

Affect and far-right publics on Twitter (working title)

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This dissertation builds upon an increasing scholarly interest in understanding the rationale of right-wing radicalism and extremism online. I propose an affect-based approach that asks: *How do far-right publics network and mobilize on Twitter through circulation of affect?* The theoretical framework for this dissertation is rooted in affect and media studies, social movement studies and network theory. For my analysis, I invoke recent theoretical concepts such as “affective publics” (Lünenborg, 2020; Papacharissi, 2015) and “networked publics” (boyd, 2011).

Empirically, I analyze two local cases and one transnational case that triggered public discussions about refuge and migration in Germany and revealed increasing xenophobic and nationalist sentiments in the aftermath of 2015: (1) the far-right riots in Chemnitz, State of Saxony, in August 2018, which included public displays of Hitler-salutes and attacks on journalists and BPOC; (2) the far-right terrorist shootings in Hanau, State of Hesse, in February 2020 killing nine people with so-called migration experience or ties; and (3) the violent shutdown of migration at the Turkish-Greek border in March 2020, during which far-right actors in Germany hijacked activists’ demands on Twitter to offer asylum to refugees. These cases represent a part of the rising trend in far-right radicalism and far-right extremist activity in Germany. In October 2019, just a few months prior to Hanau shootings, another far-right terrorist killed two people in Halle after attempting an attack on a synagogue with 52 people inside. In June 2019, Walter Lübcke – head of the regional council in the central German city of Kassel known for his welcoming attitude towards refugees – was assassinated by a far-right extremist in his home.

I apply a mixed-method approach to collected tweets combining social network analysis, methods of automated text analysis and qualitative text analysis. Using social network analysis, I identify and examine influential far-right actors and communities as well as their relations. Next, I apply computational methods for text analysis to identify dominant attitudes and sentiments among far right. Finally, I analyze tweets posted or distributed by influential

far-right actors by qualitative means. Here, the focus lies on how affect and emotions are used to mobilize and produce a sense of community and belonging, while construing and excluding emotional 'others'.

References

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