PENULTIMATE DRAFT

"Islamization of the Occident" – Fear of Islam as a Mobilizing Force of the
European New Right

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Abstract

Recent research has investigated the emotional underpinnings of support for the political New Right. Some of these works focus on the supply-side of support, emphasizing specific political styles and discourses, whereas others emphasize the demand-side, highlighting cultural, economic, and emotional factors. Lacking from this research, in particular for the European context, is an understanding of how supporters of the New Right experience and make sense of pertinent cleavages with regards to emotions. The present study sets out to acquire a more detailed understanding of the emotional narratives of supporters of the New Right, in particular with regard to fear and religious cleavages. Using group interviews with supporters of New Right parties and movements in Germany, we show that narratives involving fear pertain to the idea of a valued collective "We" that consists of political and cultural elements and serves as a reference point to collective identity and an antidote to existential insecurities. Further, this collective "We" is perceived to be threatened by cultural differences and changing majority-minority relations with respect to five domains of social life: demography, the liberal democratic order, public majority culture, security, and welfare.

Keywords: political emotions, fear, religion, migration, right-wing populism

Introduction

Since the increase in refugee migration to Europe in 2015, challenges related to flight, migration, and social integration have become most pressing political issues. But already before 2015, these challenges have been a breeding ground for the emergence and electoral success of new (radical, populist) right-wing parties across Europe (e.g., Ivarsflaten, 2008; Wodak, 2015; Mols and Jetten, 2020; Leininger and Meijers, 2021). This is evident, for example, in the electoral success of the "Alternative for Deutschland" (AfD) in Germany, the "Front National" in France, or the "Dansk Folkeparti" in Denmark, all of which have put issues of migration and social integration on their agendas (Muno and Stockemer, 2021; McKeever, 2020). In order to understand the success of these parties and related social movements, many have argued that economic and cultural grievances drive specific emotions of the New Right (see overviews in, e.g., Jansen, 2011; Betz, 2020; AUTHORS, 2017).

Although these emotions among the New Right are diverse and include feelings of déclassement, hate, and resentment, *fear* stands out as a particularly relevant emotion. This is true when examining the German case of the "AfD" and related voter alliances, but also other movements and parties across Europe. Fear in the discourse of the New Right is frequently associated with concerns over status and employment, and especially with culture. In this respect, religion as an object of fear is particularly salient in this discourse. The New Right are said to be concerned about the threat of an alleged hostile "Islamization" of society (Wodak, 2015; Berntzen, 2020). Paradigmatic examples are the protest group "Pegida" (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident) in Germany and the "SIOE" (Stop Islamization of Europe) movement in other countries. Religion, and in particular Islam, here becomes a key reference not only for fear, but for a cluster of emotions including anxiety, hate, and resentment.

Research has mainly begun to investigate the supply side of this emotional dimension of the New Right, asking how political parties and organizations articulate, construct, and

address the emotions of their supporters and the general public (e.g., Breeze, 2019; Ekström et al., 2018; Block and Negrine, 2017). The most comprehensive treatment of fear, in this respect, has been provided by Wodak (2015), who investigated the "politics of fear" in the New Right discourse. In contrast, still little is known about the emotions of supporters of New Right parties and movements. Hochschild's (2016) study of tea party supporters in Louisiana, USA, is a notable exception, as is Cramer's (2016) work on resentment in rural Wisconsin, USA. Both emphasize emotional processes that are also frequently mentioned in continental debates, in particular hate, anger, and resentment towards cultural and political elites, immigrants, and minorities (see Author's own, 2017). None of these, however, focus specifically on fear in conjunction with religion. Hence, the emotional articulations of right-wing support have mainly remained a matter of public debate, in particular in the European context, and thus of speculation and discursive attributions.

The present study sets out to acquire a more detailed understanding of the emotional narratives of supporters of New Right parties and movements, in particular with regard to fear. Instead of looking at political issues and cleavages very generally, we focus on religion as one of the most prominent markers of fear among the New Right. In order to do so, we concentrate on a specific country case, namely Germany, to investigate fear among the New Right. Germany has recently witnessed high success rates of New Right parties in state and federal elections and has a particular prominent history of right-wing populism and extremism due to its National Socialist's past.

In the remainder of this article, we first review research on the relevance of emotions for the success of the New Right, with an emphasis on cleavages concerning religion and fear as a particularly salient emotion. We then outline our research design and describe our methodological approach as well as the specific methods we used. We then present the results of our analysis, summarize our findings and offer some concluding remarks.

The New Right, Religion, and Emotions

Political parties and social movements of the New Right differ in their political ideologies and discourses and have been characterized by a broad range of criteria. It is also not uncommon that labels such as "right-wing populism", the "far-Right", "alt-right", or "right-wing extremism" are used interchangeably, thus reflecting an ongoing debate about the manifestations, causes and, in normative terms, dangers of the New Right for liberal democracy. In Germany, the New Right "is frequently defined as an anti-democratic movement dating back to the late sixties or early seventies" (Woods, 2007: 7) that can be characterized by its "rejection of universalism, pluralism, liberalism, parliamentarianism, equality, and multi-culturalism" (ibid.). In line with Salzborn (2016), we also contend that the New Right represents "the intellectualization of right-wing extremism through the formulation of an intellectual metapolitics, and the pursuit of a (right-wing) cultural hegemony" (38). In contrast to the "old" Right, the New Right, amongst other things, typically mobilizes "culture" rather than "race" to construct agonal moments between the familiar collective self and the Other (Minkenberg, 1992).

Religion, or more specifically Islam, has become instrumental in establishing these cultural boundaries of otherness (see deHanas and Shterin, 2018; Marzouki et al., 2016; Zúquete, 2017, for overviews). Two studies are particularly noteworthy in this respect: Roy's (2016) research on the role of religion in the *Front National* in France and Brubaker's (2017) comparative study of European right-wing populist movements. DeHanas and Shterin (2018) summarize their findings, stating that the link between religion and the New Right is primarily "identitarian and negative", focusing on distinctions between the "civilized" Western world and "barbaric" Muslims (178). According to Roy and Brubaker, the New Right tends to reinvent a Christian past that is threatened by immigration from predominantly Muslim countries. In their narrative, "the people" need to be saved by expelling Muslims.

Using some examples from German and Austrian populist parties, Palaver (2019) argues that the populist right-wing discourse on religion is specifically geared towards eliciting fear amongst its audience. Also, Wodak (2015) shows how Islam is part of the New Right's "politics of fear" that insinuates a hostile process of "Islamization."

These studies hint already to the importance of emotions in understanding the rise of the New Right. Social science research rarely considers emotions idiosyncratic or subjective psychological "states", but rather as processes fundamentally shaped by culture and social structure and vice versa (e.g., Turner and Stets, 2005). This constructionist perspective on emotions is essential, for example, in studies focusing on media discourse of the New Right (Block and Negrine, 2017; Breeze, 2019; Ekström et al., 2018) and for research investigating emotions as they are experienced or articulated by supporters of New Right movements and parties (Hochschild, 2016; Cramer, 2016).

With regard to the New Right, in particular its populist varieties, two aspects seem relevant to understand its emotional roots and narratives: long-term changes in modern societies' structural and cultural conditions as well as discourses aimed at tapping into and exploiting the emotional repercussions of these changes. As argued by proponents of modernization theory (e.g., Bauman, 2001, 2006), modern societies have seen a host of developments, including globalization, individualization, and economic deregulation that promote widespread insecurities, for instance with regard to identities, status positions, and geo-political conflicts. As we have argued elsewhere (AUTHORS, 2017), these insecurities can be considered "emotional opportunity structures" (Ruiz-Junco, 2013) for political entrepreneurs, who pursue discursive strategies that either transform these insecurities into (usually hostile) other-directed emotions (anger, resentment, hate) or contain narratives that provide specific targets or domains for these rather diffuse insecurities, thereby transforming them into more specific emotions, such as fear.

Given the relevance of fear with regard to the New Right's perspective on religion, it is surprising that most studies do not consider the prototypical structure of fear and examine the way that the New Right actually construct these narratives with regard to religion. This is even more surprising since especially Islam and Muslims have been framed within a new politics of political violence and securitization following the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 (Asad, 2007). Although there is a wide range of different forms of fear, it is typically a narrative based on three ideas: the salience of a particular good or value, for instance a person, object, or idea. Fear then results from the belief that this good is threatened and likely to be harmed and that this harm is largely beyond one's control (Dehne, 2016). In terms of this prototypical concept, how does the New Right then actually construct fear with regard to religion and a hostile "Islamization"? Moreover, most studies tend to focus on media discourse. What has received far less attention is how supporters of the New Right make sense of religion and how it is a discursive resource for their collective political positioning. What emotional narratives do supporters articulate with respect to religion? Is fear actually a salient emotion in this context and how specific are these collective articulations? To answer these questions, we conducted a number of group interviews with supporters of the New Right.

Methods

To acquire a better understanding of how emotions – in particular fear – shape New Right supporters' views on religion and the cleavages surrounding religion, we conducted group interviews amongst members of New Right parties and activist groups in Germany.

Sample and Data

We conducted group interviews (Frey and Fontana, 1991) because we were interested in (a) differences across political groups, (b) in the collective dimension of emotions, and (c) because we suspected that in individual interviews, respondents might too easily rely on

discursively "streamlined" knowledge. We conducted interviews with natural groups, that is social groups that exist beyond the specific research context, groups being our unit of analysis and group members our unit of observation. Groups were sampled on a number of criteria likely to produce a broad range of different narratives. First, we included groups from East and West Germany since they imply distinct political socialization contexts and significantly different levels of religiosity. Second, we included groups whose members predominantly recruit from both rural and urban areas, which are known to be linked to different political leanings and exposure to immigrants. Third, we sampled on demography to include younger and older respondents and different genders. Finally, we sampled different types of organizational backgrounds, in particular political parties and activist groups.

The total sample included 24 individuals (2 female) in five groups, three of which were all-male, varying in size between four and ten individuals. Age (21 - 75 years) and socio-economic status varied considerably across as well as within groups. Three groups were recruited from members of local chapters of the "Alternative für Deutschland" (AfD), a New Right party with notable electoral success in the past decade, presently being the largest opposition party in the German Parliament. One group consisted of members of a local chapter of the "Identitarian movement", a youth movement that is active in many European countries and is described as being part of the global "alt-right" (e.g., Virchow, 2015). The fifth group consisted of members of the German "Pegida" movement (see above) (Dostal, 2015). All interviews were conducted between November 2017 and March 2018, lasted approximately two hours, and were conducted at a time and place determined by the groups.

We sought to instigate discussion within the groups to be structured by the participants and our main goal was to stimulate a self-sustaining debate (Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr, 2009: 106f). Therefore, we prepared a brief interview guideline that started with an open and general stimulus question on what "religion" meant to the group. More specific questions on

Islam, Christianity and other religions were introduced only when the groups did bring up these issues. All group interviews were fully transcribed and then analyzed.

Analysis

To analyze our data, we combined concepts from existing theory and research with the *Documentary Method* (Bohnsack, 2010). This approach proposes to distinguish between the subjective sense of "what" individuals introduce as their own theories about the world from "how" they produce their social reality collectively through more latent and taken-for-granted knowledge. To reconstruct this latter "documentary meaning", we focused on instances of notable "metaphorical" and "interactive" density, that is on text rich in metaphors and exchanges between group members, to reconstruct recurring patterns of collective knowledge (ibid.: 102ff). In line with this, we conceive of our interviews as *collective* efforts of self-presentation and self-understanding that provide insights into unambiguous, taken-for-granted views as well as into the contested and debated perspectives.

Based on the literature reviewed above, we used the following sensitizing concepts to guide our inductive analysis: We used the concept of *boundary work* to sensitize interpretations to narratives involving distinctions between "us" and "them" (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Second, we paid attention to statements invoking *religion*, either as a substantial or functional category. Third, we paid close attention to instances directly or indirectly referring to emotions. We looked for specific emotion words, prototypical emotional narratives (Kleres, 2011) and affective registers (Author's own, 2019). Fourth, the introduced prototypical narrative structure of fear proved a valuable guideline for our analysis. Fear then results from the belief that a valued good is threatened and likely to be harmed and that this harm is largely beyond one's control.

Fear of Islamization amongst the New Right

When activists of the New Right talk about religion and cultural differences as important cleavages in contemporary societies, articulations of fear become evident along three major categories that emerged from our data: self and collective identity, Muslims as a threat to valued goods, and loss of control. Very generally, it is noteworthy that although our stimulus question and re-inquiries were geared towards religion, the group discussions very quickly centered around general issues of culture and cultural difference. This is an important finding in itself, suggesting that our respondents' understanding of religion is less geared towards spiritual and transcendental elements, but more towards cultural practices, beliefs, and values. Moreover, we have decided to arrange our results around the most important categories that emerged from our analysis and not around the different groups we interviewed. We point out the group context wherever it becomes important.

Collective identity: Antidote to existential insecurity

References to a collective identity as a valued good are common across all groups we interviewed and they are intricately linked to articulations of fear and religion. Although the specific semantics of this "We" differ across groups, they retain a "true people"-based connotation which entails political and cultural references.

Respondents describe this "We" as consisting of liberal as well as cultural and historically anchored political subjects belonging to a national body. They consider themselves liberal in that they emphasize their status as citizens of the democratic and liberal polity of the Federal Republic of Germany. The liberal outlook is, in this sense, defined by the description of corresponding political ideas such as the rule of law or democratic principles, but also by way of citizenship. This is illustrated, for example, by Armin[1], a member of an

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[1] All names used are aliases.

East German chapter of the "AfD". When their group discussed what it means "to be German", he literally produced the German Constitutional Law ("Grundgesetz") from his pocket, called it "our Bible" and read the paragraph regulating German citizenship, closing with the words:

> *Armin: And with this I own every discussion... if you now say: (...) 'Well, that's what it says on paper, that's not worth anything, and I have other views.' Well, then we are on different worlds. This here is the much-pictured German. Basta. Unity.*

The legitimacy and validity of the Constitutional Law seems undeniable for this respondent and defines a categorial rationale of belonging: those who hold German citizenship belong to the political community, those who act against or argue outside of its scope, do not belong, they are incompatible with the collective "We".

What also becomes apparent here is the materiality of the affective dimension of collective identity. The political community and its ideology are not just abstract ideas, but they can be touched and felt through the pages of a book. The materiality of the book thus lends credibility to liberal constitutionalism and delimitates the boundary of a legitimate debate on political belonging.

Aside from the historically grown legal and liberal norms of political self-understanding, we find a range of cultural references in respondents' self-conceptions that are deemed important conditions for political community. This is illustrated by two quotes from members of the "Identitarian Movement":

> *Nils: Identity is giving meaning to the meaningless. Now, we are born, we are thrown into the world, and, no idea, that in itself is absurd. What helps is a kind of narrative, a narrative in which I can place myself. And identities are stories for me. I have the history of the German, whatever, European history, Christian history…It's a narrative in which I have the freedom to place myself.*

Denis: [Our organization is about] national pride. That's what many people say.. (...) But I find that (...) falls a little bit short. Yeah, I'm referring to myself, and I'm putting some more effort into it.. (...). But, there you cannot necessarily talk of pride, but more of love of one's homeland or country, I think.

On the one hand, these examples reflect the idea that the individual subject ("thrown into the world") becomes aware that simply *being in the world* requires a meaningful narrative ("identity as narrative") to make sense of this world. These are historically anchored narratives of the nation, of European heritage, and includes also Christianity. On the other hand, and although this collective dimension is mostly embraced by our respondents, it is also looked at reflexively, further qualified by an element of choice and liberal thought, rooted in individual traits and preferences, as becomes evident in "the freedom to place oneself".

Importantly, religious in conjunction with national identity becomes an antidote to existential insecurity. Being "thrown into the world" bears strong connotations of a lack of agency, uncertainty, and insecurity, and national identities including religious heritage act as a remedy against these feelings. This also becomes evident in the reference to "love" (of one's homeland), which trumps feelings of "pride" often mentioned in connection with national identity.

Taken together, narratives of voluntary choice, such as those embodied in references to German Constitutional Law, and narratives emphasizing the lack of agency without belongingness, such as those referring to a communitarian national heritage, are roughly balanced in the groups. Moreover, respondents frequently acknowledged the historical variation and emotional ambivalence of the social formations that provide collective identity, as this quote from a member of the "Identitarian Movement" illustrates:

Denis: So, this is what we are always accused of: Yes, national pride. But that's much more complex with us, (...) it's, so to speak, like an onion: You have the family, you have the local community, you have different regional

> *dialects. For me there is no such thing as: this is a genuinely German culture,*
>
> *[the] Germans, for me there is no such thing. (...)Then of course there is the*
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> *national, we definitely have our own history, the language, but also Europe.*

To summarize, collective identity and the collective "We" are constructed as a "loved" and valued good that acts as an antidote to existential insecurities, it is narrated as an anchor to which respondents hold fast when reflecting about the social world. The collective "We" provides security in a world portrayed as increasingly complex and uncertain. This "We" consists of categorical boundaries in terms of political-liberal and legal norms, primarily defined by citizenship and the Constitutional Law. The boundaries and fear-repelling attributes of the collective "We", however, become fuzzier and ambivalent when constructed with regard to cultural ideas and practices pertaining to the nation, to Europe, or Christianity. We interpret these inconsistences as an outcome of more encompassing processes of modernization and social change, in particular individualization, which also render subjects' emotional lives less determined by traditions and tightly integrated social groups, but instead by individual choice, identity work, and self-care (e.g., AUTHORS, 2017).

Muslim immigrants as a threat: From cultural difference to power relations

In addition to the valued collective "We", a second major reference for fear are threats to specific domains of social life. In the interviews, we find that these threats emanate from the trope of the "foreign", which is constructed as a danger to the collective "We" through a wide array of ascriptions. From these, we have singled out two basic dimensions, "cultural difference" and "being outnumbered", which are the building blocks of five domains of social life perceived as threatened.

Cultural difference in our interviews typically implies an understanding of culture as primarily defined by religious beliefs and practices. Contrary to respondents' descriptions of the collective "We", culture in this context is *not* considered fuzzy and malleable, but rather a fixed quality of groups. In constructing cultural difference, interviewees semantically

homogenize their own group and the "other": the collective "We" now appears as a homogeneous, spatial and cultural entity which is challenged by immigrants. This challenge arises from the idea that immigrants are "carriers" of cultural practices that are not only different, but in fact *incompatible* to the autochthonous culture.

The belief in cultural differences and incompatibilities surfaced through various categories, but was ultimately represented in the image of Islam. Throughout the interviews, categories of alterity, nationality, and ethnicity emerged, as is evident in uses of words like "foreigners", "migrants", "Turks", "Arabs", and "Africans". However, all these signifiers are used more or less synonymously for being "Muslim". In addition, gender is a crucial category to exemplify differences between "us" and "them". In a more general sense, these references and rhetorical strategies mirror contemporary neo-racist discourse, in which difference is mainly constructed along the category of "culture" (Balibar, 1991).

The second key dimension, "being outnumbered", is closely linked to cultural differences and incompatibilities, but focuses more on assumptions about population dynamics and presumed changes in power relations. Cultural difference is widely considered problematic, but only tends to become a significant threat when combined with changes in the relations between the cultural majority and minorities. This reflects scholarship on multiculturalism arguing that many cleavages surrounding immigration are related to ideas and conceptions of minority-majority relations (Kylicka, 1995).

These two dimensions are the building blocks of five key domains of social life that are considered to be under threat – and thus fear-inducing – by what respondents broadly describe as the process of "Islamization": demography, the liberal democratic order, public majority culture, security, and welfare.

Demography. In the interviews, the topic of "demographic change" combines accounts of cultural difference and incompatibility with the idea of being outnumbered. Immigration and birth rate statistics are key to this imaginary. One notion of demographic

change centers around (forced) migration and related policies. In this respect, increasing

numbers of refugees since 2015 and the lively debates over immigration policies across

Europe are key reference points for interviewees' perceptions of changes in cultural minority-

majority relations. In 2015, the number of asylum seekers in Germany peaked at

approximately 890.000 individuals[2] and continued to be at elevated levels until 2019. The

interviewed groups unanimously describe this time as a period of "open borders", "mass

migration", and "refugee waves" which are believed to lead to an overall shift in the power

balance between cultural groups. Harald and Elisabeth, both members of "Pegida", articulate

these concerns, providing a good example of how "Islam" becomes a signifier for complex

population dynamics:

> *Harald: And the other thing are the sheer masses, because of the opening of*
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> *the borders, or the keeping open of the borders, one has to say, they had*
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> *already been open before [the refugee crisis in 2015], and one just didn't close*
>
> *them. According to the principle: We can't do anything about it, what are we*
>
> *supposed to do? And that is the increase in Muslims here. And at some point, it*
>
> *will be the sheer masses. [...] Nobody claimed that Islamization is coming*
>
> *abruptly, overnight. It comes stepwise, through a shift in the power balance.*
>
> *And this is my fear.*

Elisabeth: It has been for years. Taking ever more room.

A further perspective on changes to demography and power relations hinges on birth

rates. In this narrative, gender relations become crucial. Across the interviewed groups,

participants construct cultural difference along a line implying that "Muslim" women would

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[2] https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2015.html?nn=403964

show notably higher birth rates than autochthonous women, and that this will, in the long run, lead to a shift in minority-majority relations and a reversal of political power. This becomes evident in a quote from Denis and Nils, members of the "Identitarian Movement":

> *Denis: Well, we have about 80 million inhabitants. 70 (...) So about 60 million are now so genuinely German, and 20 million are just immigrants. We have a fertility rate of 0.2 for German women born between 1974 and 1992, while Muslim women have an average fertility rate of 3.1 for women born between that year and 1992. This means that this is already being tipped over in many large German cities - so in Frankfurt [am Main] I think this is already the case, so there are already over 50 percent migrants - and, if you look at the demographic change today, then we have a much higher mortality rate and we have even more immigration by refugees. So, and if we continue to calculate that, if it stays that way, and those are the nice figures now, then I think we will be from 2040, ... a little later perhaps, ... A little later perhaps, we are definitely a minority in our own country. And that will always go on like this. And the 0 to 15-year-olds, we've been the minority for a long time.*
>
> *Nils: Yes, uh (...) so in any case something will change.*

This dialogue illustrates the rhetorics of cultural homogenization present throughout the interviews. Importantly, it also points at contradictions in interviewees' imaginations of identity. For example, Denis uses interchangeable references for the "other": "Immigrants" become "Muslim women" which then turn into "refugees". Whereas Denis in a former quote opposes the idea of fixed identities, he here constructs difference by opposing categories of "genuinely German" with those of "immigrants". A presumed higher reproductive activity among "Muslims" will, in the long run, reverse majority-minority relations, making "Germans" a "minority in our own country".

Regardless of these inconsistencies and contradictions, the presumed population dynamics and changes in power relations are unanimously perceived as threats to the collective "We". Fear in this regard can be further defined with respect the perceived coping potential and the assumption of "fixed" identities. Whereas the topic of immigration is characterized by a critique of extant immigration policies and the principled possibility to change these policies, the issue of birth rates, its implied population dynamics and the inertia of "foreign" identities lack such a potential. Since fear hinges on perceived coping potential, the topic of demographic change and its connotation of powerlessness are likely to amplify many of the other threatened goods we discuss in the following.

The liberal democratic order. The imagination of demographic change goes hand-in-hand with various specific threats to the collective "We". One of these is the narrative about the political and legal order of the valued "We" that is under threat. Constructing this threat, respondents repeatedly essentialize Islam by arguing that its "ultimate interpretation" – as a member of the Southern chapter of the "AfD" put it – lacks any concept of the separation of religion and the state. Along the same lines, respondents quote Surahs from the Quran and construct theological hypotheses, for instance that the "separation between politics and religion never took place" because of the historical absence of "enlightenment in Muslim societies". Also, respondents invoke the notion that the "Sharia" is supposed to be "incompatible with the German Constitutional Law".

Again, the notion of "being outnumbered" is essential in this narrative: All groups escalate this political conflict to an actual threat through the idea that, in the long run and through "demographic change", Islam will overthrow the liberal democratic order to install an Islamic "Caliphate". All groups argue that only a specific concept or interpretation of Islam renders this scenario plausible. Accordingly, Muslims should submit to the prevailing liberal democratic order as long as they are a minority. Once they constitute a majority, however, they are obliged by divine law to establish an Islamic order. From this standpoint, respondents

constantly deny Islam the status of a religion that is subject to many lived concepts and change, but rather characterize it as a "political ideology" effectively thwarting integration and the amenability of Muslims to democracy. Fear of Islamization is thus not only rooted in the appraisal of cultural difference and a belief in changing power relations, but likewise specified by imaginations of the political incompatibility between Islam and the liberal democratic order.

Public majority culture. Islam is further seen as conflicting with what interviewees describe as the „German Leitkultur"[3], the "German" way of life. It is important to note that even though this notion of threat refers to everyday practices, all groups qualify the perceived incompatibility of "German" and "Muslim" practices by a distinction between the private and the public sphere. Referring to the principles of liberalism, respondents repeatedly affirmed that religious practices "are a private matter" and should not become an object of indignation as long as they remain compatible with legal norms. However, everyday "Muslim" practices become an issue once they extend to the public sphere and disrupt citizens' presumed "peaceful" communal life. In this respect, Muslim practices are perceived as intentional acts of disregard and misrecognition of the public.

Interviewees frequently expressed secular sensibilities towards different aspects of Muslim practices that become visible in public. Gender, again, is a key reference in our interviews. Respondents argued that Islam promotes a "sexist culture" which is directly opposed to "German" gender norms, which in their essence are assumed to embody gender equality. Headscarves or "modest" clothing, for example, are seen as important indicators of

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[3] The German term „Leitkultur" is frequently used in debates about immigration and means „dominant culture", carrying both descriptive and deontic normative implications.

these cultural differences. Likewise, mosques and minarets are perceived as a means for Muslims to show off their emerging cultural power.

The notion of "being outnumbered" is an important part of these narratives of conflict over the public sphere. The interviewed groups see considerable changes in minority-majority power relations by referring to, for example, "parallel societies" in the city of Berlin where "one does not feel at home any more". An example from an interview with a West German chapter of the "AfD" illustrates how feelings of cultural alienation and "becoming a minority" are expressed. Here, the threat stems from perceived changing food practices in public schools:

> *Gerhard: The problem starts when you start to affect society with your faith in such a way that you restrict the rights of others, and we have to see where Islam does that. (...) In our city, for example, there are no more pork dishes in the schools, except at the Protestant school. (...) Now you could (...) at least make [and offer] a pork meal, but you have to know that a kitchen, in Islamic teaching, is impure if even one pork meal is prepared there. (...) And that is why it must be so that everyone, including Christians or non-believers or whatever non-Muslims, all receive a pork-free diet.*

In sum, a culturally diverse public sphere, that is, a public sphere in which certain Muslim practices become visible or are accounted for, becomes appalling for our respondents, posing a threat to their cultural sensibilities regarding gender, religion, or food. In other words, a culturally diverse "We" seems impossible to grasp and recognize for our respondents because it lacks the capability to establish communal bonds and disintegrates the political community.

Security. The interviewed groups also frequently articulated fears related to bodily well-being, both in individual and collective regard. Interviewees were quick to interpret gender as a marker of cultural difference: In their view, a "sexist culture" and more

specifically ideas of "masculinities" of male Muslim immigrants promote crime and Islamist terrorism. The notion of "being outnumbered" in this narrative is not only made salient by respondents referring to anecdotal evidence and personal experiences, but also by referring to what they describe as "official statistics".

Two strategies are most prevalent: the groups refer to crime statistics to either demonstrate a presumed increase in overall crime rates (especially since 2015) or to indicate higher (relative) crime rates amongst immigrants and refugees compared to the native population. This is illustrated by one member of the "Identitarian Movement":

> *Chris: Of course, when you say something like that (...) you don't mean everyone. But there are certain trends in a particular collective that simply show something to that effect. Of course, not all refugees are rapists and murderers, terrorists, whatever. But it is astonishing that when such cases come to light, that they are very often refugees, that this group is simply disproportionately present among the perpetrators. And at some point, you can no longer deny that. This has nothing to do with hate or racism when you talk about facts. Facts can't be racist!*

The belief that members of a specific social category are "disproportionately" represented amongst criminal offenders and terrorists renders them a particularly salient threat to individual and collective well-being. This is particularly true when respondents establish links between Muslim immigrants and terrorism, since the very nature of terrorism is to induce fear (Bauman, 2006). Likewise, research on the securitization of asylum suggests that the characterization of immigrants and asylum seekers as threats to security is likely to induce fear (e.g., Hansson Malmlöf, 2016).

Welfare. Finally, respondents are also keen to articulate fears in relation to social and economic welfare. Members of the interviewed groups mutually confirmed their views that immigrants and asylum seekers are better provided for by the state in terms of social security

than "the Germans" are. Immigrants and asylum seekers are supposed to "drain" and corroborate the welfare state or deprive the native population of jobs and resources. Gerd, a member of the West German "AfD" chapter, provides an example:

> *Gerd: I believe that the social system that we have here could perhaps serve as an example to other parts of the world; if we allow too many people to enter this country, it will simply collapse and then we will no longer be able to make the contribution that we are making today to support other countries, and if we no longer have the exemplary function that we could perhaps still offer.*

This quote shows how both cultural difference and group relations become essential for the threat narrative: Gerd imagines immigrants not as members of the workforce contributing to economic welfare, but considers them exclusively as beneficiaries of the welfare state.

Threats from within and losing control

The image of Islamization is finally bolstered by another fear-inducing pattern of meaning-making: the uncontrollability of the threat(s). Fear to a large extent rests on the appraisal that a threat cannot be averted or its consequences being coped with. Research on boundary work argues that the identification of the "other" always implies a specific self-characterization. Hence, while the interviewed groups draw cultural boundaries through political, religious, cultural, gender-related, and economic narratives, they implicitly recount the "We" as being liberal, secular, democratic, economically productive, etc. However, besides these implicit positive self-references, members of the interviewed groups also discussed a range of undesirable qualities of the collective "We". We summarize these interpretations under the label *threats from within*.

Islamization as an "external" force becomes unmanageable and irreversible in particular when constructing the collective "We" as a political and cultural minority. The "We" in these narratives becomes a "hollow" and "rotten" entity: the delusional and ignorant

"welcoming and humanistic do-good culture", which, because of its "lack of national pride," is not willing to stop the "torrent" of Muslim immigrants. A member of the "Identitarian Movement" summarizes this criticism:

> *Andreas: (...) About Islam [and the threat]... there is the [publicist] Stocker, (...) who has written: He sees the threat of the West not in the headscarf, but in the sweatpants.*
>
> *–all laugh –*
>
> *Andreas: And, hey, of course I [as a devout Catholic] have more intersections with a devout Muslim than with the, the selfish egoist uh, oh in Prenzlauer Berg [a bohemian Berlin district], if that's where they live.*
>
> *–all laugh –*
>
> *Andreas: [Our] criticism of Islam, of course, refers first and foremost to what we have here at the moment, the negative consequences of Islam.*

Although Islam is clearly imbued with negative attributes in our interviews, a second important "threat to the West" comes from within their own cultural community. "Sweatpants" in the above quote stands for many issues the groups complained about which amount to a perceived de-valuation of desirable virtues, rendering the collective "We" weak and vulnerable: Wearing "sweatpants" here is associated with a withdrawal from the public, with laziness, consumerism, hedonism, and unproductivity – characteristics that are met with blatant contempt from many of our respondents. Put differently: How can a "country" in sweatpants "serve as an example to other parts of the world?", to quote the respondent in the above paragraph. In stark contrast to the many devaluations, respondents also acknowledged a range of desirable and in fact admirable traits among "Muslims", which they lament to lack in their collective "We", such as national pride, family values, solidarity, and a strong group consciousness. From this perspective, the groups see themselves as a minority that still

upholds traditions and pride vis-á-vis a majority that celebrates cultural diversity and at the same time disdains its own culture.

The idea of losing control further gains momentum in a second regard: Although interviewees marshal a general criticism against their co-nationals, the weakening of the political community is at the same time attributed to a range of "elites", as usually found in populist ideologies: Interviewees were quick to blame political parties, "mainstream" media, and "cultural elites" for this lack of control. In this respect, the narrative of fear is closely linked to other emotions, such as anger, contempt and resentment. The groups accused these institutions and their social milieus for refraining from controlling any of the above-mentioned threats. Moreover, they accuse "elites" to strategically promote Islamization. Gender becomes an important category to express the perceived corroboration of the collective "We", as the following quote of a member of "Pegida" indicates:

> *Gunnar: And here, for a long time now, a policy has been pursued that has led, already led, to the fact that the people who create value do not multiply so much. By that I mean the destruction of families, (...)*
>
> *Heinz: Yes.*
>
> *Gunnar: (...) through gendering, through feminisation of men here as well.*
>
> *(Heinz laughs)*
>
> *Gunnar: It's a certain kind of development here. Softening of the men's world.*

In this quote, different fear-inducing patterns intersect: The birth rate of a valued in-group is deemed too low compared to other groups. Whereas this idea implies narratives about "cultural difference" and "being outnumbered", Gunnar argues that this is intentionally so. The comparably lower birth rates of the in-group are a political strategy, steered by feminist policies and men who are "softened" or "feminized". In sum, our interviewees turn cultural differences pertaining to Muslims into unavoidable threats to the collective "We" and their majority status because no policies are in place that would prevent further immigration

and declining birth rates of the in-group. In sum, these narratives also reveal a striking contradiction between the perception of Muslims as a threat to "Western" culture and the acknowledgement and admiration of their sense for national pride, family values, solidarity, and traditional gender roles. This speaks to a constellation in which fear is closely intermingled with feelings of envy. Although respondents hardly ever articulate this emotion, envy typically signals that one desires certain goods and qualities that another party possesses, coupled with desire that the other party loses these qualities. This component of spite, malice and ill-will that is integral to envy can be easily reconciled with feelings of fear, as is the case, for example, in ressentiment, which has been argued to be a characteristic emotion of the New Right (AUTHORS, 2017).

Conclusion

The recent success of New Right movements and parties across European Societies has spurred a range of research looking at the emotional underpinnings of this success. Most of this research has either looked at individual-level emotional determinants of electoral behavior and movement participation from a demand side perspective, or at emotions in New Right political discourse from a supply side perspective. What is lacking, in particular in the European context, is a systematic understanding of the way emotions such as fear work as cultural narratives for the New Right and the manner in which supporters and voters of the New Right make sense of pertinent cleavages with regards to emotions. Using group interviews, we therefore investigated the emotional narratives of supporters of New Right parties and movements in Germany, focusing on religion as a particularly prominent cleavage, and on fear as an emotion known to play a decisive role in demand- and supply-side explanations of New Right support.

Based on research of the cognitive antecedents of fear, our analysis capitalized on valued goods, perceived threats to these goods, and assessments of one's coping potential. Our results show, first, that although religion was primed as the main topic of the conversations using adequate stimulus questions, the narratives predominantly revolved issues of language, politics, history, language and cultural practices, which indicates a salient understanding of religion as a cultural and political, rather than a "spiritual" and "transcendental" phenomenon. Second, our analysis shows that that narratives involving fear frequently pertain to the idea of a valued collective "We" that consists of political and cultural elements and serves as a reference point to collective identity and an antidote to existential insecurities. The political elements of this "We" include ideas of liberal democracy and of the rule of law, whereas cultural elements refer to national heritage, Christianity, language, practices, and cultural traditions. The collective "We" is mostly imbued with positive emotions (e.g., love) and is widely perceived as an anchor of identity in a world perceived as increasingly complex and uncertain. It consists of unambiguous categorical boundaries in terms of political-liberal and legal norms, which are primarily defined by citizenship and Constitutional Law. These boundaries become fuzzy when constructed with regard to cultural ideas and practices pertaining to the nation, to Europe, or Christianity.

Third, our analysis shows that a further reference point of fear are threats to specific domains of social life deemed valuable. These threats are rooted in perceptions of cultural difference and the idea of being outnumbered by Others. Specifically, we find that the current demographic composition of society is suspected to change as a consequence of immigration and purportedly higher birth rates amongst immigrants compared to the native population. This contributes to the fear-inducing appraisal that the liberal democratic order is under pressure and possibly overthrown by a "Caliphate". Being outnumbered by Others further threatens an ideal image of respondents' beloved majority culture that is essential to the

collective "We", it pressures public security and social welfare, all of which are articulated as matters of concern.

Although not every single enunciation frames Islam or Muslims as the responsible agents threating these valued goods, the patterns of interaction in our group discussions do suggest that "Muslim culture" is, in essence, incompatible with these goods. Ascribed reproductive activity, orthodox religiosity, gender inequalities, violence, and economic unproductivity are typical traits circumscribing the anti-modern, which is why the narratives fit well within the discourse of Orientalism. However, we also found instances where these traits are appreciated, even envied, and seen as characteristics lacking in the collective "We". This also becomes in our third finding, namely threats from within the collective "We" and the perceived loss of control concerning cultural diversity and population dynamics. Muslims become even more fear inducing threats when respondents self-categorize as a cultural minority within a multiculturalist majority that has given-up on traditional cultural virtues and instead engages in planned "Islamization".

Generally, it is striking that fear in the group discussions is notably rationalized. Contrary to wide held belief, our respondents hardly ever engage in affectively charged or strongly emotionalized discourse in terms of a particular populist style (AUTHORS, 2021). Rather, fear follows an almost textbook-like constellation: Respondents articulate beliefs which are seen as impeding their aims, goals, and desires, coupled with the impression of a limited control potential. Clearly, many of the ideas the respondents articulate are false by any standards or at least questionable. This, however, does not undermine their role as a basis for collective emotions among supporters of the New Right. Furthermore, overarching narratives of fear are accompanied by a range of other emotions revolving around contradictory or ambivalent stances, for example contempt, envy, and admiration with respect to the fear of losing control.

The present study contributes to a better understanding of the emotional underpinnings of the success of the New Right. In particular from a demand-side perspective where research has capitalized on theoretical arguments and survey research, our study gives a systematic reconstruction on the narrative elements of fear among the New Right. Our study also suggests that political interventions aimed at offsetting illiberal, racist, and extremist tendencies on the New Right need to address and revise the belief structures underlying the various fears we described, rather than exclusively focusing on emotional styles and rhetoric.

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