Yet, links to the contemporary and local context are

⁶¹ “Die Erfindung der Menschenrassen”, Deutsches Hygienemuseum Dresden, 19 May 2018–6 January 2019.

present in the exhibition. As a result, my informants read the exhibition as a political attempt to impose a multicultural ideology, brand East Germans as regressive, premodern racists and to push them into the “Nazi corner” while ignoring the reality of race. A *Tumult* review of the exhibition (Küchenmeister, 2018) argued that by suggesting that races are constructed, the exhibition postulates an ultimate universal truth and a horizontal homogenization of humanity into equal races, ignoring the plurality of truth and the reality of difference between regions and countries. The exhibition seeks impose a worldview that claims that “any form of thinking human *Dasein* like Heidegger ... as asserting and unfolding itself in a vertical way” through *different* ways of being human is taboo.

On the way to the museum, Ferdinand and I briefly talk about the history of the Hygiene Museum. He tells me that he has started to rethink the concept of *Volkshygiene*, people’s hygiene. “I think the concept is not as problematic as many think. It is true that it is a term that is mainly linked to the Nazis. But the problem is rather that today we see this collective hygiene as self-evident. But in the 19th century and early 20th centuries this was different. Merely looking at the problematic history of the term reduces it to the Nazi past. But there is a greater truth to it.” In our interview it becomes clear that his re-evaluation of concepts linked to the Nazi past is similar to the way he rethinks the notion of race. We agree to look at everything independently and then meet in the museum’s café for the interview.

The exhibition shows how the concept of race was invented to naturalize inequalities as part of colonial rule. It follows a linear chronology looking at how the concept entered western thought and looks at the role of Saxony and specifically the Hygiene Museum in the process of the racialization of the white self and the non-white “other” before and during Nazism. I notice a quote by the German writer Max Frisch about one of the race exhibitions that took place in the museum in the 1930s. The quote states that the exhibition was marked by a pedagogical tone that would be typical for Germans. It strikes me as a claim that I have, in the months before, during my fieldwork, heard many times from my informants when they talked about a “multiculturalism imposed from the liberal left”. I realize that by now I have become so familiar with the thinking of Dresden’s far-right intellectuals that I start to read the exhibition through their eyes. Once again, I feel an uncanny familiarity that, under different circumstances, may have turned me into a sympathizer or even member of Dresden’s circles. Pondering on this I continue to walk through the exhibition, that after the part on the 1930s, attempts to build a bridge to today by showing how Islam and the Orient are racialized and how notions of “white supremacy” perpetuate the colonial legacy. The carriers of these residual

thoughts are mainly portrayed (Figure 97) as far-right racists, the less intelligent left and left behind by globalization. The final room shows prominent German politicians standing up against racism.

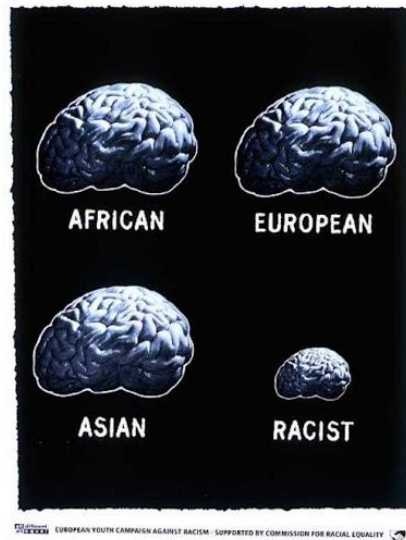


Figure 90: Poster displayed in the exhibition on racism in the Hygiene Museum in Dresden (photo taken by the author).

While the exhibition breaks new grounds in the way it links past to present racism and thematizes its own entanglement in racist thinking, it ends up reproducing a linear narrative. Racism is portrayed as carried by regressive and unintelligent extremists while contemporary liberal democracy emerges as a form of society that overcomes these residues from the past. By including contemporary politicians in the final room, the exhibition suggests that the contemporary German state has overcome and engaged with this past. In a video Heiko Maaß, Germany's foreign minister and leading member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), asks "Is there actually such a thing as German identity?" From the other perspective, there are videos showing racism today. Here the focus is on neo-Nazis in Germany and US racists. Contemporary racism is portrayed as essentially distinct from a democratic liberal society, externalized to the political, economic and intellectual margins or abroad. A real engagement with the racist heritage of democracy, liberalism, Germany's intellectual canon, never mind its notions of *Kulturnation*, is avoided.

When I meet Ferdinand in the museum's café, I ask him what he thinks of the exhibition. "I think only one truth is told. But there is, of course, a plurality of truths," he says, using almost the exact words of the *Tumult* criticism I had read prior to coming to the exhibition.

The biggest problem I see is that victims of racism are only portrayed as victims of colonization. I think you cannot blame it all on the west. You need to ask for the responsibility of the local populations in Africa and the Middle East. To see them only as victims of the discrimination by the west as inferior races reduces them to a role of mere objects: The “white man” as the perpetrator and the colonized as the victims. One has to differentiate between the question of what is an appropriate remembering of one’s own past from a question of guilt and responsibility. Am I conscious of where I come from? Of the shadows of our history? Do I remember these bad sites appropriately by problematizing it? On the other hand, do I bear responsibility for what has happened two hundred years ago? The exhibition is absurd when it says that past colonialism is today pushing many people to flee. It puts guilt on us for people coming to Europe. So I feel that this exhibition has a pedagogical undertone. When I read the quote by Max Frisch, I felt the same about this exhibition. Immigration, diversity and the decision not to close the borders in 2015 are taught as an ideal. But in all this diversity, are those also included who don’t want immigration? What about the white racist in the US? Is he also included in this diversity?

Hearing this I realize that I had become quite efficient in reading the exhibition through the eyes of the far right. Knowing that Ferdinand joined the circles as an interested follower only recently I ask him if he would have read the exhibition the same way before 2015.

Probably not. I changed my point of view through Markus Schürer [chapter three] around 2014/2015, shortly after PEGIDA had started. I met him for a beer, and we started talking about PEGIDA. I had just been to an anti-PEGIDA demonstration and was shocked when I heard that he was extremely sceptical about what was going on in Germany, the way PEGIDA was treated in the media. This triggered something in me because I have always thought of him as a very intelligent person. I started to investigate all this myself, also at the question of my own identity and GDR past. At some point I started to question my anti-PEGIDA posture. I thought “these people are your countrymen, your origins. You cannot stand up against them.

Markus Schürer challenged Ferdinand’s view that far-right views cannot be intelligent and opened him to far-right ideas. The way PEGIDA was treated by the media, that he today sees as dominated by a West German and leftist discourse, made him feel solidarity with the protesters as East Germans and to rethink his own East German identity. Through a shared history as an East German, he felt a deeper connection with the PEGIDA supporters, which made him fundamentally rethink German society. As he tells me, he moved to West Germany to experience what he had always seen as more progressive and developed society, closer to a more ideal political community. Part of this ideal was multiculturalism.

Thinking about PEGIDA and talking to Markus Schürer made me realize that I actually don't know what it means to be German. I also started to understand these national conservative positions. In the 1990s I grew up with an emptiness, this feeling that with reunification I have now arrived in West Germany, the final stage of history, the ideal system. At the same time the reality around me did not look like that. I felt this estrangement and alienation from East Germany and Dresden. These remains from the socialist dictatorship, this morbid atmosphere, no multicultural society. But in the media you only saw a West German reality. I wanted to experience what it means to be West German and decided to move to the West after my bachelor's degree, also to experience multiculturalism. I thought this is what progress looks like. That this is the future, something fascinating and desirable as it was portrayed in the media. But with the refugee crisis, talking to Markus Schürer and listening to Jörg Bernig's Kamenz speech [chapter four] I questioned this view. Why should a multicultural society be something desirable or positive in itself? Why is rejecting it backward or negative? Where is the moral justification for this? This really made me think.

He links this feeling of alienation, first from East Germany and then from the multicultural West, to the experience of migrants.

I understand Turks who came to Germany in the '60s and who also don't feel German. I can feel how this leads to a rejection of society. This hybrid identity must be really difficult to deal with. I am not sure that this will dissolve one day. If a society is ethnically too diverse the social cohesion will get lost. As long as they are minorities it is very important to discuss these hybrid identities in a liberal society. But as soon as this becomes the truth for a majority there will be conflicts of loyalty. The main problem is not immigration per se. I don't see a problem with European immigrants. The problem is obviously Muslim immigration.

For Ferdinand, it is Islam that marks an essential difference to a European self that is shaped by a shared history and heritage.

There is an Islamic culture, just as there is a Christian-occidental culture. (...) We cannot simply ignore these differences. I have the impression that this has been tried for years and is repeated daily in the media: "Don't be racist, be diverse, accept the 'other', Islam is part of Germany." But for a big part of the population this remains a problem. And this makes me think that maybe there is an essential difference,

he concludes showing how seamlessly soft cultural differences are blended with essential racialized differences.

His empathy with non-white and Muslim Germans is limited. He has more empathy with PEGIDA as he shares a history with them, not with Turkish immigrants.

I share more with people with whom I share a tradition, a century-old history, who are rooted here. (...) I believe in human rights and that all men have the same dignity and worth. But a shared history and culture is closer to me. When the media claimed PEGIDA protesters were Nazis I felt I had to stand up for them. I cannot stand up against my own people,

he says, showing that an alleged cultural reading of a collective being based on shared history, tradition and roots á la Heidegger is little more than a veil for a crude view of essential racial differences.

He concedes that there is some successful integration but that this would be the exception.

There is a problem with most Muslim immigrants. In individual cases a Muslim may be able to identify more with German culture than some Germans. But at a large scale this is unrealistic.

Yet, cultural identification is central for his understanding of a “successful integration”. He tells me about an example from his university.

At the architecture faculty we have someone from Sri Lanka. He was born here, but his parents obviously came from Sri Lanka. (...). He once gave us a guided tour through Frankfurt's Goethehaus.⁶² This was very beautiful. It fills me with joy that a human being who, as is obvious through his ethnic background, does not have a long tradition here (...) and still knows German culture so well.

He is visibly moved. It means a lot to him that a non-white German celebrates the *Kulturation* embodied by the national poet Goethe. Yet, when a non-white German utters criticism about German society, he finds this problematic and sees it as a sign of disintegration. “In Cologne you have these alternative migrant literature festivals. I don't know what to think about them. They simply seem to reject German culture.”

His biggest disillusionment with the West German ideal is the realization that the universal humanitarianism underpinning it lacked a shared identity. “‘All men are equal, all need our solidarity’, this sounds very nice, but it is no basis for a community. There was no discussion of what ‘German identity’ actually means after reunification.” He sees this mainly linked to a history education focusing on Nazism:

⁶² The house where Germany's national poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born.

I agree with the AfD. There must be a change in the way history is taught. If I look at my time in school, there was too much focus on Nazism. I didn't experience it back then like this, but today I would say that it was overrepresented. The history from '45 to '90 barely takes place in history lessons. Compared to 12 years of Nazism. This is a big problem. (...) We have been united for over 20 years. We need to take on East German history as something that is part of us. This is a big challenge of integration, enough to worry about. And now immigration from non-European areas adds to that.

Ferdinand's sees the exhibition as a politically motivated attempt to convince Dresden's citizens of the irrationality of racism and the ideal of multiculturalism. As he doesn't see himself as a racist, he doesn't feel challenged by the exhibition. Instead, he underlines that he sees an essential difference between Islam and European cultures. As his example of his non-white Sri Lankan colleague shows, this anti-Muslim posture is not simply a cultural essentialism, but includes the belief in a racial difference, the overcoming of which he sees as exceptional. While he feels some empathy with immigrants' struggles of identity, he sees the integration and unification of East and West Germany as what must be the focus. Despite different traditions, he believes that East and West Germany belong together as they consist of the same "people". On the other hand, the integration of Muslims and non-White Germans is unrealistic because of essential differences. This becomes clear again when, sometime after our visit to the museum, he posts a video by a psychologist on Facebook proclaiming an essential difference between an Arab and European "soul" (WissensWerteWelt, 2019).

Like Markus Schürer, Ferdinand can be described as a "disappointed multiculturalist" who turned from an idealization of multiculturalism in his youth to its rejection, in adulthood, embracing the idea of an ethnically and culturally homogenous nation. It is the latter that forms a common ground for him and the outright white racism of Gruber and Taylor.

4. Incorporating the "Other", Reasserting Essential Difference

Feroz Khan and the Spiritualization of Secularism

Despite these intertwined articulations of cultural and biological racisms, Muslims and non-White Germans still find a place in Dresden's far-right intellectual circles. In addition to Muhesir Sebastian Hennig, a white convert to Islam with connections to the al-Murabitun

movement (chapter five), Dresden's far-right educated bourgeois also provides space for Kemal Yilmaz and Feroz Khan. Hennig, Yilmaz and Khan represent three different ways of incorporating the "other" into the movement.

Hennig, together with the al-Murabitun movement and a marginal part of the far-right, attempts to promote Islam as a white German religion (Özyürek, 2014). They argue that the reality of Germany as a multi-ethnic society and the undeniable presence of Islam are calling for a shift in the perception of Islam from "threat" to "opportunity". French far-right intellectuals such as Alain Soral Islam are seen as potential allies against cultural decline (Eichberger, 2019; Kaiser, 2019). Dissociated from non-white ethnicities, embracing Islam can speak to exclusive notions of spiritual and cultural Germanness (Göppfarth and Özyürek, 2020). In the context of Dresden's far-right intellectuals, Hennig's Muslimness is mocked and met with scepticism (Petersen, 2015). Yet, his Germanness, whiteness and his position in the circles are not questioned.

Feroz Khan, whose parents immigrated to Germany from Pakistan, has not only become a central figure in Dresden's far-right intellectual milieu, he has also become an important far-right influencer online. In his videos he warns Germans of a Muslim invasion. He criticizes the "mainstream's" focus on Germany's dark sides of history as leading to a self-hate that impedes rather than facilitates integration (Khan, 2018a, 2018b). Originally from Frankfurt, he moved to Dresden for his master's in engineering. I first meet Khan at the end of the Trojan Horse art project (chapter five) when Bormann introduces me to him. As we fix a date and time for an interview several people greet him by his first name "Feroz". "I am always watching your YouTube channel," one says. "Your videos are great!" Yet, the fact that Khan is not white and has a thick beard also irritates some. Bormann is keen on integrating Khan into the far-right networks and presents him to Hans-Joachim Maaz, who spoke at the event. Maaz visibly struggles with Khan's presence and only hesitantly shakes his hand. Bormann sees this and says, "No worries, he is only our *Quotenschläfer*", our token sleeper terrorist. What is supposed to be a joke is answered with a frozen smile by Maaz.

After this first encounter, I meet Khan in the cafeteria of Dresden's university for an interview. He moved to Dresden to "find out what was really going on here. Everybody was talking about PEGIDA, but nobody really knew what was going on. I felt the way East Germans were being labelled as Nazis and extremists was not fair. I want the discourse to be more balanced and end this domination by the left." This is also the reason why he votes for the AfD.

He says that most of his friends in Frankfurt who have a migration background vote for the Greens and the SPD. “But they do so not because they are leftists but because they think they are the only parties who support their interest. I think this is not true. The AfD actually has potential for conservative Germans with migration background.”



Figure 91: Feroz Khan in a YouTube video by PI-News reporting on the AfD's media day in the German parliament (PI-News, 2019; screenshot by the author).



Figure 92: Thomas Seitz, AfD MP with Feroz Khan in his own YouTube broadcast (Seitz, 2020; screenshot by the author).

Through his YouTube channel “Axis East West” (Khan, 2020), he wants to give a voice to conservative Germans of colour. The name points to East and West Germany and “the Orient and Occident. All dimensions are united in my personality.” When his channel gained traction, he was approached by a friend of Dagen. They met at the bookshop and she took him to the Leipzig bookfair where she introduced him to Kubitschek. “I thought Kubitschek was a racist. But when I read his work, I realized that this was high-quality stuff,” he says, yet again showing how the fact that racism is often envisioned as a sign of stupidity plays into hands of racist intellectuals. After the end of my fieldwork, Khan’s popularity in the far right’s online community rose further. Today his channel has almost 100,000 followers. He participated in the AfD’s “First Congress of Free Media” in the German parliament in 2019 (Figure 98; PI-News, 2019: 6:55-7:15, 9:27-10:02) alongside leading AfD politicians, far-right bloggers and influencers like former Breitbart author and Trump supporter Milo Yiannopoulos (Am Orde, 2019). In 2020 he started a new YouTube channel entitled “Change my mind” that was celebrated by AfD members of the German national parliament as a “new metapolitical format” (Figure 99; Seitz, 2020). He is also regular guest in AfD media formats.

Khan does not support Kubitschek’s and the Identitarian Movement’s rejection of multiculturalism:

For me it does work, I know it from Frankfurt. The problem is not different ethnicities. It is Islam. The contemporary far right has nothing to do with Nazism. The Nazis were leftists. What really presents a totalitarian threat today is Islam. Today's far right is not against Jews. It rightfully opposes Islam. It is also not about chauvinism anymore. Nobody wants Germany to rule the world or invade other countries. It is about the defence of Heimat, tradition and patriotism. And what is wrong with that?

Khan left Islam around the time PEGIDA started. "I felt there was no self-critique. Look at people like Seyran Ateş," he says, referring to a known German Muslim activist for a liberal Islam with ties to the far right (Göppfarth and Özyürek, 2020: 8–10). "She was caught up by reality and ended up being attacked by the Muslim community. I don't believe in reforming Islam. It is simply not realistic." I ask him if he is not concerned about the racism in the far right. "Not really. I think it is a minority. Even if most were to support racist views, they wouldn't seriously deport people. It is simply not realistic. I don't take this seriously."

He argues that leftists are today the true racists:

I have had many experiences at uni where self-describing multicultural leftists made racist comments. I have even thought about making a video about how the leftists are the real racists today. Their using of the terminology of the past such as "racist" and "Nazis" is backfiring. People start realizing that it is not true.

As we speak, two young students sitting next to us shake their heads, get up and leave. "You see," Khan says,

they had a hard time to bear with our conversation. You could see it in their faces. When I say these things, they don't say anything because they think "he is a Muslim, an immigrant so we have to tolerate that". But if I were a white German they would have spoken up.

Looking me in the eyes with a serious face he says, "You are discriminated against, not me. Isn't that racist too?"

While he criticizes the left's hypocrisy, he doesn't seem to mind the racist comments and prejudices he faces in Dresden's intellectual circles. In the meetings at Dagen's bookshop where he is present, he is frequently introduced as the "token sleeper" or "token-Muslim" even though all know that he is not religious. He is still, even if jokingly, reduced to his Muslimness. The irritation he causes shows that his mere presence in Dresden's far-right circles challenges forms of biological racism while, at the same time, helping it to reassert its cultural racism. Mirroring Hennig, who, as a white-Muslim, challenges the far right's cultural racism while

reasserting its whiteness, Khan helps the right to externalize biological racism to the left and to embrace a white cultural identity.

Kemal Yilmaz and the Celebration of Ethnopluralism

Kemal Yilmaz represents yet another way of finding a place in the movement. A close friend of Hennig, Yilmaz opposes Khan's positions and denounces attempts of assimilation and multiculturalism as unrealistic. His disappointment with multiculturalism has led him to embrace his "essential difference" as a Turk with a Muslim background while idealizing *Kulturation* as essentially German. He finds a place in the far right by portraying himself as a product of *Kulturation* while excluding Turks in general from it.

Yilmaz, a pianist who worked as a cab driver for many years, lives in Hanover but has been to Dresden several times to engage with Hennig and to get to know Dagen's circle. I get in touch with him through Hennig and meet him in Hanover in December 2018, after the end of my fieldwork. He lives in Langenhagen, a calm and leafy residential middle-class neighbourhood in the north of Hanover. His living room is dominated by a bookcase with many books from *Antaios*. He tells me that he is preparing a book project with Kositzka, Kubitschek's wife, in which he declares his love for German culture. I also notice Bernig's *Anders* in the bookcase (chapter four). Like Khan and Hennig, he supports PEGIDA, which he has followed online from its beginning.

I got to know Sebastian [Hennig] through PEGIDA. I engaged in many discussions on PEGIDA's Facebook [page]. At some point I found out about [the far-right magazine] Compact and the circles around [its editor] Jürgen Elsässer. I always tried to argue reasonably and rationally in support of PEGIDA. So I got to know people. Elsässer had the idea to write an article about me. He said I should definitely meet Hennig. This was the connection. We met in 2015 in Leipzig. Today we are friends.

What strikes me during our interview is that Yilmaz shares a lot with Ferdinand. Originally a leftist he has come to feel alienated from West Germany. He feels a strong empathy for PEGIDA demonstrators.

They started a debate critical of the mainstream that I have been missing in Germany for years. I have been frustrated with the status quo for a long time, more from a migrant perspective. I could really understand why they rose up. Even if the form didn't appeal to me. Long before

PEGIDA I had realized that many things are going wrong, especially with young Turks. The demographic imbalance in the schools leads to students not learning proper German. There are too many immigrants, so they don't really integrate. As an idealistic musician I used to think that music is the way to bind young immigrants to German culture. Today I am more sober about this.

Like Khan and Ferdinand, he sees the problem in a lack of appreciation of Germany's own culture and a tendency of self-hate:

Germans clearly lack self-confidence and a positive relation to their ethnic group because they focus on the negative aspects of their history. This German self-hate is horrible for immigrants. What should they integrate into? Take me as an example. I have always thought that Bildung and culture were important and essential to being accepted in Germany. I am a model immigrant. But my experience was that Germans, no matter their political view, only like foreigners if they have an inferior position, either socially or intellectually. As soon as one has a high intellectual level you can see that they feel unwell. I have [had] this experience time and again. Especially with leftists. At some point one starts thinking about what could be the reason for it? (...) Where are the Germans that still accept themselves as Germans and who have no problem with speaking up, slamming the fist on the table and saying, "our identity is non-negotiable". Germans who know who they are. So that one knows what to integrate into.

He only found those people in East Germany and Dresden's intellectual far right. In Hanover, he argues, there are too many left-liberal multiculturalists.

Even if people here appreciate traditions some things are simply not talked about. I never really got into conservative circles in Hanover. But the few conservatives I know would never vote for the AfD, let alone be proud Germans. But in fact, they are very German, they just don't want to own it. Instead they mock that being proud of being German is petty-bourgeois.

A core different view to that Ferdinand and Khan is Yilmaz' view on Islam. Here, he has more in common with Hennig, even if he is not a practising Muslim.

The fixation and generalizations on Islam are of course problematic. I know the Islamic world well enough to see that this is distorted.

Nevertheless, he sympathizes with the protesters. As for Hennig, Islam is not the actual problem for him. He argues that the fear of Islamization expresses a deeper East German alienation with Germany's society that he can empathize with.

I can understand this alienation because there are too many foreigners. For the people in Dresden this is something they see in West Germany. It scares them. I felt connected to them because of this alienation, the feeling that this is my country but at the same time it is not. Islam helps to awaken a German patriotic spirit, a common ground of Germanness shared by liberals, conservatives, right-wingers and nationalists. But seeing Islam as the utmost evil is nonsense. This is my main criticism. PEGIDA tries to bring people together against [his emphasis] Islamization. This is a negative identity. Why not for [his emphasis] the preservation of the occidental culture?

His alienation from German society stems from a deep frustration that emerges out of the attempt to become accepted as a German. He loves German literature and music; but German leftists and liberals never recognized his efforts to integrate. Like Ferdinand, he sees this lack of recognition reflected in a lack of representation of his “German experience” in the media.

For years German media either invited people with a beard wearing a kaftan who represent only a tiny part of Muslims or people who absolutely defended multiculturalism when the topic was foreigners, migration and integration. The average Turkish population was never represented.

According to Yilmaz, this lack of representation is directly linked to a lack of recognition of his Germanness. He tells how he tried many years to do something for society but time and again met rejection from the “left-liberal mainstream”.

In 2011 I had this pop song project. It was my first public political activity. We made song and a video with all kinds of children and people, with and without migration background. I was euphoric about it. I tried to get in touch with the Jusos, the youth organization of the centre-left social democrats, to promote it. I believed that to make integration work you needed to create a shared identity through German culture and language. I posted the video on the Jusos' Facebook page. It was deleted right away with a comment “We don't want this nationalist shit here.” (...) I was shocked. This has nothing to do with nationalism. There was only one verse: “We are proud of Germany.” This must have been the problem. But the biggest disappointment was that the local radio station had promised to play the song and talk about the efforts of the 150 people who contributed. I produced the music at my own cost. But they never played it. Then I was involved in this intercultural, interreligious day in Langenhagen, organized by a church and a mosque. I composed a piece for a chamber orchestra (...). It was performed in the most beautiful and oldest church in the city, by me [his emphasis], a migrant son of the city, on its 700-year anniversary. The church was packed. The people applauded for 10 minutes or even

longer. Standing ovations. And then the local press simply put one sentence at the end of their article: "Kemal Yilmaz wrote a song".

He pauses, and one sees that he is still deeply humiliated by this experience. "I still don't know what to say to this. This is worse than a degradation, worse than ignoring. (...) This lack of appreciation was the end for me. I quit." The lack of recognition by the media represents for him a lack of acceptance of him as a German. This negative experience with the German mainstream society and its politics of aesthetics made him turn away from it.

You can do whatever you want but you are not being accepted. The media are society or at least its mirror. So society doesn't want to see you and your work. But you know that you could actually move many things. You have a good education, you are self-confident, you love German culture. You try to give and what comes back? Nothing!

Yilmaz always felt close to the left. But his rejection by Hanover's cultural establishment that officially celebrates diversity and multiculturalism made him look for alternatives. Like Ferdinand, he found recognition in the far right. His views are appreciated, he finds clear answers to what being German means and finds a community that shares his alienation from a "left-liberal multicultural mainstream". His path to the far right, as well as his criticism of multiculturalism and an educational focus on the negative aspects of German history, is strikingly similar to Ferdinand's.

Through Sebastian and Götz Kubitschek's work in Schnellroda I started reading about many things that I simply didn't know before. For example, in history lessons at school we never talked about German refugees after World War II. We only talked about Germany's negative first half of the 20th century. (...) I admire Germany for being so critical about its past. This is a model for the whole world. But it cannot be a model if that means that Germany is abolished. The far right addresses this and the lack of communication about how we want to live together. What is German identity? Why does integration fail? Right-wingers are the only ones who talk about this. Leftists silence it. But their multicultural ideology will fail in the end.

Like Ferdinand, Gruber and Taylor and disagreeing with Khan, Yilmaz argues that multiculturalism cannot be an ideal for society.

Multiculturalism is individual, nothing that can be transferred to onto a group. Multicultural is me myself. I have grown up with two cultures. I can say it is not a nice experience. It is exhausting and not an ideal for a society. It is something that just happens and that includes a lot of negative experiences. One makes the best out of it, but one doesn't really belong anywhere. Only people who have never really lived multiculturalism, lived between two

cultures, can propagate this as an ideal. They are often all but multicultural themselves. For me multiculturalism dissolves cultural identities and this is first and foremost a painful experience.

In the book project with Kositzka he hopes to provide a migrant perspective from the right. He is very enthusiastic about this opportunity. The East German far right is giving him the sort of recognition that he never received from Hanover's cultural establishment.

I hope to provide a novel perspective. You have people like Seyran Ates. But what she is doing is unnatural, artificial. To say, "just construct a liberal Islam that can belong here". Like building Ikea furniture. Things must come into existence naturally. She appears to be really frustrated. She totally assimilated into an idea of Germany that now collapses before her eyes. She could probably not live in Turkey anymore. Just like Necla Kelek. They think that total assimilation is more amazing than one's own identity. I don't want to like one thing more than the other. My mother tongue is Turkish. I have a Turkish name. I don't artificially try to be German. I have tried this for a while. And noticed that this is nothing, neither one nor the other. I prefer to be only one thing. But this does not mean that I don't love the other anymore.

Yilmaz likes the clear idea of the homogenous culture and identity propagated by the far right. As he says, it has made him realize that he wants to move back to Turkey so that his children don't have to grow up between two cultures like him. The best would be if all the Turks in Germany would eventually return to Turkey.

Many of the young Turks born and raised in Germany realize that they are not really welcome here, that this is not really their Heimat. They will always be a stranger here. If they want to live here as Turks, then they have to live with always feeling like a stranger. So why not live in Turkey with one's kind? I wish people would simply move back. This would solve the German-Turkish problem.

If this problem is not solved, the only alternative for him is the polarization between West and East, natives and immigrants, leading to a civil war and a split of Germany "into a German Germany and a multicultural Germany" he says, echoing the far right's claims of East Germany being more German, that is white (Greiffenhagen and Greiffenhagen, 1994). "So to say a new GDR. Saxony could hold a referendum to leave the federal republic. Maybe other East German states will join." He hopes that the educated bourgeoisie will rise to defend Germany's cultural unity against "globalist ideologues": "The Educated Bourgeoisie is my hope! But if there is a green chancellor, Germany will soon look like Marseille or Birmingham. You won't be able to recognize Germany anymore. Then we will yearn for the NSU [National

Socialist Underground]. This will look ridiculous compared to what the violence that will come. They will use the same terrorist means as Muslim terrorists!”

By simultaneously embracing his biological non-white identity and a German white cultural identity he both confirms the far-right ideology of ethnopluralism and a purely positive affirmation of white culture. He can keep both, his non-white and Muslim identity *and* find a place in Dresden’s intellectual far right only because he advocates for a separation of Turks and Germans. By embracing educated bourgeois ideals as his own he, even if he rejects the term assimilation, reflects the importance of educated bourgeois ideals for the “becoming German” of minorities that equally characterized minority efforts to assimilate in pre-World War II Germany (Motadel, 2019: 245–249).

5. Conclusion

Gruber, Taylor and Ferdinand show how easily notions of culture can be essentialized and directly fed into biological white racism. They show how enduring unmarked exclusionary notions of whiteness and religion inherent in the political aesthetics of democracy, liberalism, secularism, as well as educated bourgeois culture, provide the symbolic repertoire for the ethno-*poiesis* and racial becoming of a European self. In a context where racism is seen as part of the Nazi past or marginal politics, where democracy, liberalism, secularism and intellectualism are being seen as inherently opposite to racism, the far right can legitimate claims of essential racial, cultural and religious difference only by cladding them in a democratic, liberal, secular and intellectual vocabulary. By asserting democracy, the far right can reconstruct an essential difference through the language of a racialized cultural and religious “other”. By embracing secularism as the “logical outcome” of a Christian tradition the far right can assert “our Christian culture” and redeem the dark sides in Christian-European and German history (Anidjar, 2007: 49). Instead of denying or silencing liberal modernity’s “racialized history and the attendant histories of racist exclusions, hiding them behind some idealized, self-promoting, yet practically ineffectual, dismissal of race as a morally irrelevant category,” (Goldberg, 1993: 7) as done by Durs Grünbein, Tellkamp and Dresden’s far-right intellectuals assume liberal democracy’s and *Kulturnation*’s racist heritage and “wear it as a badge of honor”. By tapping into this symbolic repertoire that reaches beyond the far-right

margins, the far right can design a politics of aesthetics where its familiarity renders the far right attractive to self-defined left liberals like Markus Schürer and Ferdinand.

At the same time, the critical assessment of unmarked racism is portrayed by the far right as an attack from the radical left on “Western heritage”. Racism and totalitarianism are externalized onto a Muslim and leftist “other” in order to victimize the self. This internal threat is complemented by an external threat by framing the refugees as an attack on a European body politic. Muslims and refugees are used as “foreign founders” of a symbolically united, homogenous white German identity that transcends past guilt and present polarization between East and West Germany, elites and the people.

The examples of Hennig, Khan and Yilmaz show, however, that the far right has to adapt to the reality of a multicultural and multireligious Germany. All three “simultaneously challenge and reproduce biological and cultural racisms as well as a homogenous understanding of German and European culture” (Özyürek, 2014: 2). They empathize with PEGIDA and East Germans as victims of a left- and West Germany-dominated discourse that labels them as Nazis and extremists. They call for an overcoming of a guilt-based German identity that they make responsible for a lack of assimilation and integration of the non-white “other” and a left that hides its racism behind a multicultural façade.

While Hennig’s Muslim belief is silenced in his far-right activism, Feroz Khan highlights his past Muslimness to show his quality as an insider who knows Islam. He can be incorporated because he leaves behind Islam and portrays it as incompatible with Germany’s cultural nationhood. He fulfils the position of a “native informant” who does not serve the interests of his own community but instead those who oppress it (Dabashi, 2011; E Said, 2003, 2011) by claiming to provide an authentic insight into the “other”. He confirms the prejudices against Islam held by the excluding majority in order to find acceptance in the far right.

Yilmaz does the same, yet not as an informant speaking about Islam, but speaking about Turks and the “multicultural experience”. He externalizes racism onto the left-establishment and believes, contrary to Khan, that multiculturalism is unrealistic. He finds a place in the far-right circles because he asserts his cultural and ethnic Turkishness and supports a return of all Turks to Turkey, all of which corresponds well with the far right’s ethnopluralism. He claims that the *Kulturation* forms the essence of a German nationhood that most Turks, with him as an exception, lack and will not achieve.

Khan and Yilmaz represent a growing group of Muslim-background intellectuals in Germany's far right who either claim the incompatibility or compatibility of non-whites, Islam and Germanness and the far right in particular. In doing so they help to regulate the ways in which the far right draws the boundaries of the German nation as well as the far-right movement itself. The different ways Hennig, Yilmaz and Khan find a place in Dresden's intellectual far-right circles, reflect an "exclusionary incorporation" that allows them to be included and recognized in the far right and its concept of nationhood, yet "only as compromised subjects" who aim to approximate whiteness, as defined by the far right, as much as possible (Partridge, 2008: 660, 680). They can be part of the far right through the silencing of one part of their identity, while highlighting another. Ironically, it is by underlining their status as essentially different that they can more openly embrace narratives of homogeneity. By rejecting their complex identities, they function as foreign founders who answer "The German Question" with a clear affirmation of cultural and ethnic homogeneity in times of perceived crisis.

The far right's quest for an essential and racialized difference in the context of a multicultural and globalized Germany unmask its alleged shift from race to culture I described in chapter one as a self-legitimizing myth. It becomes clear that notions of race are informed by biological and cultural assumptions that are ascribed as essential markers onto an "other". Yet, this myth is limited to the far right. As the Tellkamp-Grünbein debate shows, it is equally implicit in dominant self-conceptions of a liberal, democratic and secular Germany. The far right and its intellectuals thus don't need to construct a racialized European identity. Rather, by tapping into a symbolic repertoire of essential difference they make the unmarked racial logic in mainstream discourses on European identity explicit. By doing so, the far right can merge the claims for a liberal, democratic and secular European culture with the explicit reassertion of a superior white race.

CONCLUSION: Imagining a New *Kulturnation*, Silencing “the Foreigner”

Emiliano Chaimite is a very busy man. The director of Afropa, the Association for African-European Understanding, welcomes me in the building in Dresden-Neustadt that houses his association. Neustadt is known to be Dresden’s most diverse neighbourhood and, if there is a counter-neighbourhood to the elitist and conservative Loschwitz, it is this neighbourhood north-east of Dresden’s city centre. Here, what Dagen and her circles would call, left-liberal elites, young students, Dresdners of colour, migrants and refugees live together in a vibrant neighbourhood that for the local *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) represents the “Antifa-neighbourhood”. Many students live here in flatshares in one of the many 19th century buildings. Like Loschwitz, Neustadt was once a centre of alternative lifestyles in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Today, as Dresden’s “ethnic neighbourhood”, as sometimes described by locals, its streets are filled with diverse cafés, hipster shops and restaurants from Vietnamese to Indian and Syrian. The neighbourhood is organized around *Die Scheune*, the barn, a cultural and music venue famous for its weekly jazz sessions. Many of the old buildings are covered in graffiti. Lantern poles are full of anti-far-right stickers that, the closer you walk to the city centre, are challenged by far-right stickers expressing the aesthetic and symbolic struggles of Dresden on even the most banal units of Dresden’s cityscape (Figure 100).



Figure 93: Light poles in Dresden-Neustadt with stickers against the far right and for solidarity (left) and showing a pre-war German flag with the slogan “Germany, Germany above everything.” The words written in an old German font are parts of the third and forbidden verse of the German national anthem (photos taken by the author).

Afropa's building is situated in the *Königsbrücker Straße*, one of the major busy thoroughfares in Dresden's north. Few people stop here, most hasten through the street to reach another place. Even in Neustadt's pluralist aesthetics, the building has only a marginal visibility and appears to be temporary. Chaimite is standing in the little café on the ground floor as I enter the building. Born in Mozambique, Chaimite moved to the GDR as a so-called *Vertragsarbeiter*, contractual worker, the East German version of guest workers, in the late 1980s to be trained as a caster in Magdeburg. In 1991 he settled down in Dresden and started working as a nurse in a local hospital. He lets me know that he doesn't have much time but that before we talk, I should have a look at the exhibition his association is currently housing on the first floor of the building. Entitled "Hassan and his grandchildren – living together in Dresden", the exhibition is advertised by a banner on the building exterior (Figure 101). The exhibition was developed mainly in West Germany. It has been touring the country and tells the story of the so-called guest workers and their families in West Germany since the 1960s. I am surprised that the exhibition has not been more discussed or advertised in Dresden. The debates on the city's polarization dominate the local public sphere. The exhibition, however, was not very visible in these debates.

As I walk through the rooms, I learn about the personal stories of families who have contributed to the economic success of post-war West Germany, and their daily struggles in the past and today. Audio recordings of their grandchildren tell me about their daily experiences with racism in Germany today and the feeling of not being seen as part of the country and its history. I see photos of families' first years in Germany, proud depictions of a Mercedes bought with hard-earned money and family celebrations in new-found prosperity. These personal success stories are accompanied by the accounts of struggle with daily marginalization. I am the only visitor in the exhibition and some of the films shown run, I imagine, for many hours of the day without being seen, speaking to the large empty rooms in which they are exhibited. The exhibition is really well done. However, the many objects are housed in rooms that are not necessarily suitable and in a building and institution that does not necessarily attract the same attention as the many prestigious museums in the city centre. The stories are very moving, yet I am surprised that it is mainly about a West German history. I leave with mixed feelings and wonder why there is no such an exhibition on the East German *Vertragsarbeiter* in the city's central municipal museum that tells the local stories of East Germany and workers from "socialist brother countries", such as Chaimite.



Figure 94: The building housing Chaimite's Afropa with a banner advertising the exhibition "Hassan and his grandchildren" (left), photo of the exhibition (photos taken by the author).

After the exhibition, Chaimite and I have a coffee together. I ask him what he makes of the situation in the city today and how, in his eyes, Dresden has changed since he moved here. "The first impression of Dresden when I moved here was, to be honest, a big shock," Chaimite starts. "Jorge João Gomondai had just been murdered," he says, referring to the murder a young man who, like him had come to the GDR as a *Vertragsarbeiter* from Mozambique in the 1980s and was murdered by a group of neo-Nazis in the Neustadt in 1991.

Therefore, in the beginning I was accompanied by constant fear. You could see that Dresden was not the same as Berlin where I had lived before. It is very provincial and I really felt that the atmosphere was very oppressive, especially after the murder. I have tried to overcome that by integrating as well as possible. I started getting involved in associations, especially through sport. And that is how I managed to be respected and to find many friends, to make Dresden my Heimat,

he says with a certain pride.

But it always was and has remained a struggle, especially to be able to stay here, to become a German citizen. I realized that to change things we had to get organized. I started working for different migrant associations but soon noticed that they were more interested in keeping their national traditions alive. But I wanted to build up an association that would represent the political interests of all migrants, to give them a political lobby.

As he says, politics, especially in the 1990s, simply ignored the concerns of *Ausländer*, the German term for "foreigners", literally translated as "not being from the land" and often

used pejoratively today. Looking back at the past 30 years, Chaimite offers a damning account especially of the centre-right Christian Democrat Union (CDU) and the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) who have dominated Saxonian politics since reunification.

They never took us seriously. When we tried to gain political visibility they always ignored and blocked us. Racism and far right extremism, on the other hand, was tolerated. And one could see that even the institutions themselves were often rather on the sides of far-right perpetrators rather than of those who were fighting them. Instead of being supported, people who spoke up and demonstrated were stigmatized, marginalized and even persecuted in some cases. So of course, many migrants left Dresden over the years. I thought about leaving many times myself.

This, so he says, is the core problem, as many students from other countries or with diverse backgrounds also decide to leave the city.

Foreign students rather go to Leipzig and Berlin. These cities are simply more diverse and open. As a consequence, you have a lack of intellectual migrants here who can speak up and be active members of political discussion in the city and the state. And there is a strong resistance against any changes to more participation.

Chaimite knows what he is talking about. For almost 30 years he has been a central driving force in organizing the interests of migrants in Dresden. He has been working for numerous initiatives and associations fighting for rights of migrants in Dresden and Saxony. In the mid-1990s he managed to build the association he had dreamed of – the *Dachverband sächsischer Migrantenorganisationen e.V.* – the main Saxonian migrant association, whose director he is today. He has also been an influential member of the so-called *Ausländerrat Dresden*, an organization organizing the interests of “foreigners” in the city that still carries the name *Ausländer* in it even though it Chaimite also represents the interests of many *Germans* of colour.

In these associations you can see that people of colour really want to make Germany, Saxony and Dresden their home. We want to be in Germany and participate in the democracy here, shape it in ways that we probably never could in most of our countries of origin. So living here in Germany is a great promise, but it remains a constant struggle to actually be accepted as a member. To put it in different words: we have too little to survive and too much to die,

he says, using a known German proverb to express the continued ambiguity of his being German as a privilege and struggle at the same time. Despite the struggles, he and his associations have, in almost 30 years of work, managed to improve things. He has become one

of Dresden's few public intellectuals of colour who, increasingly so, is invited to take part in panel debates.

We managed to have a central square in Dresden be named after Jorge João Gomondai [Figure 102]. We do a lot of work in local schools. And especially the left-leaning parties, the Greens, the far-left Die Linke and the centre-left SPD [Social Democratic Party] have become more responsive to our perspectives. Especially since they have been in power here in Dresden's local government. We were able to contribute to policymaking of the state government with our expertise and to participate in the elaboration of Saxony's first integration law. But overall, one has to say, sadly, that the politicians and Dresden's citizens are still not showing a clear position against the far right. There are too many who say about PEGIDA that "they may have a point". If there is a real mobilization in demonstrations against the far right, it is mainly people who come from the outside and from other cities. Here, Dresden and Saxony clearly lag behind many other cities and states in West Germany.



Figure 95: Photo of the square named after Jorge João Gomondai (photo taken by the author).

He sees a big problem, less in PEGIDA itself, which he sees as mainly driven by frustrated citizens, but more in elites who pick up PEGIDA's racism. Here he looks not only at the increased influence of the *AfD* but also at the so-called *Werte Union*, the Value Union, a group inside the centre-right CDU with connections to the far right and the *AfD*.

What is crazy is that the so-called Ausländerbeauftragte, the commissioner for foreigner's affairs in Saxony, is himself a very conservative member of the CDU who, we suspect, has links to the Werte Union. How is he supposed to represent us? He has no meaning for us as a person. I fear that he is less there to represent us but to control us. We always get people put in front of us by the parties who then claim to speak on behalf of us. But we can speak for ourselves! They simply want to avoid us getting more political influence, to be able to participate as equal members of society. They want to keep us as second- and third-class citizens. As long as you are grateful and polite without demanding or criticizing you are fine. But don't you dare to speak up for your interests!

Chaimite not only sees problems with the centre- and far right. He says, these problems reach deep into the public institutions, bureaucracy and even left-wing unions and parties.

I joined the [centre-left] SPD myself in 2010. Many then threatened to leave the party because I joined. So the left also has a problem. They always say, "What do you want, we will represent you, so why do you want to participate?" But this attitude is less visible simply because the centre right parties have been in power for so long. Germany is a democracy and that is great. But it is a democracy that excludes migrants or those seen as such.

B Chaimite hoped to change this by becoming an SPD member. He ran for the municipal council as well as for the state parliament. So far without success.

I am not too disappointed. I know of course that I am a pioneer. I pave the way for the next generation. They are my real hope. Many have travelled, lived abroad or are part of minorities themselves. They are more open, more diverse, more radical and more outspoken than my generation. So I tell them to go and join the parties, to become part of the institutions and also the police. Only in this way there is hope for fundamental change.

While Chaimite has made slow, but important progress and is even invited to speak on panels with the Saxonian prime minister, his perspective and the work of his associations is rarely reflected in the debates that dominate the German public sphere during my fieldwork. Instead, many articles on Dresden centre around an alleged new debating culture that would be born in Dresden and that could serve as a model for Germany. It is a debating culture that envisions two sides of a white citizenry, one cosmopolitan and left-liberal, the other one conservative

and right wing. During my fieldwork, Germans of colour were only a marginal part of the debate. While Dresden's political and cultural establishment, as well as the city's official institutions, increasingly tried to keep their distance to Dagen and her circles, they also attempted to rebrand the conflict with the far right as a sign of an exemplary democratic debating culture.

This strategy of rebranding the city's polarization while excluding minorities is exemplified by an article on Dresden that appeared in the well-known German weekly *Die Zeit*, including an interview with Frank Böckelmann. The version sold in Dresden had an extra black and yellow sticker, the official colours of the Saxonian state, saying "Typically Dresden. The city from which Germany as a whole could learn" (Figure 103).



Figure 96: Issue of the German left-liberal weekly *Die Zeit* (18 May 2018) including Frank Böckelmann (top left).

The article in *Die Zeit* is an example of the German debate as a whole that has tried to brand the far right as extremist and, at the same time, avoids facing any substantial engagement with the racist and populist entanglements of the vision of *Kulturnation* and the liberal-democratic, but ultimately exclusive vision of nationhood linked to it. Even if Dagen was increasingly excluded from official institutions of the city, the resonance the debate she organized with Tellkamp and Grünbein found in Germany's public sphere shows that on the one hand, she has managed to play a central role in moving Dresden into the centre of a national debate during my fieldwork. On the other hand, Dresden's circles have managed to create a debate between white citizens allegedly embracing a liberal or conservative vision of the national self while excluding Germans of colour from any future vision of *Kulturnation*.

Toward the end of my fieldwork this strategy had turned into a central element in the city's official narrative. The municipality tried to embrace the debates pushed for by Dagen and Dresden's far-right intellectuals to let them happen on its own terms, and to rebrand them as a positive marker for Dresden's image. When I leave Dresden in July 2018, the city's government turned Dresden's polarization into a "debating culture" representative of not only Germany's but also Europe's democratic debating culture. Dresden's polarization was transformed into the central point of marketing for the city's bid to become the cultural capital of Europe in 2025.

In the online portal for the application (Dresden, 2020), which is also available in English (Figure 104) Dresden is praised as a "unique *Kulturstadt*, cultural city in Europe", a heritage that is today the basis for a democratic debate. Representative not only of Germany's vision of *Kulturnation*, but of Europe, "the old continent shaped by culture", Dresden is idealized as a prime place debating the "current crisis of the continent" without openly stating what this crisis actually is. For the reader, however, it is instantly clear that the application refers to the so-called refugee crisis. The lines of conflict emerging out of this "crisis" are portrayed as between those who are "ready for the technological change" of the "everyday world" and those who reject it. That is, between those "who continue to support our basic democratic principles" and those who "consider them outdated". Between those who perceive themselves as "a winner in economic development through globalization (sic)" and those who see themselves "on the losing side". And finally, between those who are "willing to invite people of other origins and religions into my society" and those who "want to be isolated."



Figure 97: Screenshot of the application pitch on the official website of the Dresden municipality (screenshot taken by the author).

While the text suggests promoting a debate of equals, it also clearly draws symbolic boundaries between two groups of the white local population. On the one hand, the enemies of technological change who, as losers of globalization, have lost belief in democracy and thus prefer closure over openness. On the other hand, those who have benefitted from globalization and embrace democracy and are thus more open not only to technological change but also to “inviting people of other origins and religions”. Without stating it openly, the politics of aesthetics of the application restate the clear opposition between enlightened democrats and closed far-right populists. It thus defines the basis for debate on the terms of the former while marking the latter as those who have to catch up. While both groups implicitly refer to a white local population, non-white “people of other origins” remain bystanders in this debate, even if many have lived in Dresden for decades and many all their lives.

The crisis is here presented as a crisis of a German and European culture that is driven apart by a polarization of German nationhood. Echoing Grütters’ speech from the bookshop prize award theory (introduction), the politics of aesthetics of Dresden’s application to become European capital of culture envision a shared *Kulturnation* as the remedy against this crisis.

Kulturnation emerges as an essential pre-political bond that can turn conflict into a constructive dialogue not only inspiring Germany but also Europe as a whole. A redemptive future is envisioned as a “Neue Heimat 2025” with Dresden as a cultural capital of Europe, a new homeland that, so the harmonious vision goes, should be the basis for a “common future”, “strengthening cohesion” and a new “culture of togetherness”. Yet, once again, *Kulturnation* emerges as a *common sense* of community while the “other” remains marked as a guest that is of “other origin” and “invited”. As in the Tellkamp and Grünbein debate, the “other”, marked as Islam and immigrants, is not included in the discussion but used as a “foreign founder for a new *Heimat*”. Chaimite and Dresdeners of colour were mainly absent in these debates. Instead of being included as active citizens, they are doomed to live with the outcome of what the “Neue Heimat” will mean for them. “The foreigner” becomes the founding figure of a new “togetherness” that, in the terms of the application, is either explicit far right or implicit official white togetherness that is either envisioned as “liberal” or “illiberal”.

As the application shows, four years after the emergence of PEGIDA, the influence and power of Dagen, her circles and supporters have contributed to turning the racist and anti-Muslim movement into a marketing tool for Dresden to become the cultural capital of Europe. While this is mainly the bizarre outcome of a strategy followed by the city to both allow the debate but to let it happen only on its terms, it would not have happened without Dresden’s far-right educated bourgeois joining the forces with the populist far-right PEGIDA and *AfD*. It is Dagen’s milieu, the politicization of an educated bourgeoisie via the politics of aesthetics it employs, that underpins the banality of an explicit racial becoming and the racial becoming explicit of the tensions between culture and race in *Kulturnation* and notions of western cultural exceptionalism more generally. As the response by the local government shows, the polarization does not, as so many times before in German history, lead to a questioning of the exclusive dimensions of *Kulturnation* and its implicit white nationalism. Instead, *Kulturnation* re-emerges as the ideal of a future cultural re-unification after polarization, the refounding of a German cultural nationhood whose unity was questioned with the so-called refugee crisis in 2015.

1. Beyond Dresden

Here, Dresden's application to *Kulturnation* has to be understood as part of a broader, hegemonic vision of nationhood in Germany, a licit national vision that perceives itself as post-racist and immune to the far right. Such a vision focuses on class and poor education as markers of a populist far-right discourse. It is a vision that equally informs the official vision of bookshops and *Querdenker* as an essential part of a modern liberal Germany, as Germany's culture minister Monika Grütters argued when awarding the German bookshop prize to Dagen. And it is a vision that also underpins much of the populism scholarship that tends to neglect how politics of aesthetics and the racist heritage underpinning them can inform the racial becoming of an exclusive white identity linking far-right narratives to the mainstream and even the left. Focusing on *Kulturnation* as a narrative identity, both official and far-right counter-hegemonic visions of it share more than both sides would like to admit. Namely, the idea that *Kulturnation* forms the basis for a narrative identity that promises the redemption (McAdams and McLean, 2013), a "New *Heimat*" in times of a national and European crisis – a crisis that is taken for granted as triggered by foreignness.

These politics of aesthetics reach beyond Dresden and equally form the ideational basis for Germany's latest official architectural expression of *Kulturnation*. In Berlin's historic centre, one of the most important cultural projects after the German reunification nears its opening: the so-called Humboldt Forum. Here, Germany's former imperial palace that once housed the Berlin conference that divided up Africa among European colonial powers and prepared the German genocide of the Herreros is currently being rebuilt. One of the motivations for the reconstruction is, as in the post-reunification years, a "*Heimat*-fetishism" that took hold in cities in Germany after reunification and that has led to the original reconstruction of historical city centres in East and West. In Dresden, but also in Frankfurt, millions have been spent on reconstructing city centres to "heal the wounds" the World War II and the socialist GDR has torn into the pre-war cityscapes and to redeem aesthetically a shared national belonging in the reunified Germany (James, 2009, 2012). In Berlin, the socialist state tore down the original imperial palace in the 1950s and put in its place the Palace of the Republic, the GDR's parliament and political centre. The palace was, in turn, knocked down a few years ago to make room for the reconstruction of the imperial palace.

No other urban project better symbolizes the entanglements of German reunification, contemporary visions of *Kulturnation*, its entanglement in colonial racism and the ways this

occludes and reproduces colonial discourses in the present in the search for a new symbolic “world-open” national unity. The Humboldt Forum will not only be a reconstruction of the imperial palace, but it will also, to express this “world-openness”, house Berlin’s so-called non-European collections. Linked to the German “explorer brothers” Humboldt, this collection consists mainly of artefacts collected under German and European colonial rule. Echoing the aims of Radebeul’s Karl May Museum in a less provincial context, it is conceived “as a unique place of experience, learning and encounter” that will prompt inspiring experiences and “open the way for animated exchange” (Humboldt Forum, 2020). A colonial past is here literally rebuilt to form the basis for a space for intercultural exchange and “to meet the cultures of the world”.

The use of “foreignness” as a constitutive “other” of a symbolically united national self becomes obvious by a new national memorial that is planned in front of the rebuilt castle. On a site that was once occupied by a national memorial celebrating the unification of imperial Germany in 1871, a new memorial celebrating the 1989 reunification will be built. The politics of aesthetics of the entire project are thus aimed at a symbolic unification of a 19th century past to envision a global *Kulturnation* post-1989 that whitewashes German history while eradicating Germany’s socialist past. As a national embodiment of the European civilization, this unity is dependent on the literal exclusionary incorporation of “non-European” collections – an exclusionary vision of world openness that depends on the presenting the “other” on European terms and that is celebrated by the far right as the rebuilding of one of Berlin’s “most valuable buildings” representing “humanist-European canon of *Bildung*” (Lombard, 2018: 62–63).

2. Making the Strange Familiar, Revealing Painful Truths

The politics of aesthetics of *Kulturnation* thus remain central to the official and counter-hegemonic visions of nationhood. In Dresden *Kulturnation*’s pervasiveness and uncontested nature form the banal aesthetics for a radicalizing educated bourgeoisie. During my first visit to Dagen’s bookshop, it was these aesthetics that also led me to admire the picturesque setting of the bookshop. Back in January 2018, the beginning of my fieldwork, the educated bourgeois aesthetics of Loschwitz and the bookshop gave me a feeling of familiarity. In an uncanny way, my left, educated bourgeois and white background made me feel at home in the bookshop and,

as it appeared to me during my first visit, not much in the bookshop seemed to give it away as a local far-right hub. Had I visited the bookshop five years earlier, I would probably have made no link to the far right. I would have enjoyed the alternative aesthetics and the picturesque character of Loschwitz.

Yet, walking through the bookshop one last time before my departure from Dresden, six months after my first visit, I had to face the uncomfortable truth that the very aesthetics that have also shaped my own biography, that had been taught to me at school, have become the aesthetics that drive and enable the explicit racial becoming of an educated bourgeoisie. I realize that to a German of colour the exclusivity of these aesthetics may have been apparent from the onset. My own white, middle-class and educated bourgeois East German background veiled the exclusive whiteness underpinning Loschwitz' and Dagen's aesthetics. My fieldwork thus made me encounter a painful truth. That the danger of a politicized racism is not primarily embodied by left-behind East German neo-Nazis; rather, this threat is inherent in aspects of my own identity as a white, educated, bourgeois middle-class German man. My own biography, reading of history and in many ways my initial reading of the bookshop was marked by a white perspective that I did not perceive as such. In other words, it was my own identification with the notion of *Kulturnation* that initially occluded my reading of the far right.

For me this became most apparent when talking to Ferdinand (chapter six). Born in the same year as me, he grew up in Dresden in a left-leaning, educated bourgeois family in Hellerau, like Grünbein. Like me, he has always been interested in politics and culture, spent his civil service abroad in France and studied in the UK. He started a PhD in the same year as I did. For a long time, he opposed PEGIDA and the far right. When I met him for an interview in Dresden, he had become a fervent reader of *Tumult*, seeing non-white Germans and Muslims as essentially different and bearers of a "different soul". What if I had grown up in Dresden and had had, like Ferdinand, a Markus Schürer as a professor during my studies? What if Dagen's bookshop had been my favourite bookshop? What if people I had admired for their knowledge and standing as intellectuals had turned to support the far right?

As Dresden's and Germany's official visions of *Kulturnation*, as well as my own entanglement in these narratives show, the research on the far right should try to better understand how the far right makes explicit tensions in mainstream discourses visible rather than reproducing the far right as an essential populist, racist or irrational "other". To do so, more attention needs to be paid to the politics of aesthetics that make far-right thoughts not

appear as part of an “other” but rather as part of the self. Future research should analyse how political ideas that used to feel strange are incorporated and accepted in the development of political subjectivities when embedded in a familiar politics of aesthetics. Following anthropologist William Mazzarella, the question should be: What exactly is it that makes individuals without former links to the far right who encounter far-right intellectuals, ideas and spaces exclaim “this speaks to me!”? Or, to relate it to my first encounter of Loschwitz and Dagen’s bookshop in January 2018: How can a personal encounter with a movement in the context of a politics of aesthetics that one is familiar with lead to experiencing a political movement that one opposes to be experienced “as *mine*” (Mazzarella, 2017: 154). How can the embracing of familiar aesthetics even by left liberals mean the exclusion of a marginalized Germans of colour? As this thesis has argued, it is precisely the still underresearched capacity of the far right to make its political strangeness appear culturally familiar by activating shared mimetic archives that explains in part its success.

In order to better understand this process, it would be fruitful if future research compared subnational regions in different countries to look at how local elites similar to those in Dresden contribute to the explicit forming of a white educated bourgeois identity. Independent bookshops and cultural centres like Dagen’s in Loschwitz promise to yield insights into the articulation of this identity between the local and the national level and the banalization of a far-right white nationalism through an alternative politics of aesthetics. Virag Molnár’s research in Hungary (Molnár, 2017) and similar kinds of bookshops in France (Dupuis, 2018) point to comparable spaces and aesthetics of an educated bourgeois white nationalism in Eastern and Western Europe. Anthropologists are well placed to explore these more subtle, everyday ways the far right draws on present and past symbolic repertoires to design, assert and defend exclusive white national identities and while credibly defending “liberal and democratic European values”.

Analysing these subtle signifiers of race also means to critically assess one’s own positionality as a researcher. It was not only the time during my fieldwork that made me question the role of my own identity and background in my research, my access to Dresden’s far-right circles and my reading of it; it was also presenting my research after my fieldwork. Here, friends and colleagues of colour made me aware that I initially did not reflect enough upon the white perspective I myself had on the far right by, for example, drawing on a literature coming primarily from white scholars. I recognized this as a larger problem in the scholarship on the far right when I participated in conferences on the far right where the large majority of

the scholars attending were white. At these conferences I realized that there is a tendency among white researchers of the far right to locate the far right at the margins instead of looking at in how far one's own white identity is entangled in the exclusive tropes the far right makes visible and explicit. This shows that researchers themselves are entangled in the very white perspective that underpins not only the far right itself but also local and national policymakers' answers to counter radicalization.

While this thesis has tried to make the entanglements of race and culture, populism and intellectualism its central axis of research, its biggest limitation is the fact that not enough attention has been paid to the question of gender. Why is it that so many women are leading this far right dissidence? What do books written by women, like Gruber's *Loving Dead White Men*, tell us about a movement where women have gained unprecedented prominence through the celebration of traditional visions of masculinity and gender roles? Why are the intellectuals of colour in the far-right movement all men? And what is the role of the politics of aesthetics of gender in the spaces, urban places, memorials and heritage that is fetishized by the educated bourgeois far right? How does gender intersect with class and race in the far right's local politics of aesthetics and its continuities to mainstream visions? These are all important questions that this thesis has touched upon but not sufficiently analysed and theorized. Future research will need to do more to better understand the entanglements of white feminism and the far right at the local level to understand these puzzling questions.

Finally, especially in Germany, the far right's links to the fascist and Nazi past should be highlighted. Yet, this should not lead to the unequivocal reading of contemporary far-right movements as "Nazis" or "fascists" as this veils the fact that they make explicit the ways past middle-class and mainstream visions of European supremacy and nationhood are intertwined with notions of race in the context of the 21st century. To understand this better, scholars of the far right should engage more with contemporary literatures on race and whiteness. To better assess the relation between "ordinary or normative white supremacy and extremist violence" (Schneider and Bjork-James, 2020: 176), between the radicalism of *AfD* and PEGIDA and the exclusionary character of Dresden's democracy, scholars of the far right should follow other disciplines in critically assessing the methodological whiteness of their discipline. Facing the "co-imbrication of whiteness" and far-right studies will be necessary to begin to see the role of far-right studies itself in perpetuating the notion of a racist, irrational far right detached from mainstream politics and obscuring the continuities between explicit and implicit white identity constructions.

In particular, the capacity of race to form a shared basis for populist and intellectual politics of aesthetics is current underassessed in the research on the far right. Future research on the far right should thus focus on how the political aesthetics of the banal everyday, licit notions of nationhood and accepted, intellectualized forms of exclusion complement populist movements at the local level. To understand how the far right can draw on widely shared politics of aesthetics that vernacularize intellectualism and intellectualize vernacularism it should thus not be read as a predominantly populist movement that is essentially antagonistic to “liberal elites” or “intellectuals” or “politics as usual”.

To be sure, the research on populism has shed light on how class allegiances have been mobilized by the far right. For example, in his widely received study of East Germany and the role of a post-1989 experience of crisis and transformation and the role of this experience for contemporary German politics, Steffen Mau has pointedly written that “in the contemporary discourse right-wing populist propose an offer that seems to be hard to beat, as it relieves people from impositions. They say: ‘The World must be changed so that it adapts to you!’ Liberals, be it market liberals or enlightened cosmopolitans, have a different message:

You have to change and adapt to a transforming world!’ Populists thus make an offer of relieve and recognition while liberal forces call impose change and adaptation on people. (Mau, 2019: 247)

While Mau here points to an important element of what he frames as a “populist” discourse, his notion of populism implies a “white people” or “white working-class” that has been left behind, excluding many workers of colour who claim visibility, such as Chaimite. His analysis veils that the far right today does not only give an offer to white left-behind Germans who do not want to adapt to the realities of a globalizing world. Rather, as I hope to have shown in this thesis, the far right also makes a seductive offer to a white educated bourgeois, to white leftists and liberals, namely, not to face the painful truth in one’s own entanglement and occlusion of contemporary forms of racism. Embracing the uncontested idea of *Kulturnation* means to be on the right side of history and to embrace the right kind of nation. Its politics of aesthetics transform what is marked as “strange” and “essentially different” far right populism in widely shared discourses and academic debates into something familiar. By drawing on shared symbolic repertoires of a white cultural nationhood the far right’s politics of aesthetics make a “strange” far right “familiar”, while engaged democrats of colour are branded as *Ausländer* and eternal strangers or guests.

As a mirror of the unmarked racist and populist heritage of mainstream visions of *Kulturnation*, Dresden's far-right intellectuals thus point to a number of painful truths that self-declared "liberal-democratic" visions of *Kulturnation*, and also researchers of the far right, often tend to neglect. Reading the far right as essentially different from mainstream politics fails to recognize that the politicization of Dresden's educated bourgeoisie, its explicit embracing of far right ideology, populism and racism is a local expression of the end of a neoliberal hegemony based on post-politics and technocratic administration on the one hand, and the "fantasy of postracism" on the other (Mazzarella, 2019: 50).

For one thing, Dresden's far right intellectuals show that the far right's violent fantasies embody a vision of hope for parts of the white German population, and even for German Muslims and non-white Germans. It is a hope for a future where Germans and immigrants don't have to deal with diversity and contradictions in the past and the present. Instead of critically engaging with the racist heritage of liberalism and democracy and the tensions it entails in the present, the far right promise a redemptive narrative in which not only a guilt-free past is envisioned, but also a future that remains free from feelings of guilt linked to these entanglements and thus also a more inclusive vision the past, of *Kulturnation* and political practice in the present and the future. In this context the claims to liberalism, democracy and *Kulturnation* symbolize a yearning for a post-reunification national identity that is free from critical engagement of the past, criticism of the German status quo by non-white Germans or the development of an inclusive future-oriented vision of national belonging.

Another truth Dresden's intellectual far right reveals is that most of Dresden's intellectuals are indeed not racists, at least not in the common German reading of racism. Part of the official politics of aesthetics of *Kulturnation* is to visualize racism as Nazi discourse that is either situated in Germany's past or at the political margins. For the most part, Dresden's far-right intellectuals are no Nazis. Rather, they are the embodiment of a racism and a racial becoming of an educated bourgeoisie in the context of the 21st century. To be sure, discourses of the past are essential to this racial becoming. Yet, this realization should not lead to reading the contemporary far-right racism through the lens of Nazism, but rather to see it as a contemporary phenomenon. The past here emerges not as a useful concept to understand the present. Rather, equating racism with the Nazi past can be used by the far right to credibly veil the contemporary forms of educated bourgeois racism as "justified concerns about integration".

As chapters two and six, as well as the example of Emiliano Chaimite show, racism is not only a problem of the far right. In fact, Yilmaz, Khan and Chaimite point to the painful truth that a self-styled post-racist and multicultural left is in fact engaged in more subtle, but arguably more pervasive forms of racial exclusion that makes some intellectuals of colour seek refuge in a movement that accepts their engagement only as long as it confirms its binary terms of identity. The far right seems to have provided Yilmaz and Khan with the space of influence that they were unable to attain in the left-liberal mainstream because of the more hidden systematic forms of racism that Chaimite has been struggling with for the past 30 years. Accepting and reflecting on these truths and one's own entanglement as a white researcher in the symbolic repertoires the far right can draw on is a painful process. Yet, it is the only way to understand the gradual and banal ways the far right and its racism become pervasive.

A final truth revealed by studying Dresden's educated bourgeois far right is that its far-right activists are not only misled want-to-be intellectuals who have fallen victim to conspiracy theories, although there is this element as well. But, assuming this as the only explanation would be too easy and the sign of yet another attempt to externalize the more systemic forms of racial exclusion that white educated Germans are part of and, often unconsciously, perpetuate. Rather, as the preceding chapters aimed to show, the far right is a mirror of contemporary, so-called western societies, making explicit the racist heritage underpinning positive national visions of the self, such as *Kulturnation*. In this sense then Dagen and Bormann were right to call themselves *Querdenker* as they dared to speak out a truth that is often still hidden in mainstream conceptions of *Kulturnation*.

3. *Kulturnation* as a Shared Politics of Aesthetics

Throughout this thesis I have tried to reflect these truths. I have tried to do so by showing how the entanglements of culture and race, intellectualism and populism in past and present hegemonic and counter-hegemonic aesthetics of *Kulturnation* enable provide Dresden's far-right intellectuals with the shared symbolic repertoire for the racial becoming of an exclusive white national identity. Connected to an educated bourgeois far-right milieu and centred around Dagen's and Bormann's bookshop, Dresden's intellectual far right can embrace Heidegger's "conservative revolutionary" philosophy to construct and legitimize a more acceptable cultural understanding of race and envision themselves as locally rooted and thus authentic

intellectuals. With Böckelmann, Fröschle and their links to New Left social-revolutionary thinking, West German Dresden's far-right milieu can merge notions of counterculture with the local, GDR-based tradition of an anti-totalitarian educated bourgeoisie represented by Dagen, Lengsfeld and Schürer.

The *mimesis* of these past movements permits these *Querdenker* to engage in the *poiesis* alternative visions of a white *Kulturnation* that are told through the construction of narrative identities by rereading the works of the literary canon, by reading Bernig's and Maron's novels or by following the art and aesthetic activism in Hennig's Radebeul circle. Drawing on the shared symbolic repertoires of *Kulturnation*, its politics of aesthetics and its unmarked racist heritage enables the far right to introduce political claims on the basis of a biological racism. At the same time, these racialized visions of German identity give space to Muslim-background intellectuals like Hennig, Yilmaz and Khan who celebrate a white racial identity.

The different ways local intellectuals produce and interpret the cultural symbols of *Kulturnation* for a white identity exemplifies the simultaneously counter-hegemonic and hegemonic character of far-right populism (De Cesari and Kaya, 2019: 16). Directed against a hegemonic "post-racist" vision of *Kulturnation* these local intellectuals simultaneously defend and intensifies its implicit cultural racism. Through the *mimesis* and *poiesis* of *Kulturnation*'s aesthetics, Dresden's far-right intellectuals establish and politically organize an explicit white identity that is shared by populist and educated bourgeois audiences alike. As an exploratory study, this thesis thus shows that to understand the mainstreaming of far-right ideas it does not suffice to look at the margins. Rather, it is necessary to look at how radicalization occurs through the more invisible and taken-for-granted aesthetics and spaces of mainstream politics and culture. At the core of this thesis is therefore the question of what it means to encounter politics that one deeply rejects in aesthetics that one embraces as positive and familiar and that form part of one's own identity.

As the local symbol and spatial embodiment of the political aesthetics of *Kulturnation*, Dagen's bookshop is an essential space that brings together the production of the project of white identity, its meaningful embedding in the local context and prefigurative performance. Connected by local and national networks, intellectuals, writers and artists in Dresden not only produce new, shared symbolic repertoires through their art, writings and literature; by organizing the spaces in which a community representing this alternative white identity can represent and perform itself, they produce alternative publics themselves and prefigure a racial

becoming in the context of 21st century that, on the basis of a shared white identity, speaks to left and right and East and West Germans by including East Germany's homogenous Germanness as well as West Germany's notions of a superior white rational liberalism against a racialized Islam. Race remains a continuing means to structure social relations in Germany 30 years after reunification "perpetuating, reaffirming and cementing racialized hierarchies" of the past (Lewicki, 2018: 499). Its persistence and continued intertwining of biology and culture shows how the concept of race re-emerges in a new, transformed and transforming way (Goldberg, 1993: 8), while drawing on the mimetic archives of past racial thinking and concepts, and is a phenomenon embedded in and expressed through the politics of aesthetics of hegemonic visions of nationhood and European civilization. The focus on past racism veils the emergence, or better, making visible of a racism that is not, as a popular saying goes, the shark, but the water in which we all swim.

As one of the first ethnographic studies of far-right intellectual activism at the local level, this thesis sheds new light on how an anti-hegemonic and exclusive white identity is symbolically constructed, ideologically legitimated and locally prefigured in close dialogue with national and local hegemonic politics of aesthetics. It documents how the racial becoming of a white national identity interrelates with the formation of local individual political subjectivities embedded in a concrete local context. By looking at the grey zones between licit and illicit forms of nationalism, intellectualism and populism it shows how intellectuals and educated bourgeois audiences are far from immune to racism and populist narratives. Instead, intellectual politics of aesthetics have to be seen as ideas and spaces for the legitimization and sublimation of populist and racist discourses into acceptable symbolic repertoires that, in turn, are embedded in a long history of ideas and tropes of countercultural nationalism. Today, the reality of a religiously and ethnically diverse nationhood becomes increasingly visible through the participation and vocal activism of German intellectuals of colour. At the same time Germanness continues to be equated with being white by a majority of white Germans. In this context, the far right emerges not as an irrational, populist "other", but as a radical mirror of the mainstream that makes visible and explicit the unmarked cultural racism, self-legitimizing mythologies and exclusionary notions of *Kulturnation* that often underpin hegemonic visions of German nationhood.

4. *Querdenker* – a New Ideal Type for a White Educated Bourgeois Counter-Kulturation?

Writing the final sections of this thesis necessarily also meant looking back at the entirety of my PhD journey that started in September 2016, at the developments since the end of my fieldwork and thinking about the implications of my findings for the future. The early months of my PhD were a time of insecurity about whether I should really focus on intellectual circles of the far right. Not a few people told me that such a topic would be too marginal, that the *AfD* would probably disappear again and that it mainly consisted of frustrated left-behinds anyway. Once their economic situation improved and once the centrality of the so-called refugee crisis in the media waned, so the many said, the *AfD*'s appeal would fade. Intellectuals, well-off elites and an educated bourgeoisie in the *AfD*'s support and electorate would only be a marginal minority without much impact.

Yet, both the radicalization of an educated bourgeois white middle class as well as the influence of intellectual far right on politics has kept increasing both during and after my fieldwork. Since the end of my fieldwork, these entanglements have become even more visible in the centre of German politics. Not only have they helped Dagen to further rise to prominence in the far right. As she proudly tells me at our last meeting, she was elected member of the board of the AfD Desiderius-Erasmus-Stiftung. One month after the end of my fieldwork Dagen chaired an event with then AfD leader Alexander Gauland that also included Andreas Lombard, above-mentioned editor-in-chief of the far-right magazine *CATO* (Figure 105). Today, Dagen is member of Dresden's municipal council for the *Freie Wähler*. Similarly, Jörg Bernig has been included in the process of giving the centre-right CDU in Saxony a new vision for its future leadership (Figure 106; *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten*, 2018) and even elected as director of a local municipal office of culture (Laudenbach, 2020). Markus Schürer has chosen to enter the public sphere by becoming an author for the far-right art journal *Anbruch*. The networks formed by local activists like Dagen and new publications such as *CATO* have created an alternative public sphere that has increased its grasp on German politics and its institutions. At the same time the AfD has managed to tighten its grip on German state parliaments and regional politics, especially in the East.



Figure 98: Facebook post by the BuchHaus advertising a book reading and debate with Alexander Gauland, then co-leader of the AfD chaired by Susanne Dagen (screenshot taken by the author).



Figure 99: Event announcement of a discussion on 5 October 2018 with Jörg Bernig, organized by the centre-right CDU, debating whether “our elites need to change their guiding principles” in face of “new challenges like globalization, migration, the rise of China, the spread of political Islam or the drifting apart of the EU” (screenshot taken by the author).

Yet, it would be wrong to see it as a uniquely East German problem. The rise of the far right and its ideas should not only be measured in polls and election results, but also in more general discursive and political shifts. Here, my fieldwork offers only a short glimpse of a larger process of entanglements of far-right and official, educated bourgeois visions of nationhood and *Kulturnation* that concerns Germany as a whole.

A first climax of this development was reached during the so-called the Chemnitz riots on the 26th and 27th of August and the 1st of September 2018, a few weeks after the end of my fieldwork. Here the relativization of racist attacks did not come from the far-right margins but from Hans Georg Maaßen, then the director of Germany's Federal Agency for the Protection of the Constitution. Ever since, the far right has been able to further its reach beyond the *AfD*, most visibly in the shape of the *Werte Union*. In 2020 the joint election of Thomas Kemmerich as the prime minister of Thüringen as a "bourgeois" candidate, thanks to votes of liberals, centre-right CDU and the *AfD*, made a shared "bourgeois" ground visible. In the cultural sphere, the rejection of a critical assessment of politics and culture has opened the space for comedians that embody an educated bourgeoisie self that goes "against the grain" by making openly racist jokes (Grimberg and Schaefer, 2020).

This increasing visibility of the "educated bourgeois face" of the far right has been paralleled by a growing far-right terrorism. Uncountable attacks on institutions housing refugees reached a first climax when in 2019 a white racist failed to storm a synagogue and instead killed two persons, one of them in a Kebab Shop in Halle. In 2020 a well-educated West German was inspired by racist ideologies and stormed shisha bars in Hanau to kill nine Germans of colour. In many ways the "armed resistance" prefigured in Bernig's novel, warned of by Fröschle and Yilmaz and called for by Gruber has become reality.

With their anti-totalitarianism and counterculture, Dresden's far-right intellectuals thus tap into a larger sentiment of anti-system politics that is prevalent among Germany's educated bourgeoisie and that reaches beyond left and right. First, starting a more visible German stage in 2010, so-called *Wutbürger*, mostly left leaning and with an educated middle-class background, protested against *Stuttgart 21*, an urban redevelopment project involving the building of a new train station in Stuttgart. A vocabulary of "civil disobedience", "*Querdenker*", "resistance", as well as the idea of *Mahnwachen* (vigils) and *Montagsdemonstrationen* (Monday demonstration) and more direct democracy were here picked up again from the peace movement in the 1980s as well as the revolution 1989 by a largely older, west German protesters.

The idea of engaged citizens fighting against an emerging totalitarianism as “*Querdenker*” most recently re-emerged as a central narrative in protest movement against COVID-19 measures. These measures are compared to the Nazis’ “*Ermächtigungsgesetz*”, and members of the protest movement equate their marginalization in the political discourse to the persecution of Jews under the Nazis (Figure 107) and call for resistance with slogans like “*Wir sind das Volk*”. Like Dagen and Dresden’s well-off far-right intellectuals, these movements lay claim to a cultural, educated bourgeoisie. Led by *Querdenker*, who creatively use the past to legitimize their political claims in the present, they envision themselves as representatives of an innocent white national community and enlightened *Kulturnation* that is today the victim of persecution comparable to that by the Nazi dictatorship, a surveillance comparable to that by East Germany’s socialist dictatorship and a reversed racism that equates the fate of white Germans to that of the victims of 19th century colonization. Many of the protests are organized by a milieu of local business owners, lawyers, artists and cultural activists, similar to Dresden’s educated bourgeoisie. Calling themselves “Initiative Querdenken” (Querdenken, 2020; Figure 108), engaged “educated bourgeois” citizens have co-initiated protests in several German cities and formed a party, “Widerstand 2020” (Figure 110) – resistance 2020 – to fight against media that have submitted to the German government, the interests of big companies and to undermine the German basic law (Schmalenberger, 2020).

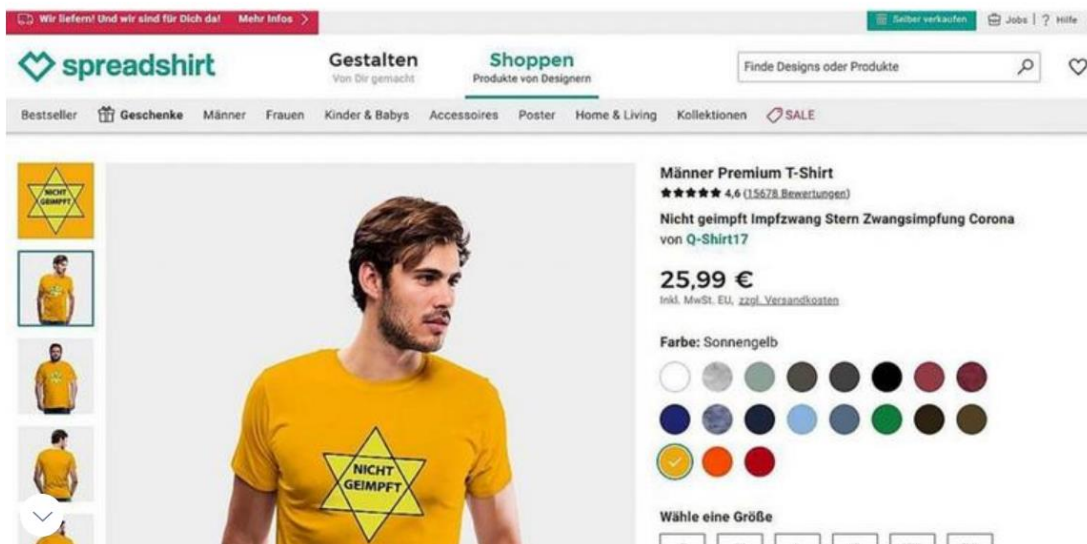


Figure 100: T-shirt with a Jewish star saying “not vaccinated” that was available to be bought during the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 (screenshot by the author).



Figure 101: Screenshot of the website of “Querdenken 711 – Stuttgart” showing the German Basic Law as its guiding principle alongside its founder Michael Ballweg. It asks, “Do you want to be a Querdenker? Then join our initiative and be an important part of a great movement” (Querdenken 2020, screenshot taken by the author).

Similar to Dresden’s far-right intellectuals, the movement gathers at central cultural spaces, such as around the *Volksbühne* in Berlin, and are implicitly supported by some leading cultural figures in Germany, such as Frank Castorf, one of the most widely produced playwrights in Germany (Castorf, 2020). Earlier, in 2018, a similar milieu of left-leaning intellectuals, including theatre directors and writers like Bernd Stegeman, grouped together under the name *Aufstehen* around *Die Linke* leader Sahra Wagenknecht, who is not only a friend of Maron, but also spoke out against immigrants in ways that made her celebrated by parts of the far right. Today this left-right crossover or *Querdenker* that re-emerges in the COVID-19 protests is also supported by Susanne Dagen who posted a picture of her reading the movement’s quasi-manifesto on the sunny terrace in front of the bookshop (Figure 109), the very space where I had many meetings with her.



Figure 103: Brochure of the “Democratic Resistance” published when the measures against the spread of COVID-19 were taken, 17 April 2020 (screenshot by the author).

The recurrent use of *Querdenker* and *Kulturnation* implies that these symbolic repertoires will continue to underpin educated bourgeois hegemonic and counter-hegemonic visions of Germanness that are developed to serve political claims to original thinking. It also indicates that explicitly and implicitly racialized visions of *Kulturnation* will continue to inform Germany’s official national politics of aesthetics. These continued entanglements show that every purely positive celebration of national identity should be approached with suspicion, especially by scholars. Even and maybe especially in benevolent forms, purely positive views of nationhood, such as *Kulturnation*, turn into myths themselves. As such they can be used to exclude ethnic and religious minorities in the present by celebrating a national identity that, through its memory politics, whitewashes German history and marginalizes its dark sides from colonialism to the in the quest for an exclusive guilt-free national future (Salzborn, 2020). Externalizing negative elements of the national self to marginal groups means turning a blind eye to how these marginal groups are not distinct, but mirror and make visible negative



Figure 102: The same brochure on a table in front of Dagen’s bookshop a few days later (Facebook post by the BuchHaus, 22 April 2020, screenshot taken by the author).

heritages that, by not being acknowledged as part of the positive national self, may exclude Germans of colour in less explicit ways. A continued silencing of the racist and populist heritages inherent in hegemonic visions of *Kulturnation* will continue to enable the far right to highlight and promote *Kulturnation*'s racist heritage in the guise and aesthetics of a legitimate vision of nationhood. Liberal democracy has led to emancipation and prosperity as well as cultural wealth. But its history is also one of slavery, racism and exclusion. Equally, the idea of *Kulturnation* represents not only a history of cultural wealth, it also represents a racial heritage and its simultaneous occlusion.

Is, then, the idea of *Kulturnation* lost? Not necessarily. *Kultur* is of course not per se an exclusionary concept, nor is the liberal democracy that is often claimed with it. Through their performative, hybrid and plural character, both culture and democracy are the constitutive elements of constant change, a change that the far right aims to subvert, reverse and keep free from multicultural complexity and plurality. Both are lost only if they remain an exclusive repertoire for the construction of a white post-reunification and post-guilt German identity that is used to exclude non-white Germans and immigrants from actively shaping what it means to be German. Instead of leaving the making visible of *Kulturnation*'s racial politics of aesthetics to the far right, it should be part of a broad debate that is led by German intellectuals of colour not as "foreign founders" for illiberal and liberal visions of a white nationhood, but as active producers of an inclusive *Kulturnation* that equally represents non-white minorities and enables their political participation and criticism of social and cultural inequalities.

In many ways, the far right's appeal to intellectuals and an educated bourgeois middle class can also be seen as the expression of a resistance to an increasingly successful and visible realization of such an inclusive vision of *Kulturnation*. One only has to take filmmaker Burhan Qurbani's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and its masterful use of a German classic novel to tell the story of a refugee in contemporary Germany as an example. Yet, just as this points to the development of a new and still fragile inclusive vision *Kulturnation* it also indicates that it is still a very long way to a truly diverse vision of German politics, culture and nationhood – a way that is likely to be met with strong resistance by white educated bourgeois *Querdenker* beyond the far right who will envision an increasing inclusivity as demise of the mystified and commonsensical visions of national heritage. The continued critical assessment of how these visions feed into the explicit racial becoming and the racial becoming explicit in the context of the 21st century will be a central challenge for critical scholars of the far right in the years to come.

5. Beyond Germany

The activism of Dresden's intellectual and educated bourgeoisie and the entanglements between abstract political debates with local populist movements it exemplifies shows the importance of the local context in making sense of the global rise of the far right. Both in the UK (Birt, 2019) and the US (Hertel-Fernandez, 2019), the far right has long understood the importance of locally embedded institutions in propagating and preparing the ground for long-term shifts of political attitudes. This has not only allowed for a greater acceptance of far-right economic policies, but also the revival of biological racism in science (Saini, 2019). New forms of racial becoming that embrace populist narratives have thus been put forward not only by local intellectuals in Dresden, but other European countries have also witnessed the emergence of similar narratives among academics and intellectuals.

In the UK and France, white nationalists develop indigenous narratives of belonging and pit them against non-white immigrants (Evans, 2012, 2017; Koch, 2016) – narratives that increasingly resonates with left-leaning white intellectuals who see a marginalization of a *white* working class. Right-wing intellectuals in France and the UK have warned of “the death of Europe” or a “French suicide” linked to fears of mass immigration and Islam (Murray, 2017; Zemmour, 2014), showing how race, as in the 19th century, is imagined as a threat to a white European identity and civilization. It is the explicit re-emergence of a white educated bourgeoisie that embraces and claims to bear a transnationally pervasive existentialist vision of a white nationhood whose survival is imagined as part of “keeping death at bay, by ensuring that if there is to be death it is the death of those not one's own” (Achilles Mbembe quoted in Goldberg, 2009: 27). While in Western Europe these claims of superior whiteness have mainly been clad in a discourse of liberal-democratic civilization implicitly referring to race and Christian religion, East European nationalisms have defined race mainly by explicitly calling for a white supremacy and religious identity that puts the collectives above individuals. As in Dresden, the local level has here proved central, embedding ethnonationalist politics in local contexts, banal everyday aesthetics and civil society activism often closely linked to marketization of ethnicity (Molnár, 2017).

Yet, like in Dresden, instead of critically engaging with racist discourses propagated by far-right populist movements and politicians, established white liberal and left-leaning intellectuals have tended to render invisible the centrality of race by seeing it as the fabricated

product of a left identity politics.⁶³ Instead, all of their focus is on a working class, whose whiteness is rarely named, but often assumed, instead of seeing the working class as a diverse group of white and non-white members of the national community. Uncritically giving voice to an allegedly “new [white] minority” (Gest, 2016) without turning race into a central element of their analysis, their assessments contributes to the perpetuation of racialized hierarchies in the diverse reality.

In Germany and beyond, the narrative put forward by many white left-leaning social scientists and increasingly also by white centrist and left-leaning political actors today is that populism, even if irrational and led by affect, expresses the rage of a white working class that has been ignored by cosmopolitan elites. The reference to the white working class is increasingly used by left- and right-wing parties to legitimize their political agendas that are meant to “tackle populism” and hear the voice of “the people” again. Yet again, an imagined homogenous white underclass is used by a white educated middle class to constitute its political self. And, once again, questions of race and class are here intertwined.

While class has become central to their analysis of a contemporary crisis of liberal democracy, questions of race and notions of whiteness are brushed aside as “leftist identity politics”, ignoring that their reference to the white working class they claim to represent is of course itself central to a contemporary white identity politics. This approach ignores that both in the US and the UK it was in fact not only white working classes, but white educated middle classes and their representatives in academia and the media who were central both to Brexit and the election of Donald Trump (Bhambra, 2017: 215). However, by neglecting the uncomfortable question of race by externalizing it to “far-left identity politics” and “far-right populism” and by emphasizing class

further displaces structures of racialized inequality from the conversation, seeking, as it does, to make white working-class identity, and not structural issues of relative advantage and disadvantage, the primary issue in explanations of the outcome. (Bhambra, 2017: 218–219)

Like Dresden’s intellectuals’ reference to PEGIDA, the intellectual leftists’ reference to the *white* working class is nothing more than a code for the romantic reference to an imagined

⁶³ See for example Piketty’s chapter “Social Nativism: The Postcolonial Identitarian Trap” in his recent book *Capital and Ideology* (2020: 862–965) or Steffen Mau on the reasons for far right populism (Mau, 2019: 221–237).

homogenous white underclass that becomes a revolutionary subject. Such a reasoning reflects their own political ideals more than reality.

Defined against “cosmopolitan elites” and “ethnic minorities”, a white identity politics that reaches beyond the far right and resonates with parts of the left has been emerging as part of the process of a new nation-building. In the case of Germany, this is increasingly led by self-proclaimed *Querdenker* who creatively legitimize their “alternative,” that is openly white identitarian thinking, by referring to notions of national whiteness shared across class, past political cleavages and defined by an educated bourgeoisie and their local intellectuals. To adequately understand the rise of the far right today it should be understood as the spearheading of a white national identity politics defined and embodied by a white educated bourgeoisie that first emerged in the 19th century. As then, it is the racial becoming of white collective identities based on an exclusive cultural identity and hierarchy defined by religion, rationality, culture and civilization (Drayton, 2019: 352). Dresden’s far-right intellectuals exemplify how intellectuals re-emerge as the bricklayers of a racial becoming in the 21st century making visible and politicizing the unmarked racial and irrational logic underpinning mainstream discourses on European national identities. Paying attention across national boundaries to how this happens locally will enable light to be shed on the myriad locally embedded ways contemporary forms of “renewed politicization” go “hand in hand with a reassertion of the (raced, classed) precarities, susceptibilities – but also vitalities – of bodies” (Mazzarella, 2019: 50). The far right, understood in this way, is thus not the residue of past, overcome forms of racism or the irrational politics of a fearful white left behind. Rather, it is the radical coming to terms with the emergence of visibly diverse European societies, the simultaneous realization of the end of a colonial and west-dominated international order and the imagined forms of European white supremacy co-imbricated in it.

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