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# Post-fascists: Putting the so-called "populist right" into historical perspective

Wiebke Keim<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract** This article tries to capture conceptually the recent developments within the far right in two countries, France and Germany. In both cases, a diachronic comparison seems tempting. Are the '30s ahead of us? What is the extent and what is the impact of the fascist legacy today? The comparison in this article is based on Mann's book "Fascists" (2004). The paper argues that while the current far-right cannot be considered fascist anymore and resembles interwar fascism only remotely, we have to consider it post-fascist. If interwar fascism is largely explicable out of a context of multilevel crises to which it provided answers that many found convincing, I conclude that the current strength of the German and French far-right does happen in a rather moderate crisis context to which it provides some answers.

## Introduction<sup>i</sup>

Authoritarians are back: demanding the restoration of community against formalised society and of tradition against the stranger; asking for strong states enforcing law and order, closing borders, preventing dark-skinned men from threatening white women; defending traditional family values against individualism and gender pluralism; claiming to represent "the people". Today many denounce them as "Fascists!"

This article is an attempt at a conceptual approach of such recent developments in the two countries that I personally know best, having lived and worked there for many years: France and Germany. Based on this, I shall develop a broader comparative framework on authoritarian restoration, aimed at including other cases (see Keim forthcoming, where I contrast post-fascism with jihadism). In both country cases, a diachronic comparison is tempting. Are the 1930s ahead of us (Föessel, 2019; Granel, 1995, pp. 71–74)? What is the extent and the impact of the fascist legacy today?

The concept of "radical right populism" (Mudde 2007), now firmly established in political science, appears as a problematic choice in this regard. First, it silences the historical legacy of far-right collective actors and their ideological baggage. Second, it makes them seem like a new feature within the current political landscape – Mudde, for instance, considers the populist radical right as the "only successful new party family in Europe" and dates its surge back to the 1960s at best (Mudde 2016:26–27). Third, this is the result of an explicitly party-centric approach (Mudde 2007:1), typical of political science approaches that are represented as having taken "ownership of this topic" from the 1980s onwards (Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017:7). The dominant approach today is also purely ideational (Mudde 2017). This specific, ideational and party-centric focus, however, loses sight of other organisational forms and of their ideological connections and continuities. Crucially, some ideological contents have become lost in the shuffle (decolonisation; 1989 and the loss of the anti-communist outlook) and others have been adapted, often for tactical reasons. As a result, long-term continuities, especially in terms of personal and organisational filiations, disappear. The current

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"populist right" appears separated from the organisational and ideological milieu of the "extreme" or "neofascist" right as well as from interwar fascism. However, one of the key characteristics of historical fascism was also populism (Griffin, 1991). Lastly, I follow Collovald's fundamental critique of the narrative on "populism" as an undemocratic, if not reactionary response to popular mobilisation that implicitly favours technocratic, elite-led solutions (Collovald, 2004). My preferred concept, far right, indicates that the political field in question and its organisational ramifications extend over a wide scope, from extreme-right groups to occasional forays into the political centre-right.

The Front National (FN<sup>ii</sup>) and the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) are currently the most visible parts of the French and German far right. Despite the prevailing attention given to these parties, we must remain mindful that today's "fachosphere" or "réacosphère" is made up of a "nébuleuse de tendances" in both countries (Jacquemain & Claisse, 2012, p. 21), including political and intellectual networks and alliances (Köttig, 2018). Recent research has shown that those political far-right parties that have dense connections with non-party nationalist networks are more sustainable than others (Jones, 2016). I will conclude that while the current far right can no longer be considered fascist, we have to consider it post-fascist.

### **France and Germany: the state of affairs in the far right**

France hosts one of the oldest, most stable, and numerically largest far-right parties of the continent (Chebel d'Appollonia, 1992, p. 29). The multiplicity of voices and organisational forms of the French far right that existed prior to the FN's foundation in 1972 has successfully been federated under this broad-based party. The FN has recently achieved sustained political success under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, whose accession was prepared by the group "Général Le Pen" formed in 2002. In January 2011, Marine Le Pen was elected second president of the FN as a result of her father's nepotistic party politics. In contrast to her father, Le Pen aimed at constructing a broad-based party that could eventually take her to power. She likes to give the impression that she fundamentally renewed the party ideologically but also in terms of its internal organisation. However, critical analyses have found no fundamental change in the party's organisation or ideology (Dézé, 2016).

Ideologically, Le Pen has ostensibly pursued a committed strategy to dissociate her party from its former anti-Semitism and negationism. The rhetoric around immigration changed from an argument around cultural and racial difference to an emphasis on Islam's purported incompatibility with the values of the French Republic and its fundamental principle of laïcité. In May 2015, Jean-Marie Le Pen, until then honorary chairman, was suspended from the party with 94% of members in favour, and expelled in August. He had refused to attend an internal disciplinary hearing for describing the gas chambers as a "detail" of history.

Marine Le Pen's presidential program for the 2012 presidential election called for the suppression of *ius soli* and for "national priority" in all areas of life. Addressing concerns about security, the program included a zero tolerance policy and a restoration of the death penalty.<sup>iii</sup> But Le Pen came only third in the first round (with 17,9 % of votes, i.e. 6,421,426 voters, one and a half million more than her father ten years earlier), behind Hollande and Sarkozy (Perrineau, 2016, p. 64). From 2014 onwards, the FN became the country's leading electoral force (Crépon, 2016, p. 14). M Le Pen's program for the 2017 presidential elections resembled her 2012 platform in many respects. After the terrorist attacks, security concerns were more explicitly approached in Islamophobic terms. Le Pen arrived second in the first round after Macron (Macron: 8,656,346, votes - 24.01%; Le Pen: 7,678,491 votes – 21.30 %) and lost in the second (Macron: 20,743,128 votes – 66.10 %, Le Pen: 10,638,475 – 33.90 %).

Still, one third of voters had picked the FN candidate. After her defeat, Le Pen orchestrated another “political refoundation”, renaming the party Rassemblement National, and marginalising the party’s Euroscepticism.

While so-called populist radical right parties (Mudde, 2007) had spread across Europe for decades already, in the context of Federal Germany no such party had emerged at the national level alongside the more old-style extremist NPD until February 2013, when the AfD was formed (Werner, 2015). Since 2014, the AfD has been steadily performing better in all elections. Between 2014 and 2017, it gained seats in 14 out of 16 regional parliaments. In 2017, the AfD entered the Bundestag with 12.6% of votes (94 seats) and is currently the biggest opposition party facing the large coalition between CDU/CSU (Christian Democrats) and SPD (Social Democrats).

The party’s emergence was directly linked to the day in March 2010 when Merkel declared to the Bundestag in the morning that European financial aid for Greece would be only a very last resort, and in the EU summit held the same evening agreed to the first rescue package to Greece, saying that there was no alternative.<sup>iv</sup> The party’s name “Alternative for Germany” reflected claims by leading economists that the European financial policy was not at all without alternative (Decker, 2016, p. 14).

Initially a prominent topic, Europe started to fall into the background of public debate around 2015. Terrorism, jihadism, “islamisation” and refugees, discussed as major threats to the country’s continued existence as a “Heimat” and to German identity gained centre-stage, and the party increasingly radicalised along its internal national-conservative and far-right nationalist fronts (Oppelland, 2017). Indeed, electoral gains in Eastern regional parliaments, made with a very different agenda from the federal level, led the regional leadership to increasingly question founding economist Lucke’s domination over the party. The Pegida movement catalysed those internal conflicts.

Since Lucke’s exit, AfD-members Gauland and Petry have favoured a politics of radicalisation and polarisation within the German party system, especially by bringing in more extreme voices to discuss topics such as immigration, Islam, national sovereignty and family. In 2017, Höcke managed to stage another right-wing radicalisation. In a speech to the party’s youth branch “Junge Alternative” in Dresden, January 2017, he made his famous reference to the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, claiming that Germany was the only country that had erected “a memorial of disgrace (Schande)” in the middle of its capital. He called for a complete U-turn in the German culture of remembrance, highlighting what I show below to be one of the German far right’s major original grievances.

The party still hosts people with diverging views and one cannot speak of a homogeneous party structure or a single extreme-right program. However, a significant fraction of its leadership decisively reconnected with or shifted to the far right<sup>v</sup> shortly after its foundation, while other members were marginalised or split off altogether. It is therefore important to take into account the party’s broader network structure, including the more radical “Junge Alternative”; New Right intellectuals, organised among others in the “Deutsche Gildenschaft”; the “Ein Prozent”-initiative in which they connect, together with the “Identitäre Bewegung”; the junker’s connection and expellees’ associations<sup>vi</sup>. This situation of the AfD in the wider far-right galaxy clearly shows that the party’s program and strategy have been increasingly co-opted by established New Right networks. Häusler even argues that we are witnessing a “Kulturkampf von rechts”, not limited to the parliamentary activities of the AfD but obeying largely to the New Right agenda of gaining cultural hegemony (Häusler, 2016, p. 1 see also Korsch, 2016, p. 146). Most recently, this has become tangible in the

push of climate change denialists into the world of the German automobile industry, with the creation of a trade union close to the AfD; as well as in the domination of protests oriented against the pandemic-related measures of the German government by far-right actors. In any case, this networked structure suggests that the party's recent developments can only be understood when traced back to its deep roots, much as the FN's current evolution has been informed by its historical emergence in 1972.

The AfD's relatively recent foundation and the FN's determined strategy to distance the party from its own historical legacy -- reinforced through their rather recent labelling in public and scholarly debate, as "populist" parties -- casts doubt on any attempt to characterise the two cases in terms of their resemblance to interwar fascism. The aim of this article is to elaborate on a diachronic comparison. I conclude that the current far right does resemble historical fascism at some levels, but only to a limited extent. Based on my assessment, I argue that it is conceptually adequate to consider it postfascist.

Furthermore, this paper assesses the current far right as a response to a crisis. In the same way that interwar fascism can be largely explained by a context of multilevel crises to which it provided answers that many found convincing, I show that the current rise of the German and French far right has been happening against the backdrop of a less serious crisis, but a crisis all the same, to which it provides some answers. This explanation is only partly satisfactory. I further argue that the current situation of both parties remains unintelligible without considering them as being in direct continuity with their historical predecessors (an argument that I develop more fully in Keim, 2022a).

### **From fascism to post-fascism – defining criteria**

"As right-wing movements have mounted increasingly strong challenges to political establishments across Europe and North America, many commentators have drawn parallels to the rise of fascism during the 1920s and 1930s. (...) 'Fascist' has served as a generic term of political abuse for many decades, but for the first time in ages, mainstream observers are using it seriously to describe major politicians and parties" (Berman, 2016, p. 39).

Are the current collective far-right actors similar to interwar fascists or not? In order to tackle this question, we need to define interwar fascism. I chose Mann's sociological framework for this purpose. In Mann's definition, "fascism is the pursuit of a transcendent and cleansing nation-statism through paramilitarism" (Mann, 2004, p. 13). In this way, he manages to bridge the limiting gap between ideological (e.g. Griffin 1991) and class theories and to thus build cumulatively on a long-standing tradition in fascism research. His conceptualisation is also grounded in a broader sociological framework on four sources of social power and therefore conveys a clear sense of power as being exercised through collective actions and organisations. For a more detailed discussion of the advantages of Mann's conceptualisations as opposed to alternative ones, see Reichardt (2004).

*Nation-statism* corresponds to the exaggeration of two core elements of 20<sup>th</sup> century political ideology. Fascist *nationalism* was grounded in the idea of the organic, integral nation. *Statism* means the worship of state power, of the state as the bearer of a project for economic, social and moral development. A strong, hierarchical and authoritarian nation-state representing the organic nation is the ultimate political goal and at the same time the organisational form that fascism takes once in power. *Transcendence* refers to the goal of transcending class conflict and national divides, first by repressing or eliminating the revolutionary left and by removing political and racial enemies, second by integrating interest groups, different economic sectors and socio-economic classes into the

nation-state through corporatist institutions. The *cleansing* aspect directly follows from transcendent nation-statism: political opponents and strangers within the organic nation are defined as eliminable enemies to be cleansed if the ideal of the transcendent and organic nation is to be achieved. The cleansing is carried out by bottom-up *paramilitary* organisations. Those militias, structured along male comradeship, represent the key value and organisational form of fascism.

### **From nationalism to exclusive solidarity**

Nationalism is certainly one of the key useful concepts to understand today's Western European far right. However, today's is a different nationalism from the interwar period. Following political decolonisation, it has been post-colonised. Its combination with statism into nation-statism is less obvious and its ambition is devoid of expansionist dreams. More importantly, it seems necessary to extend Mann's concept of nationalism, too specific and too narrow, into a broader concept of exclusive solidarity that extends beyond the nation<sup>vii</sup>. Sitas's reflections on non-class solidarities provide me with a useful analytical grip, in demonstrating that there are five elements that make the nationalist narrative cohere (Sitas, 2015, p. 4): a historical subject; an original grievance; a social foundation of alienation; outgroups; modalities of legitimacy or veracity.

The post-fascist far right bases its ideological core on embedded levels of belonging, built into the historical subject. First of all, there are two slightly distinct invocations of Europe ("*l'Occident*", "*das Abendland*"), which is one of the reasons why "nationalism" would be an oversimplification. The first one is the idea of "white Europe", based on white supremacy, sustained by eugenicist and genuinely racist ideologies and obsessed with the idea of a natural hierarchy of races and the ultimate ideal of racial purity as its modality of veracity and legitimacy. Mann's take on nationalism does not fully represent the colonial mindset of National-Socialism and its imperial outlook. The legacy of white Europe however, lives on. An articulate denunciation of racial miscegenation and decadence related to post-colonial immigration as an original grievance remains limited to small circles of the extreme right. Moral panics around sexual assaults perpetrated by Muslim refugees against white women, for instance, echo historical memories and fears of the "dark stranger".<sup>viii</sup> In the broader public, what disturbs people is rather the idea of cultural heterogeneity. This makes them call for an exclusive solidarity of "authentic Europeans", across nation-states, within Europe (Bauman, 2017, p. 17).

A slightly different shade is contained in calls for solidarity at the level of a civilisational "Occident". Historically, the original grievance here was the threat of international communism as well as Third World nationalism during the Cold War and decolonisation. Currently, the major perceived threat is the alleged ongoing islamisation of "Judeo-Christian" civilisation. This relates to the vision of the Muslim as being highly reproductive, conveying fears of a Muslim 'takeover' of Europe (Zúquete, 2008). The invocation of Christian identity, of Judeo-Christian civilisation and of the Reconquista as modality of legitimacy is one of the connecting zones between the conservative, centre-right and fractions of the extreme right. The idea of a civilisational Occident that needs to be defended against islamisation or even the assertion of a necessary re-Christianisation of Europe is behind the calls for "Reconquista!" voiced by **Identitarian** groups today<sup>2</sup>. They invoke historical antecedents as a legitimisation, eternalise the supposed conflict between Europe and Islam, and stoke fears about the imminent decadence of Christian Europe. This version is obviously close to the idea of "white

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<sup>2</sup> For further information on Identitarian movements, please see Bruns, Glösel, & Strobl, 2014.

Europe", but places the emphasis on the co-presence of Muslims and on European values more than on racial aspects. In France in particular, both combine in specific ways, related to the loss of French Algeria as well as to the recent "Republican turn" of the FN. Colonial thinking is deeply ingrained into far-right discourses about Islam. But the colonial civilising mission has given way to claims of cultural segregation and expulsion from the national territory. In comparison with the interwar years, one of the most substantive shifts regarding the outgroups is the progressive inclusion, at least in several official discourses of established far-right parties, of the arch-deviant Jew into the idea of a Judeo-Christian Europe<sup>ix</sup>.

Below the European level, there have been calls for solidarity amongst the people of one nation as a historical subject. They share a series of meta-outgroups. Since the series of violent attacks within Europe claimed by or attributed to Daesh and related groups, the deviant figure of the Muslim has been fused with the deviant figure of the terrorist. The call for exclusive solidarity is based on the principle of national priority<sup>x</sup> and the need to maintain the integrity of the nation. Exclusive solidarity, translated into a "right to stay amongst us", gives legitimacy to such narratives. Combined with calls to limit or "reverse" immigration flows, this also translates into policies for spatial segregation and avoiding closeness between supposedly culturally different and incompatible population groups.<sup>xi</sup> Calls for economic closure, at company-level or at macro-economic level, are another mode of legitimacy for the nation as historical subject.

The fact that Europe can act as a level of identification and belonging does not prevent the national framework from being another level for exclusive solidarities. Another shared outgroup can be identified here: cosmopolitans, as opposed to patriots (patriotism having replaced the cruder talk of nationalism in official political statements). The calls for a European front against the debilitating effects of immigration, outbreeding, globalisation or cultural mixture are still expressed under the umbrella idea of solidarity amongst sovereign nations, the "Europe of fatherlands". In this sense, the political and administrative framework of the EU functions as a key projection, including political and bureaucratic elites and experts, the new cosmopolitans, that sustain and support it nationally as well as at the European level in order to destroy the nation (Chebel d'Appollonia, 1992, p. 23). The shared grievance of the subordination of the nation under the European *Acquis Communautaire* or "Brussels' Mandate", including loss of national sovereignty and implementation of the Schengen agreement, i.e. supposedly "open borders", is another expression of a loss of national sovereignty and specificity.<sup>xii</sup>

Against this backdrop of shared themes, the two national cases display some distinctive features. In France, the appeal to the people of the nation is expressed in terms of the "grandeur de la France". The specific original grievances here are the collaboration under Vichy as a consequence of the German occupation, which discredits the aspirations of the far right within broad segments of the population; the Algerian war and independence, representing the loss of empire as the prime expression of France's "grandeur"; as well as 1968 and the supposed "leftist hegemony" that followed and against which the far right has re-established itself as a counterforce. Jean-Marie Le Pen himself declared that "[t]he fight for a French Algeria has prepared the fight for a French France" (cited in Stora, 1997, p. 24). While earlier iterations of far-right discourse insisted on cultural particularism against the universalism of French republicanism, current proponents base their claims on the chauvinist assumption of the universalism of French Republicanism against communitarianism (French: "communautarisme", Stora, 1997). This has been particularly evident in recent times in the debate around laïcité. Rather than assimilation, the French far right of today argues in terms of multiculturalism. The intellectual New Right, realising the limited chances for racial thinking to gain

support, has managed to reframe racialism in such a way that cultural differences are supposed to be accepted and are granted a right to existence, but under the condition of remaining within bounded entities, calling for the segregation of diverse population groups. This is but a thin veiling of an underlying racism (Shields, 2007).

In the German case, the historical subject of the national people would be the "Volksgemeinschaft".<sup>xiii</sup> Suffice it to say here that after a period stretching into the recent past where NS-vocabulary had been banned from public space but subsisted in rather hidden ways<sup>xiv</sup>, the AfD has led a strategic struggle to reintroduce NS-associated terms into the public debate. This concerns in particular the adjective "völkisch", which clearly has historical connotations.

The original grievance of the Volksgemeinschaft-ideologues is paradoxically, but without any doubt, the Holocaust, or more precisely, its undeniability. This is what delegitimises any call for the greatness of the German nation within broad segments of the population, and constitutes a major disadvantage in comparison with the far right in other countries.<sup>xv</sup> Since the Holocaust cannot be denied, the far right plays with ambiguous references to this past, partly to elicit attention, partly to trivialise the facts, and partly to express their frustration at being strongly disadvantaged with regard to other nationalist movements. While the early post-war far right in Germany opposed parliamentarism and multiculturalism as the macro sources of alienation of the Volksgemeinschaft, nowadays the German culture of remembrance, in Höcke's (AfD) view a "shame culture" or "culture of disgrace", is seen as the basic social foundation that inhibits national pride. Björn Höcke's agitation against the German disgrace in terms of its memory politics echoes Goebbels's outrage against the "Disgrace of Versailles".

Outgroups are similar to the French case. The modality of veracity, aiming to overcome the grievance of the undeniability of the Holocaust, is the invocation of 1000 years of German history, compared to which the NS-years appear as no more than "a speck of bird poop" (Gauland cited in Hebel, 2018). Within those parts of the German far right that are intellectually versed, racial organicism remains another source of legitimacy for the Volksgemeinschaft (Chebel d'Appolonia, 1992, p. 21, see also Kemper, 2016).

In calling for diverse forms of exclusive solidarities, the French and German far rights have found their most promising response to ideological crises (see below). By placing exclusive solidarities above the individual, they aim to transcend internal conflict and to close up spaces of privilege. They represent "displacement ideologies" that give the illusion of resolving social conflicts along lines of race, culture or creed (Hammerschmidt, 2005). Because exclusive solidarities are essentially based on the exclusion of others and enemies, they have an inherent potential for violence and coercion. This section has highlighted how the history of interwar fascism has impacted recent ideological reconfigurations. Because it has integrated a self-reflexive move around what has become one of its major grievances, the far right today can be characterised as post-fascist.

## **Statism**

In addition to exclusive solidarity, far-right parties reaffirm a strong state against the EU and "globalisation". In their view, a strong state is a free state, where free means mainly free from the subordination of national law and action under the EU treaties, but also free from international legal provisions and from US domination. Beyond the metaphor of the closed border, since the 2008 economic crisis, certain economic protectionist visions have developed in ways that depart from the



liberal economic orientations of the 1980s. There are at least six such visions of the role of the state, with variations, among far-right groups and parties: regaining control over the economy; safeguarding law and order; defending national values; guaranteeing true democracy (against the superimposed international and EU frameworks and against technocracy); and providing exclusive public services (for a more detailed elaboration, see Keim 2022b). Even if it does not combine as elegantly into nation-statism, statism clearly is a feature of the current German and French far rights. It does not appear as a major issue when compared to their blatant racist and anti-immigration discourses. The emerging vision of a "Europe of fatherlands" is an attempt to follow the extension of the historical subject from the nation to the European level and thus to perpetuate nation-statist ideas.

### **Transcendence**

Nationalism entails a sense of transcendence, in particular of the divide between "the people" and the elites. However, the strong sense of transcendence that was tangible in interwar fascisms has become obsolete in a context where class struggle is no longer the order of the day. With the bureaucratisation and overall weakening of trade unions, the fragmentation and alienation of the working class through the restructuring, transformation and offshoring of production, combined with the neoliberal narrative of individualisation, class conflict, i.e. conflict over distribution, has given way to "multiculturalism" as the major site of social friction. Racialised Others are an outgroup to far-right exclusive solidarities. Transcendence is not a necessary option for national renaissance and reintegration.

### **Paramilitarism**

Paramilitarism, according to Mann, is a key value as well as the primordial organisational form of fascism. During the interwar years, political violence and paramilitarism as a means of political struggle were widely accepted. Every major political party in Weimar Germany, for instance, had its militia. Today the political context in Western Europe is fundamentally different, and paramilitarism has largely disappeared from the political landscape. In the case of France, this is a more recent evolution: until the foundation of the FN, paramilitarism remained an important organisational form. Various supporters of "French Algeria", especially the major armed group named the OAS (Organisation Armée Secrète), who also operated on the mainland, revived paramilitarism after 1945<sup>xvi</sup>.

While Mann defined paramilitarism as one of two key organisational forms of interwar fascism, in the absence of a military crisis and under a firmly established parliamentary democracy, the strategic choice by far-right intellectuals and activist networks to opt for a political party as their key organisational form reflects a sense of opportunism. A party does not necessarily fit their key values and preferred organisational forms in the same way that paramilitarism did. Many New Right intellectuals and grassroots members of networked activist groups have no affinity with parliamentary democracy.

However, two related organisational features of organisation that extend the concept of paramilitarism are significant for the current far right. In every European country, we find organised groups that practice extreme-right-inspired political violence against leftists, migrants and ethnic minorities, and within the last two years in Germany increasingly against representatives of

established politics and the state. Because they remain small in size – at least as far as their visible part is concerned – do not control territory or wear uniforms, we cannot consider them as paramilitary. They are usually called terrorist groups. Another type of violent organisations that often acts with far-right motivations are vigilante groups. These often small groups attack supposed deviants in order to protect the population. They control certain areas in a few places where police and state organs are perceived as deficient (Quent, 2016, p. 21; Roth, 2003). Vigilante groups are not driven by a quest for a radical systemic change; but rather, they want to stabilise the system by defending the old order through self-justice. This may lead them to rationalise exceptions to the state monopoly on violence. While those groups and actions cannot count as paramilitary and remain on the fringes of the political game, they use organised violence as a means to claim agency, to take concrete measures to impose order on what they perceive to be an anomic social world. They all claim that the state does not do enough to guarantee the security of its legitimate citizens, defined according to an exclusive identitarian conception. Often this assumption is combined with conspiracy constructs alleging an external manipulation of the state. Despite their own illegal actions, their aim is to reinforce a strong, authoritarian state (Quent, 2016; Waldmann, 2011). Their violent acts are meant to help restore some sense of coherence and expresses claims to privilege. It also has a fundamentally socialising aspect (Roth, 2003), similar to the socialising micro-cage of interwar paramilitary groups (Mann, 2004).

### **Cleansing**

Cleansing in the sense as acquired in interwar fascism has not appeared as a palpable characteristic of far-right parties. Acts of extreme-right physical violence and murders of migrants have been reported in every single European country. However, the broader far-right movements and official parties have not publicly endorsed those actions.

### **Hypermasculinity**

The gender dimension has not been included prominently in theoretical approaches to fascism, but I consider it to be one of its key elements. I therefore propose the additional key concept of "hypermasculinity" as an extension of Mann's initial framework. This section can also be seen as a response to the call made by historians that gender should be considered in the "fascist minimum" (Passmore 2011). The far right's visions of gender largely overlap, despite some updates, with those of historical fascists. Male bonding has always been and remains a key organisational principle of extreme-right politicization<sup>xvii</sup>. There is a consensus in the literature on political far-right parties on the persistence of a gender gap amongst members and voters alike (Dubsclaff, 2017, pp. 160–162; Hartevelde, van der Brug, Dahlberg, & Kokkonen, 2015; Oppelland, 2017). This is especially true for extreme-right fringe groups that were for a long time "considered as 'male' practically by definition" (Blum, 2017, p. 322). Their ideal of masculinity is central to their worldview, and is among their constitutive features (Köttig, 2017, pp. 225–226; Overdiek, 2014, p. 6). The image of the warrior reflects the idea of a "right" or "true" masculinity within an original natural order, in the service of the nation and of the race. Being a "real man", as insinuated by such visions of hypermasculinity, seems to be one of the key motivations for young men to join the scene. Male aggressiveness is strongly associated with the will to dominate in a perceived competition with foreigners over women. Women's relationships with unwelcome outsiders, in particular in terms of their sexuality

and potential reproduction, are monitored to defend the nation and the white race. This has no parallel amongst women, and reflects an ambiguous vision of womanhood in general<sup>xviii</sup>.

Hypermasculinity is embedded in the vision of "gender complementarity". Gender complementarity is used to mobilise against gender equality and to restore the original meaning of the family against feminism and gender pluralism. It is often grounded in religion, drawing on the Vatican's reaction to the United Nations conferences on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and on women in Beijing (1995). Like representatives of Protestantism, Islam and Judaism, the Catholic church opposes international advances on sexual and reproductive rights, which are seen as a first step towards the international recognition of abortion, as a threat to traditional motherhood and as a legitimisation of homosexuality (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017, p. 263). Alongside the religious justification shared across creeds, within other fractions of the far right, biological legitimations of hypermasculinity and gender complementarity prevail (Villa, 2017, p. 104).

In the mobilisations against gender equality and gender pluralism, variously termed "gender ideology", "idéologie du genre" or "Genderwahn", political extremisms effortlessly overlap with much wider and more moderate constituencies, including conservative parties, Catholic groups, men's rights movements or homophobic circles. In those mobilisations, gender functions as a "symbolic glue or the empty signifier that allows the emergence of such coalitions, especially when actors do not share the same ideological framework" (Kováts & Pöim, 2015)<sup>xix</sup>. All across Europe, anti-gender movements also frame this issue in terms of an imposition by outside forces such as the EU or the UN.

Furthermore, hypermasculinity clearly opposes the legacy of 1968. The publication by Identitarian author Willinger, "Die Identitäre Generation. Eine Kriegserklärung an die 68er" ("Generation Identity. A Declaration of War against the '68ers"), expresses this clearly: "You have deprived men of their masculinity. Reduced them to feeble teddy bears, with no energy, no courage or strength, in short: no will to power" (p. 21 quoted in Blum, 2017, p. 326)<sup>xx</sup>. Education is a crucial battlefield, where gender sensitivity is accused of inhibiting the healthy development of masculinity and femininity amongst young children. Some put forth rather intellectual or cultural arguments; a few insist on the eugenicist implications, such as the AfD youth organisation's programmatic claim that the family remains the "germ cell of the nation" (Herkenhoff, 2016, pp. 205–206). As a consequence, homophobia is the counterpart to hypermasculinity and is equally shared amongst far-right groups (Claus & Virchow, 2017, pp. 310–311).

Gender complementarity involves the ideological construction of normative male and female bodies, as well as of a normative, child-rearing family. Women partake in those constructions of essentialist gender stereotypes. Hypermasculinity is articulated with constructions of "radical femininity"<sup>xxi</sup>. Restoring the honour of women as mothers, as bearers and educators of the following generation (Köttig, 2017, pp. 225–226) is one of the far right's programmatic ambitions<sup>xxii</sup>.

### **A certain family resemblance**

The current far right shares a certain family resemblance with interwar fascism. Both adhere to societal visions that are based on exclusive solidarities. However, in comparison with interwar fascism, the recent versions of those visions are based less strictly on radical nationalism, let alone in its expansionist version; they exhibit a broader, European perspective. In this sense, the current far right is not only post-fascist but also post-colonial. While imperial aspirations are a total taboo in the

German case, given the history of World War Two, the French far right had to fundamentally revise its territorial concept of "grandeur" after the end of its last colonial war and the loss of "French Algeria" (Renken, 2006; Shields, 2007, 90ff). Today's statism is more moderate. The state is not seen as integrating society based on a corporatist model or as incarnating the organic nation. Rather, there is an emphasis on sovereignty in the face of the EU framework and the state fulfils certain functions in the service of the integral nation and its legitimate citizens. The criteria of transcendence and of cleansing are no longer covered, although the potential for cleansing is ideologically inherent in far-right societal visions, whose realisation requires getting rid of a lot of people. Paramilitarism as major organisational form has been abandoned to the expense of party politics for pragmatic, contextual reasons. However, smaller-scale organisations that practice political violence still exist. Most obviously, in terms of hypermasculinity, both cases overlap to a large extent.

Furthermore, present authoritarian figures do not appear as innovative, or "revolutionary" as in historical fascism (see the discussion in Griffin, 1991). Their programmes are also more limited in scope, ideologically as well as in terms of their potential for political action. As a result, the FN/RN and AfD and their surrounding networks appear as rather poor copies of their historical predecessors. I therefore argue that they cannot be considered fascists.

While the family resemblance seems relatively distant, we need to consider that differences are partly related to changing contexts. They are also partly tactical, following internal, self-reflexive and strategic debates within far-right circles. In order to highlight that we cannot understand their logics, their functioning and their historical lineage unless we agree that they are clearly part of a historical legacy that reaches back into the interwar years, I call them post-fascist. Post-fascism in this sense does not only refer to the fact that the current far right evolves within a broader post-fascist society and has to adapt to those circumstances. Referring to the current far right as post-fascist also acknowledges their internal process of reflection upon their own past and the difficulties they have in tackling it (see my discussion of their major grievances). Major ideological revisions have taken place, and in many cases it is explicitly recommended not to evoke the semantics of the interwar years to avoid discredit on the political scene. This argumentative move started right after the turning point of 1945, as evidenced for instance by Mohler's publication "Die Konservative Revolution" (1949) – an attempt to ideologically reconnect with the protofascist thinkers that had not been "contaminated" by the developments of 1933-45, which remains a key reference within far-right intellectual circles (Bruns et al., 2014). While the current groups are definitely not fascists, they are inarguably post-fascists. Lineages dating back those interwar experiences must be carefully retraced to identify them as such (see Keim 2022a).

There have been conceptual takes on "post-fascism" amongst historians. Traverso, who rejects the term "populism" because of its lack of definitional clarity, has conceptualised post-fascism as a new reality of fascism, where the prefix "post-" hints towards continuities, transformations and ruptures (el-Ojeili 2019; Traverso 2015). His work takes on a contextual perspective on a heterogeneous phenomenon in transition. Insofar as he contextualises post-fascism, his work largely complements mine and indeed covers important aspects that remain underrated in my proposition. While historical fascism was decidedly anti-communist (and could therefore garner support from the ruling classes), the consequence of the dilution of communism, class struggle and the workers' movements is that post-fascism has lost this anti-communist outlook. This sense of drive, of a mission to combat the Bolshevik threat has given way to a more conservative and reactionary orientation. This is no longer attractive, for now, to wealthy elites who find their interests better protected by the EU and

international organisations. Another important transformation concerns the move from imperial aggressiveness towards a defensive anti-immigration stance. The idea that decolonisation has thus "post-colonised" original fascism overlaps with my own account. Because he considers post-fascism as a political development in transition, Traverso does not give a clear-cut definition of that term.

This is also true of Finchelstein's work. Adopting a longer historical perspective, he also refrains from taking a stab at a clear definition. Yet, he follows a different terminological strategy: starting out from a Latin American perspective on the issue, he inserts fascism as well as post-fascism into a global history of populism. From the 19th century through the First World War and into the 1920s, Finchelstein uses the term "pre-populism"; when discussing the 1920s and 30s, he switches to fascism. After 1945, with the rise of Peronism, the fascist legacy was reformulated as an anti-liberal, authoritarian populism using democratic means. The Latin American experience showed that "once in power populism is fascism radically reformulated and adapted to democratic times" (Finchelstein 2019:420). After 1989, in Europe, the author observes populist leaders with neo-fascist supporters, and after 2016, a return to the pre-1945 regimes in the personalities of Bolsonaro, Salvini and Le Pen. Apart from the rather cursory overview on "highlights" of the story (Poujadism, which paved the ground for the FN in the 1950s, for instance, is left unmentioned), my deeper issue with Finchelstein's work is that he limits populism and fascism only to fully established regimes and post-fascism to the personalised form of outstanding leaders. He does take ideological aspects into account, but does not address movements, parties or organisations. Still, Finchelstein's work is an important reminder that more comparative and connected research as well as more scholarly exchanges on the topic are needed, since conceptual choices made in different parts of the world might not converge effortlessly.

### **The societal context of the French and German far right: multiple crises?**

A return to the structural conditions of the rise of interwar authoritarianism and fascism might hint towards the kind of questions we should ask about the current phase. In accordance with his theory of the four sources of social power – economic, political, ideological and military – Mann (2004) cites major crises at all four levels in interwar Europe as necessary causes of the rise of fascism. Fascism was successful because it offered responses at all four levels that sounded credible to particular constituencies<sup>xxiii</sup>. Do we have similar broad crises at various levels today? Does the far right address those crises and offer solutions to them?

Globalisation theorists, like those who contributed to "The Great Regression" (Geiselberger, 2017), attribute the current situation to the neoliberal policies of the last decades. Neoliberal deregulation has increased inequalities within and between countries (see the contributions to Wallerstein, 2016). The 2008 economic crisis had global repercussions. The migrations that cause concern in the richer parts of the world (concerns on which the far right capitalises), can be considered, in addition to reactions to violent conflict, war and climate change, as major outcomes and manifestations of economic crisis. The most promising option for economic upward mobility is migration from poor to rich countries, i.e. it is an adequate strategy in the context of global economic inequality (Boatcă, 2015; Korzeniewicz & Moran, 2016).

Furthermore, the weakening of state apparatuses in the face of economic neoliberalism can be considered as a feature of a global political crisis. The spread of paranoid thinking in times of widespread terrorism (Schneider, 2010) has led to a securitisation of (international) politics. While it

is difficult to assess the current potential for a global military crisis, at a very abstract level, a global ideological crisis is unfolding: neoliberal globalisation and its premises are increasingly criticised. This ideological crisis is framed as a variety of perceptions of threat, chaos and instability causing moral panics everywhere, concerning terrorists and refugees, western decadence and "gender ideology"; and all sorts of unfaithful and therefore dangerous populations. Global trends are refracted differently in specific societal contexts.

Can the recent years in Western Europe be considered years of multilevel crises? While the military remains a meaningful reference for the European far right<sup>xxiv</sup>, the latter's current strength is not a response to any sort of military crisis and paramilitarism has ceased to be important as an organisational form.

### **Economic crisis**

While we face nothing similar, in societal terms, to the Great Depression today, we observe contradictory analyses of the impact of the 2007-2008 economic crisis on European societies. The global economic crisis did affect Europe; and it did so in context-specific ways. Globally speaking, the 2008 economic crisis, "with the near meltdown of the global financial order" (Fraser, 2017, p. 40) was an impressive illustration of the structural weaknesses of the global capitalist system. It marked a turning point in at least two respects: political and ideological (see below). At the economic level, the outcomes are subject to controversy. One consequence of the 2008 crisis was the large-scale realisation that austerity does not work (Misik, 2017, p. 123), unsettling decades of ideological certainty among mainstream economists. Furthermore, the state has reentered the economy, challenging another neoliberal certainty. This has led to a schizophrenic situation where a vast array of commentators have criticised neoliberalism on political and ideological grounds, but in practice it continues unabated (Nachtwey, 2017, pp. 134–135). But whereas the neoliberalism of the 1980s and 1990s in Europe was accompanied and legitimised by a promise of success and prosperity, in the 2000s and 2010s it is imposed under threat. Broad swathes of society consider that during the 2008 crisis, the state stepped in to rescue banks and companies with taxpayer money, whereas their benefits usually remain private as long as the economy performs well. This has contributed to discrediting national and European political elites, perceived as being in the service of global economic players. The effect of the global economic crisis in Western Europe is therefore more political and ideological than economic in the strict sense of the word.

As far as the response of the far right is concerned, their strength has mainly been to channel economic grievances into exclusive solidarity utopias. In the face of an absence of class conflict, the far-right reformulates issues of redistribution. Economic relations are translated into an issue of national sovereignty, European integration is repoliticised, a chauvinistic stance calls for exclusion of those who undeservingly profit from "our welfare" and thus reassure identitarian claims for the "right to stay amongst ourselves" as the current expression of exclusive solidarity.

The far-right has always been ambiguous on economic policy<sup>xxv</sup>. The recent experience has been yet another illustration of its inconsistency in terms of economic analysis and programmes. Its recent success is a reaction at political and ideological levels to processes that have important economic reasons: "the loss of economic sovereignty everywhere produces a shift towards emphasizing cultural sovereignty" (Appadurai, 2017, p. 5). Within the European context, the submission of national politics and economies to the "dictate of Brussels" fuels the Euroscepticism of most far-right parties. Economically speaking, the far right does not offer meaningful solutions. It is a particularly

weak alternative, if it is even one at all, economically speaking. The highly theorised economic analyses put forth by the AfD in its founding phase did not characterise the party for long and do not account for its subsequent electoral successes. Rather, the current strength of the far right is related to long-term, profound economic transformations of Western European societies<sup>xxvi</sup>. Instead of offering meaningful economic solutions to economic problems, its success amongst new electoral constituencies can partly be explained by its capacity to propose cultural responses (instead of economic ones) to economic issues.

### **Political crisis**

The 2008 economic crisis has had a moderate impact on European societies compared to other parts of the world, but a profound political and ideological one. More broadly, over the past decades, while the narrative of class conflict has largely disappeared, social and economic inequalities have deepened in the most affluent societies, combined with the erosion of the welfare state and financialisation. This has catalysed a malaise of Western European liberal democracies at various levels. The term "malaise" serves to distinguish the depth and degree of problems at the political level from a full-fledged political crisis: so far, the basic structures and functioning of the liberal democratic, parliamentary systems have not been fundamentally called into question.

First, in the course of the restructuring of the economy and the meltdown of labour protest, distributional conflict has given way to "a technocratic search for the economically necessary and uniquely possible" (Streeck, 2017, p. 158). This has led to the rise of political, bureaucratic, academic and technical elites and experts as key agents of politics and has largely depoliticised many controversial questions. Second, while experts have taken over, the big mainstream parties of the moderate right, left and centre have come to increasingly resemble each other in terms of their external image and have retreated "into the machinery of the state as 'cartel parties'" (ibid.), acting in a distinctive, narrow arena disconnected from the broad public. This arena is in turn perceived as dominated by external forces (EU, IMF). Third, this has led to declining political participation, democracy fatigue, voter dealignment and voter volatility, i.e. more broadly, to a crisis of representation within liberal democracy. The political handling of the 2008 economic crisis has made things worse, as a perception of unequal burden-sharing in favour of big banks and business and to the detriment of the population prevails. This is what gave the "anti-system"-rhetoric of the far right new momentum (Löwy & Sitel, 2015). We can add, fourth, what Frazer has termed "progressive neoliberalism", i.e. the fact that mainstream political parties and elites are perceived as close allies of global capital on the one hand, and of groups fighting for the recognition of their particular identities and rights, perceived as partial, irrelevant and minority claims on the grounds that they are far removed from the everyday issues and frustrations of majority citizens (Fraser, 2017). Today, we face, if not a full-fledged political crisis, a crisis of representation.

This mood of frustration amongst voters has been exploited by the far right, whose ideologues propose a distinctive project in a largely levelled, technocratic political landscape, turning the prevailing logic around. It contends that ordinary citizens are the only ones who have a sense of reality and are the only legitimate political subjects. As a response to the crisis of representation and to expert knowledge, post-fascists celebrate the common sense of ordinary people. Furthermore, they voice a patriotic, anti-elitist, anti-establishment discourse that is directed not only against national elites, but also especially against the "dictate of Brussels".

As a response to the crisis of political representation, they have all successfully moved towards strong forms of representative claim-making (Volk, 2017). In this sense the designation of those movements and parties as “populist” is justified. Their leaders have managed, despite their own political careers and socio-economic backgrounds, to appoint themselves as the voice of “the people”. In the same move, they have also redefined who is legitimately part of “the people” in terms of racist exclusive solidarity<sup>xxvii</sup>. Longer-term developments in the political realm, and in particular the so-called crisis of representation, have to be understood as opening up windows of opportunity for the profiling of post-fascist parties as alternatives to the mainstream. Their recent successes can partly be understood as a consequence of and response to the crisis of representation:

"They all have the feeling that, politically, there is no longer anyone to speak up on their behalf. They all have the feeling that globalisation and European integration generate more costs than benefits for them. And in general terms, they are right. (...). All these groups sense that the established progressive parties have generally ceased to be interested in them and that their representatives have themselves joined the global upper class" (Misik, 2017, pp. 119–120).

The new far right claims to speak for “the people”. Its scholarly analysis in terms of “populism” implicitly confirms this claim. In France, the FN’s current strength is mirrored in the hegemonic analysis of the “populist” threat to established democracy. Collovald provides us with a sustained, historically informed critique of the emergence of the term “populism” in its association with the French FN and the political effect of this conceptual framing on the debate. Under the dominant analysis, populism is a threat to democracy due to its capacity to mobilise the popular classes. The idea that “too much” democracy paradoxically tends to destabilise it as soon as you let “the people” really express itself, is inherent in this conception. This justifies a call for expert knowledge to counter this “threat”, conceived as a technical problem of good governance rather than as a social and political problem (Collovald, 2004, p. 46).

### **Ideological crisis**

Since 1989 already, reports on the “end of history” have clearly pointed to an ideological crisis. The 2008 economic crisis has had major ideological repercussions. While the economy has rebounded, there have been cracks in the ideological construct underpinning global neoliberal capitalism, which had been until then largely unchallenged. The success of the far right owes much to its responses to this ideological crisis. Economic and political developments as well as the ideological shifts they have promoted have certainly given way to widespread feelings of uncertainty: something might be amiss. Far-right leaders have succeeded in capitalising on such fears, in “activating, bundling, structuring” them in a process that resembles an “inverted psychoanalysis” (Biskamp, 2017, pp. 94–95). It is this structuring exercise that has helped them gain votes in recent elections all across Europe. As a remedy they offer the reinvigoration of exclusive solidarities, combined with the idea of a return to a glorious past, to a former, “purer” state of an imagined community, to traditional gender roles and healthy families. While their economic outlook has been underdeveloped, all of them have excelled with identitarian themes.

Post-fascists have accordingly been able to capitalise on the refugee reception crisis. Some have circulated conspiracy theories alleging that Merkel’s government is flooding the country and the continent with the aim of abolishing the German nation, European civilisation and the white race. This has triggered another peak of organised violence, with terrorist acts and the creation of vigilante



groups as a response to perceived state failure as well as the (re)formation of ultraright terrorism. The current pandemic has reinforced nationalist worldviews and strong anti-system rhetorics and actions (e.g. the assault on the Reichstag-building in late August 2020).

### **Postfascism as a response to multilevel crises?**

I have mobilised Mann's framework of fascism emerging out of and responding to major multi-level crises in order to understand the current strength of the far right in Western Europe. Germany and France today do not face anything similar to the deep economic, political, ideological and military crises that characterised the interwar period. There is no military crisis as a motivating factor. We do need to consider the political and social effects of the 2008 economic crisis. They have also caused deep ideological uncertainties, as cracks appeared in the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism and its social long-term impacts, and in the absence of a left-wing alternative. This ideological uncertainty creates a climate that is conducive to the spread of moral panics of all sorts.

At first sight, it looks like the impressively quick rise of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) was directly linked to two crisis contexts. The AfD was founded in direct response to the 2008 financial and subsequent Eurocrises, and its agenda was initially decidedly Eurosceptic, demanding the dissolution of the monetary union and restrictions to European integration (Werner, 2015, p. 35). The management of the Euro crisis by the political establishment led to a peak of distrust in established politics in Germany. In the initial phase, the AfD emerged as a response to the crisis of representation that affected the German *Mittelstand*. During the refugee reception crisis, the AfD responded to moral panics<sup>xxviii</sup> by promising a restoration of state power, law and order, and more nostalgically evoking a sense of *Heimat*. The case of the AfD, in terms of its timing and origins, could therefore easily be seen as a consequence of and a response to the crisis.

Yet, this argument holds only superficially, as the economic crisis and the AfD's response are not sufficient explanations for the latter's subsequent development from a "professorial party" with a sophisticated economic analysis at the core of its program to what it is today after several radicalising shifts to the right. Rather, the catalysis of longer-term political and ideological transformations into something like a crisis of representation allowed existing far-right networks to put forth discourses that captured public attention and that influenced politics across the party spectrum. Ultimately, the far right's success among new constituencies has also been a result of its representative claim-making in the voice of "the people" against a perceived "mass inflow of migrants", against corrupt elites and foreign or international forces.

Post-fascism does offer some responses to the observed crisis contexts. Its performance at the ideological level has certainly been particularly strong, taking up the concerns of citizens around the loss of *Heimat*, the threat of mass migration to the nation and to whiteness, the perceived competition of migrants in the domains of cheap housing, education, jobs and women. Qualitative studies of the FN-vote, in particular, illustrate this point<sup>xxix</sup>. Parts of the German *Mittelstand*, of the French working class, of populations living in peri-urban areas or specific professional categories like workers appear to share a common experience of representational crisis. Each of them have specific reasons that relate to their lived experiences – their situation in the deregulated workplace, the challenges of access to housing and the pressure of long-term loans on the family, or their children's education – that make the far-right vote appear like a reasonable choice in the search for more

protective social spaces. The post-fascist promise of white privilege or national priority sounds appealing to them. Their far-right vote is thus not a result of pure emotion or resentment, as many have argued in the recent literature on the topic; it can be explained by professional, economic, residential, educational or family reasons. Qualitative analysis, in particular of these relatively new constituencies, give us part of the explanation for the parties' recent growth and electoral successes.

Still, I agree that "(...) although the threats to security and economic stability that have rattled Europe in the past few years may have spurred the current populist surge, they did not create it" (Mudde, 2016, p. 25). Detailed ethnographic and biographic analyses on some of the FN and AfD's leading figures, ideologues and surrounding networks of activists clearly show that the current situation is only understandable if we trace their lineage back to their deep roots. In Keim (2022a), I argue that the FN has remained alive and has managed to attract new members and voters only because it could rely on organisational forms and on an ideological tradition that has been sustained throughout the decades by a small circle of people, some of whom have dedicated their lives to making the advent of post-fascism a reality. Likewise, the dramatic trajectory of the AfD since its inception can be understood by retracing its roots to the turning point of 1945. Those long-term continuities and the important role the FN has played for certain people as a political home explain why the FN has survived ups and downs, although it has considerably adapted to changing contexts. The enduring appeal of the FN for larger and also newer constituencies has been made possible by the party's long-term survival, sustained by the silent or open engagements of committed far-right circles in direct continuity with interwar fascism and colonialism. A fragment of the FN activists embodies those continuities. The same argument is valid for the recent emergence and success of the AfD in Germany. Only a focus on long-term continuities and lineages can help us understand how an initially "professorial" party, representing the interests and voicing the grievances of the *Mittelstand*, has been embraced and transformed so quickly by far-right networks and actors.

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<sup>ii</sup> The Front National was renamed Rassemblement National (RN) in early 2018. However, since most of the consulted literature refers to the FN, I shall use that acronym throughout.

<sup>iii</sup> In 2015, 60% of FN voters supported the reintroduction of the death penalty (compared to 28% of right-wing voters and 11% of left-wing voters), see: Mayer (2017).

<sup>iv</sup> Incidentally, "Alternativlosigkeit", meaning "lack of alternative", was voted "Unwort" (un-word) of German language of the year 2010 for stifling political debate.

<sup>v</sup> Pfahl-Traugher (2016). A comment on the 2017 federal elections concluded that "With the AfD, for the first time, a flawless right-wing populist party enters the German Bundestag, in terms of its milieu structure just as much as in terms of its personal, its electoral campaign and – apart from a few market-economy-oriented remnants of its liberal founding phase as a Euro-populist professoral party – also in terms of its program" (Vehrkamp and Wegschaider 2017, pp. 60–61).

<sup>vi</sup> For a more elaborate description of those networks, see Keim 2022a.

<sup>vii</sup> "Exclusiveness" is adapted from Jacquemain's discussion of the European extreme right as a "projet identitaire exclusif" (Jacquemain 2011, p. 2). "Solidarity" is adapted from Sitas's idea of the creation of non-class "horizontal solidarities" (Sitas 2015). I leave out "horizontal" because self-perception as an elite or vanguard as well as hierarchical models of society prevail.

<sup>viii</sup> See the "Black Disgrace"-campaign: Wigger (2007); Keim (2014).

<sup>ix</sup> This applies to Western Europe only; see Žižek (2017, p. 187).

<sup>x</sup> This translates into policy programs such as compelling companies to give priority to nationals in their employment policies, or reserving social housing or family benefits for nationals, etc. propositions that the FN campaigned with, or practical support for the national poor, such as the programs put in place by Casapound in Italy, copied in France by Bastion Social.

<sup>xi</sup> According to Jacquemain, far from an outward-looking rhetoric of sovereignty, from assumptions of racial superiority, from the ideal of an organic nation or from aggressive or imperialist nationalism, nationalism has been re-elaborated to fit better the rising fear of heterogeneity and cultural friction within European societies (Jacquemain and Claisse 2012, p. 22). Girard's ethnography of a small community near Lyon aptly illustrates how this translates into local policies and how it makes sense to ordinary citizens in specific working conditions, community cultures including leisure, and particular housing arrangements including access to private real estate property (Girard 2017).

<sup>xii</sup> France and Germany have followed divergent trajectories in this respect. The AfD initially emerged as a Eurosceptic party and was then increasingly embraced and taken over by far-right actors and voices. The FN, on the contrary, has rather recently experienced a controversy over the traditional xenophobic or identitarian line, represented by the Le Pens, challenged by more recent sovereigntist line represented by Philippot, who unsuccessfully tried to install Euroscepticism more firmly as a key orientation of the party.

<sup>xiii</sup> See my elaboration on the term in Keim (2014). There is asymmetry in my categorisation since ideas of the greatness of the French nation are much more broadly accepted in France than ideas of Volksgemeinschaft in Germany. However, if the aim is to understand national specificities, I believe this distinction still makes sense.

<sup>xiv</sup> Botsch traces the term "Volksgemeinschaft" throughout the postwar history of the German extreme right as being in direct continuity with National-Socialism. While from 1949 onwards, "Volksgemeinschaft" formed a counter-model to parliamentarianism and pluralism, its current iteration opposes multicultural society (Botsch 2017).

<sup>xv</sup> E.g. Gauland: "At least in one point we have more difficulty: The British need not struggle with Auschwitz" quoted in Ulrich and Geis (2016).

<sup>xvi</sup> Renken (2006); Shields (2007, pp. 90–117). While they are absent in Western Europe, there are a few actual paramilitary formations in some parts of Eastern Europe: Fromm (2016); Gauriat (2017).



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<sup>xvii</sup> This concerns, for instance, the all-male student organisations or fraternities ("Kameradschaften", see Köttig 2017, p. 229), the "Gildenschaften" (Wölk 2016, pp. 100–101; Kellershohn 2004), the Identitarians (Bruns, Glösel, and Strobl 2014; Blum 2017, p. 327) or the far-right parties' youth organisations (Herkenhoff 2016, p. 205).

<sup>xviii</sup> See Keim (2014) for a discussion of gender representations in the Black Disgrace campaign, a historical forerunner to current moral panics.

<sup>xix</sup> On France, see Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Tricou (2017); Dubslaff (2017); on Germany, Villa (2017, p. 99).

<sup>xx</sup> Opposition to 1968 includes anti-authoritarianism (conceived of as "re-education"), feminism (and related calls for gender-sensitive language and "political correctness") and sexual liberties, regarded as the foundation of the current dilution of gender roles and family models and therefore representing a "threat to social order, shared values and the moral integrity of German society" (Villa 2017, p. 105).

<sup>xxi</sup> See, for example, the interview of the Identitarian Martin Sellner with "Radical and feminine": Sellner (2017). Ici pas clair si c'est Sellner qui interviewe le blogueur ou l'inverse (d'ailleurs difficile aussi de trouver la référence de ce blog, c'est une traduction de l'allemand ?

<sup>xxii</sup> Hypermasculinity is not without its contradictions. For a more detailed elaboration on its contradictions, see Keim 2022b.

<sup>xxiii</sup> An important weakness in Mann's account, however, is that he conflates fascists' analysis of crises and the solutions they offered with sociological and historical analyses of those crises. We shall see further below that authoritarians today do offer solutions, but in accordance with the particular, self-tailored analyses of crises they put forth (see in particular the narrative of the "refugee crisis"). A rhetoric of crisis is part of their programme.

<sup>xxiv</sup> The military crisis in the aftermath of World War II certainly played a role in the German context, as the reconfiguration of the far right in the immediate post-war years shows: the disorientation *Je ne comprends pas ce que tu veux dire* par disorientation *ici* of former high-placed members of the NS-army played a role in newly founded organisations that fought, among others, for the rehabilitation of the honour of German soldiers. Their skills were also useful for the creation of stay-behind armies and in parts of the national intelligence services. The history of the Front National, in turn, is rooted in France's history as a colonial power and the resulting ideology of "declinism", i.e., the loss of France's grandeur. Similarly, anti-communist members of the Résistance and soldiers and high-ranking army officials mobilised in colonial wars (Indo-China 1946-54, Algeria, 1954-62), who had ties with the most radical civil nationalist fractions of "French Algeria", formed one of the core constituencies of the French far right. They were also recycled into French stay-behind structures during the Cold War. The defence of veterans' rights continues to be part of the FN program.

<sup>xxv</sup> In the case of the FN, which was founded in 1972, the rise in unemployment in the wake of the 1979/1980 oil crisis led to a first reformulation of the party's economic stance. In those years, the famous slogan "Un million de chômeurs, c'est un million d'immigrés de trop! La France et les Français d'abord!" aimed at appealing to the working class while remaining solidly anti-communist, transforming a complex economic issue into opposition to immigration. In this same early phase, the FN's economic policy could be characterised as largely neoliberal. Throughout the 1990s, the official "Neither right nor left" positioning of the party corresponded to its mixed outlook in terms of economic policy and to the increasing adoption of redistributive, protectionist and interventionist economic principles. This has been further accentuated following the 2008 crisis (Ivaldi 2015). In an attempt to broaden the FN's appeal, after 2008, the party abandoned its original neoliberal program and formulated an appeal to "the forgotten" combined with an anti-globalisation and anti-EU discourse. This reflected the far right's reinterpretation of the capital/labour division into one between elites and globalised cosmopolitans on the one hand and the "grassroots French" on the other hand. Considering the inconsistencies of its economic outlook over time and the relatively little importance accorded to economic issues compared to identitarian ones, it is uncertain whether this shift is about substance or just packaging (Ivaldi 2015). The FN's ideologues appear to be searching for a new "winning formula" that would ensure them broad political support.

<sup>xxvi</sup> This overlaps with Mudde's conclusion: Mudde (2016, pp. 26–27).

<sup>xxvii</sup> This is the critical point about Pegida taking up the call "Wir sind das Volk!" ("We are the people!"), a legacy from the broad opposition movement in the final phase of the GDR. Whereas those opposing the authoritarianism of the former GDR framed "the people" in terms of inclusive solidarity, the current far right turns the same wording into its opposite, a call for exclusive solidarity.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Electoral and opinion poll studies seem to confirm rather superficial, imagined moral panic reactions against socio-cultural heterogeneity. According to statistical research on the far-right vote across Europe, items like "fear of crime" appear to be a code word for "fear of multiculturalism" (Irving Jackson and Doerschler 2018).

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<sup>xxix</sup> Eribon (2009); Girard (2017); Pudal (2016).