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Anti-Muslim Articulations: Ethnosexist Common Sense and Gay Politics in the *Alternative for Germany*

Patrick Wielowiejski

1. “The Only Real Protective Power for Gays and Lesbians in Germany”

Alice Weidel’s public coming out during a campaign speech in September 2017 came as no surprise. On the contrary, the media had already picked up on her sexual orientation and lifestyle that observers found to be puzzlingly at odds with her party’s stance on LGBT rights. Being one of the two leaders of the populist radical right-wing *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) group in the *Bundestag* and a representative of the party’s neoliberal wing, Weidel had so far remained silent about matters deemed private. But, in 2017, she decided to go on the offensive:

“Today, I would like to deviate a little from my program to talk to you for the first time, both in this election campaign and in general, about a subject that does not actually belong here. A first, so to speak. As some of you may know, I share my life with a woman. Not so much lately, but normally I do. (Applause.) We also raise two kids together. Some of you might have guessed already what I’m talking about, and the rest will hear it from me now: I’m homosexual. (Laughter, applause, shouts of “bravo”, whistles.) I just paused a little on purpose, but nobody seems to be getting up to leave. (Laughter.) And that’s a bit surprising because the AfD, after all, is a homophobic party! I read that every day. The members, the functionaries, and, of course, all the supporters and voters of this party all hate homosexual people, don’t they? Is there no one here who hates me? No? So, not a single person who can’t stand the fact that I spend my life with a woman. Phew, thanks a lot. (Applause.) [...] But let me get one thing straight: I am not a member of the “Alternative for Germany” in spite of my homosexuality, but because of my homosexuality!”¹

How is Weidel able to say that she is a member of the AfD *because* of her homosexuality, and not in spite of it, given that the AfD not only opposes marriage equality and the right to adoption for same-sex couples, but views homosexuality as unequal to heterosexuality in general? As I have argued elsewhere, the agenda of the AfD is, for the most part, not openly homophobic in its rhetoric, but strictly heteronormative: gays and lesbians are ‘tolerated’ as long as they do not demand equality (Wielowiejski 2020). However, Weidel argues

1 Cf. Youtube. 2017a. “Wahlkampfabschluss der AfD: Rede von Alice Weidel” Produced by phoenix. September 23. Video, 11:23–13:55. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nryxxv-BFdm&t=835s>. All translations from primary sources are my own.

that the AfD is “the only real protective power for gays and lesbians in Germany”, as she said in an interview published on the same day as her coming-out speech. “We are the only political force that dares to thematize the intimidations, discriminations, and attacks on homosexual people in Germany, committed by mainly Muslim migrants” (Berger 2017).

This line of argument works well within the AfD. For AfD supporters and as part of far-right common sense, it is obvious that the immigration of Muslim people poses a particular danger to gays and lesbians because ‘Muslims’ and/or ‘Islam’² are perceived to be ‘backward’, ‘barbarian’, ‘uncivilized’, and, therefore, homophobic. The fight against the supposed ‘Islamization’ of Europe is, as it were, the brand essence of the AfD.

In my contribution, I interrogate the ways in which a ‘pro-gay’ discourse is articulated to the anti-Muslim racism characteristic of the contemporary far right, based on material from two years of ethnographic fieldwork in the AfD. As will become clear, far-right ideology can appear attractive to some white gays—namely, to those who are in favor of anti-Muslim racism—in spite of its constitutive heteronormativity. I am, however, neither interested in ‘exposing’ this particular variant of gay racism nor in answering the question of whether or not the AfD is ‘actually’ gay-friendly. Instead, I approach this political phenomenon from the perspective of hegemony. Thus, I ask how the putative boundaries between the far right and gay politics are blurred. Certain political players in the AfD try to connect the pro-gay, anti-Muslim argument as exemplified in Weidel’s remarks to the wider *common sense* of the far right. By engaging with this central notion from the work of Antonio Gramsci, I can make sense of the contradictions at play in these politics—and importantly, without psychologizing the actors in the field.

In the following, I will explain how I situate this analysis in the ongoing debates on homonationalism (section 2) before I relate two ethnographic vignettes that provide the empirical basis for my argument (sections 3 and 4). Subsequently, I will elaborate on what I call the ‘ethnosexist common sense’ of the far right, and on how my interlocutors, gay AfD politicians, try to connect to it (section 5). I finish by discussing the contradictions and ambivalences of this politics, which are, as I argue, not an outcome of the ‘self-hatred’ or ‘false consciousness’ of gay right-wingers, but rather a constitutive feature of any battle for hegemony (section 6).

2 (Anti-Muslim) racism does not find its object—‘Islam’ or ‘Muslims’—in the world and subsequently devaluates it; instead, it constructs it in the first place (Attia 2017). I therefore consistently place ‘Islam’ in quotation marks to highlight that I am citing a term from the field and, consequently, referring to a racist figure.

2. The Homonationalist Interpellation

The appropriation of liberal ‘Western’ values in the name of imperial and exclusionary nationalist politics has been discussed for some time with notions such as “homonationalism” (Puar 2007; 2013), “sexual nationalism” (Mep-schen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens 2010), “queer necropolitics” (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014), and “femonationalism” (Farris 2017). With different emphases, these authors argue that women’s and LGBT rights are used by Western actors to legitimize the ‘war on terror’ or the sealing off of ‘Fortress Europe’. A common feature of homo- and femonationalist discourses is that they postulate the superiority of the West vis-à-vis an uncivilized Muslim ‘Orient’. Although women’s and LGBT rights have been intensely fought for in the West time and again (and must continue to be fought for), ‘tolerance of homosexuals’ is now regarded as the defining criterion of ‘Europeanness’ par excellence (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014). This “culturalization” of gay and women’s emancipation is closely linked to anti-Muslim discourses and policies (Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens 2010). Fatima El-Tayeb, for example, suggests that the devaluation of Islam is constitutive of the national narrative of the Netherlands as traditionally tolerant, liberal, and secular (El-Tayeb 2011). At the same time, these discourses are an expression of a long colonial tradition in which the notion of “white men saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 1988:297) is a central tool of the West’s “civilizing mission” (Bracke 2012). Rogers Brubaker embeds these phenomena in a larger context. For Northern and Western Europe, he notes a partial shift from particular nationalisms to a broader “civilizationism”: “The preoccupation with Islam has given rise to an identitarian ‘Christianism’, a secularist posture, a philosemitic stance, and an ostensibly liberal defense of gender equality, gay rights, and freedom of speech” (Brubaker 2017:1193). The contradictions that accompany the illiberal invocation of liberalism, the growing importance of Christian identity in one of the most secularized regions of the world, and the adoption of liberal rhetoric by sometimes far-right parties are striking, Brubaker writes (ibid.).

But how are these contradictions to be understood? Cultural and Gender Studies scholar Gabriele Dietze speaks of a “dynamic paradox” that is constantly being re-balanced (Dietze 2018:35). According to her interpretation, the paradoxes within right-wing populism are not a disruptive factor but rather its current recipe for success, for it enables the construction of an “emancipation façade” through which Western ‘sexual freedom’ can be positioned against Muslim ‘unfreedom’ (Dietze 2018:42).

I find it important to emphasize that the aforementioned analytical categories such as homonationalism and femonationalism were by no means developed for an analysis of the far right, but on the contrary, they are meant as

critical tools that look at the present condition of liberal modernity. In this respect, I am not concerned with the question of whether the AfD is homonationalist or not; that is, I do not consider homonationalism as a practice or characteristic of certain actors (be they ‘right-wing’, ‘liberal’, or ‘left-wing’). Rather, I conceptualize homonationalism as a hegemonic relation that positions subjects along the axis of civilized/modern/tolerant/Western/liberal versus barbaric/primitive/violent/non-Western/illiberal. In the postscript of the 2017 edition of *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar, who had coined the term homonationalism, addresses the reception of her book and clarifies her understanding of the term (Puar 2017:223–41). She makes clear that she was not merely interested in demonstrating how queer actors appropriated nationalist and imperialist interests of the United States in the wake of 9/11. Homonationalism, she argues, is neither a synonym for “gay racism” nor a term for how gay and lesbian identities are integrated into the conservative imaginary (Puar 2017:229). Rather, homonationalism, as an analytical category, attempts to grasp the consequences of the successes of those LGBT movements primarily oriented towards the expansion of liberal rights. In this respect, the focus is on the question of

“how and why a nation’s status as ‘gay-friendly’ has become desirable in the first place. Like modernity, homonationalism can be resisted and resignified, but not exactly opted out of: we are all produced as subjects through it, even if we are against it. It is not something that one is either inside of / included or against / outside of—rather, it is a structuring force of neoliberal subject formation.” (Puar 2017:230)

If we thus understand homonationalism as an interpellation that no political subject in neoliberalism can escape, then our question is no longer: *Is the AfD homonationalist or not?*, but rather: *In what ways does the AfD respond to the homonationalist interpellation?* The sexual-political paradoxes within the far right can be interpreted as different strategic responses to the homonationalist interpellation. I argue in this chapter that the simultaneity of liberal and anti-liberal, ‘emancipatory’ and conservative discursive practices in the far right are not only constitutive elements of the current historical success of European right-wing populism (Dietze 2018:36), but *both* an opportunity to integrate heterogeneous political demands into a hegemonic bloc *and* a risk of incoherence and division.³

However, for the purposes of this chapter, I have chosen to refrain from a more thorough theoretical discussion in favor of a more detailed ethnographic

3 My formulation of homonationalism as a hegemonic relation is based on Benjamin Opratko’s critique of Puar’s theoretical premises (Opratko 2019:275–76). Opratko points out that Puar’s conceptualization of homonationalism ignores questions about underlying social relations, contradictions, and conflicts because it argues within an assemblage theory paradigm and focuses its analysis on what emergent forces come together at the surface of this assemblage. According to Opratko, what *function* homonationalism fulfills in hegemonic conflicts remains unrecognized within this paradigm.

description and analysis. I base my main claim on an analysis of the common sense of the field, as it appeared in various events of the AfD and its gay caucus, the *Alternative Homosexuals* (AHO), which I attended during two years of fieldwork (2017–2019). In the following, my analysis of two of these events asks what views and interpretations of the world are taken for granted in the field, placing them in the context of hegemonic negotiations around power and interpretational sovereignty (Sutter 2016). The AHO tries to connect to the common sense of the field in various ways. The resulting connections and breaks, the compatibility on the one hand and incoherence on the other hand are the subject of this chapter.

3. A Silent Vigil on the Rhine Promenade

The *Alternative Homosexuals* are a small group of gay men who are members of the AfD. During the time of my fieldwork, they had a core of five active members—my main interlocutors, who would meet up twice a year in different parts of Germany to plan their activities, discuss their policy positions, and socialize. Although they were not recognized as an official branch of the party, on June 19th, 2018, the AHO held its largest and most important event to date in the Western German city of Essen with party spokesman Jörg Meuthen as a special guest. Two years earlier, on June 12th, 2016, an Islamist perpetrator had murdered 49 people at the LGBT nightclub *Pulse* in Orlando, most of whom were members of the Latinx community. The date of the event in Essen had deliberately been set by the AHO around the second anniversary of the Orlando shooting. Three days before the event, I met two of them at a silent vigil on the banks of the Rhine in Düsseldorf.

On June 16th, 2018, I travel to the state of North Rhine-Westphalia to meet with Gregor and Jens.⁴ Gregor has told me, without further explanation, that he and Jens wanted to go to ‘a silent vigil in memory of Luliana’ in Düsseldorf, organized by a group called *Patrioten NRW* (Patriots North Rhine-Westphalia). Just before eleven in the morning, I arrive at the Rhine promenade. From a distance, I can already see a handful of people, maybe 15, with signs in their hands. I get closer and can now also see Jens and Gregor. The two are holding a poster together that reads, “The blood of the victims is not colorful!” (“Das Blut der Opfer ist nicht bunt!”). A few of the other participants, both men and women, have laminated signs hanging from their necks. On them, there is a link that leads to a ‘mobile memorial plaque’—as I later investigate, it is a website of the Austrian leader of the far-right *Identitarian Movement*, Martin

4 The ethnographic descriptions are based on fieldnotes by the author. Names of interlocutors are pseudonyms.

Sellner. Jens introduces me to one of his comrades-in-arms who has the word ‘Patriot’ tattooed on his forearm in Gothic script. “I know you from somewhere”, he says. I am startled, even though he must be mistaken. It’s obviously meant in a friendly way—after all, I’m here with Jens and Gregor, and he has no reason to distrust me—but in this far-right environment, it still strikes me as a threat.

The picketers are standing around and talking. A few police officers are nearby; Gregor explains to me that they had just had problems with “attackers” who had called them “racist”. But for the moment, everything is quiet. A few passers-by are strolling along the Rhine promenade, but they pay little attention to the vigil. After a while, Gregor and Jens decide to leave. Gregor seems to be a little disappointed because he had expected more people to come; he is texting back and forth with an activist who, he says, overslept. Finally, he gives his poster to another person and says goodbye to the guy with the ‘Patriot’ tattoo.

4. “A Strong Germany on the Side of Its Homosexuals”

Three days later, I am in an upscale restaurant in the south of Essen, overlooking Lake Baldeney and the Ruhr valley. Under the title “Civil Rights Instead of Silent Victims—A Strong Germany on the Side of Its Homosexuals”, the AHO has set up an evening event here with party spokesman Jörg Meuthen. They have been planning this event for several months, and now, it is about to begin. There are tables and chairs ready for about eighty people. Members of the AHO are laying out flyers and preparing the technicalities. Someone is struggling with a black-and-white roll-up display that reads “Orlando, June 12th, 2016. They had to die because they were gay. 49 homosexuals brutally executed by Islamists”. The display also features a large black cross in the background and the AfD’s slogan, “Mut zur Wahrheit” (“Daring to Tell the Truth”).

Shortly before the event begins, I take a seat at one of the front tables where three women, aged around seventy, are sitting and talking animatedly. One of them has a small booklet in front of her: “The Little Incorrect Islam Bible”. She passes the book to the others and says, “This is a present for Annette, write a dedication in it!”

The idea for this event goes back to the national party convention in Hanover in December 2017. During his candidacy speech for the office of national spokesman, Meuthen wanted to justify why he had met with representatives of both the far-right caucus of the party, the *Patriotic Platform*, and the more moderate *Alternative Center*. He used an analogy: “Here’s a thought experi-

ment: Suppose the group *Alternative Homosexuals* [...] invited me, and I accepted the invitation. What should I do? If I go, will I be homosexual?”⁵ Andreas, one of my key interlocutors, told me that the AHO members, of course, immediately pricked up their ears. So now, they take Meuthen at his word.

After one of the AHO members has welcomed the guests and opened the event, Matthias Helferich steps up to the lectern, representing the board of the North Rhine-Westphalia AfD:

“I am pleased to be here with you today as a representative of the state executive committee of the Alternative for Germany here in NRW. It is even a matter close to my heart to express my appreciation and recognition for your commitment within and outside the AfD with a greeting word to you. You are courageous... men above all, I noticed—that is a problem in the AfD anyway, that we have far too many men—[...] but you also have women, don’t you? In the “Alternative Homosexuals”, right? Yes, then you are definitely brave women and men who are doing an important service to the patriotic movement in Germany. For decades, the left-liberal cartel parties claimed interpretive sovereignty over gay interests in political life. Greens and left-wing politicians posed as advocates of homosexual causes. But what did the left do over all those decades? They opened up society, they opened up borders, and they invited barbarism into our country.”⁶

One of the women at my table turns to her friends in astonishment during these words, “Why is he talking about homosexuality, that’s not the issue today!” “Yes, it is!”, another one of the women says. “I thought it was a speech by Professor Meuthen!” “Yes, but that’s the topic, Gregor organized it.” She turns her head very slowly. Her gaze goes into the distance. “Pfff...” Next to speak is the chairman of the AHO, Alexander Tassis, and, as he says, “in order to explain this evening”, he addresses a few words to the audience: “Gays, lesbians, transsexuals, AfD, this is perhaps not coherent at first sight”. He first mentions strategic reasons to “take this issue away from the leftists, because, of course, hardly anyone in Europe votes for a party that is exclusionary”. Then, Tassis, the only member of the AfD in the state parliament of Bremen, starts talking about the “Action Plan Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Interphobia” of his state⁷ and justifies why he—a gay man—was the only MP who voted against it:

“Because what is not mentioned, what does not occur in 185 pages, which keyword? The word Islam! Not even mentioned! One would think, if I am trying to construct an ideology, that I am at least able to pretend that I want to tackle the most important problems. I can at

- 5 Cf. YouTube. 2017b. “Rede von Jörg Meuthen auf dem AfD-Bundesparteitag in Hannover” Produced by AfD TV, December 8, Video 04:53–05:19. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4WTl6cqP_0.
- 6 Cf. YouTube. 2018a. “Veranstaltung vom 19.06.2018 Grußwort Matthias Helferich” Produced by Adrian Ochmanski, Juli 5. Video 00:12–01:17. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GjC_FBsZoQ&t=250s. Since this was a public event and the speeches can be found on YouTube, I decided not to anonymize the speakers in this case.
- 7 Cf. Freie Hansestadt Bremen. 2015. “Aktionsplan gegen Homo-, Trans-, und Interphobie für das Land Bremen”. Accessed November 4, 2022. https://www.soziales.bremen.de/sixcms/media.php/13/Aktionsplan_2015%20%28barrierefrei%29.pdf.

least pretend that I perceive the problems, the current problems, in 2018, of homosexual and transsexual people in Germany. But they don't do that. Because these people, who design such action programs, are just ideologists who conceal the most important thing, as ideologists have done through all centuries. And it is out of the question for me, as a homosexual, to agree to such plans, which are supposedly against [anti-]gay violence.⁸ So, although it seems illogical at first sight, one must fight against these plans and raise one's voice against them."⁹

My neighbor taps on the table with her long fingernails and looks at her golden watch. In a voice that is no longer so low, she says, "If this continues, I'm out of here... I didn't think this the theme. There's a whole different crowd here today, too. Pfff..."

The next opening speech is given by Karsten P., a victim of anti-gay violence from Bremen. He talks about how he and his partner were brutally attacked by Salafists. Later, I read about the case in the Bremen newspaper *Weser-Kurier*: The alleged perpetrators were confronted by the police and later summoned for questioning, to which they did not appear. There was no search for them. After a robbery, they left for Syria. The prosecution initially presumed one of them dead until it became known that he had been arrested in Turkey (Hinrichs 2017). Irritated by the inaction of the police and the public prosecutor's office, Karsten P. also turned to different political parties and the Bremen senator of the interior, but without success. In the AfD, he was eventually met with open ears.

Now, Meuthen begins to speak in front of the fifty or so guests—"finally!", I can read in the eyes of my table neighbors.

5. "As Colorful as a Burqa": The Ethnosexist Common Sense

By describing these two episodes, I want to show my interlocutors' attempts to participate in the "ethnosexist constellation" (Dietze 2019) of the field. With the term ethnosexism, Dietze describes forms of sexism that refer to ethnicized "others" (Dietze 2016:3). This includes racialized sexism towards women *and* men, that is, forms of discrimination that impute a problematic (such as backward, oppressed/oppressive, or violent) gender and sexual order to 'ethnic Others'. To distinguish it from historical forms of sexualized racism, Dietze limits the term to those contemporary forms of anti-immigration politics in which

8 In the quote, Andreas speaks of "gay violence" ("schwule Gewalt"), which appears to be a slip of the tongue.

9 Cf. YouTube. 2018b. "Veranstaltung in Essen Teil2, Rede Alexander Tassis/Karsten Potthast". Produced by Adrian Ochmanski. July 8. Video 08:35–09:38. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gq7lhb99keo&t=173s>.

sexuality is highlighted (ibid.:4), that is, to those discursive patterns that are the subject of this chapter. In her book on “sexual exceptionalism” (Dietze 2019), Dietze uses the term “ethnosexist constellation”, referring to social relations composed of triangles of (dangerous) ‘others’, (endangered) members of the ‘us’, and a protective power (Dietze 2019:15–16). Thus, when ethnosexist constellations construct inferior or dangerous ‘others’, a superior, enlightened, emancipated, and free ‘us’ is always produced as well. The function of these constellations, according to Dietze, is to ward off and externalize the inadequacies and ambivalences proper to Western gender and sexual politics by flaunting the façade of an ostensibly previously completed emancipation vis-à-vis the ethnosexistically marked “Others” (Dietze 2019:39).

The vigil in Düsseldorf was intended to function primarily as an emotionalized form, although it remained vague and implicit in terms of content: the talk was simply of ‘(death) victims’ and ‘violence’, without being more specific about *what* violence and *what* victims were at stake. Apparently, it was not even necessary to name ‘Islam’ or ‘Muslim men’ explicitly; everyone present seemed to know who the alleged perpetrators (Muslim men) and victims (young white German women) of the ‘violence’ were; no further proof was required. It did not surprise me that it was my interlocutor Gregor who was connected to far-right groups beyond the AfD, such as the *Patrioten NRW*, who organized several such vigils and other demonstrations in 2018, some more successful than the one depicted here. They are closely connected to the *Identitarian Movement* and other extreme right-wing groups (Sturm 2019), which, at the vigil I attended, was evidenced by the links to the ‘mobile memorial plaque’ on the signs of the participants. At AHO meetings, Gregor often wore *Identitarian Movement* T-shirts and made more openly racist statements than anyone else (which made others visibly uncomfortable in my presence). In this respect, Gregor seemed like a nodal point connecting the AHO and AfD to more clearly right-wing extremist groups.

This vagueness on the one hand and the references to other far-right actors on the other hand suggest a common sense of the field—that which is considered self-evident and does not require detailed argumentation. My claim is that ethnosexist common sense, as articulated in both events, is shared by a range of politically diverse actors on the broader far right. It thus establishes relations—sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously—between them: that (young and, implicitly, white German) women and girls are threatened by male Muslim migrants is just as self-evident to people in this field as the fact that the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. This commonsensical idea establishes a certain ideological coherence across different actors on the far right.

An ethnographer conducting participant observation and spending an extended amount of time with a certain group of people aims at making sense of the world through the eyes of their interlocutors. Working with the Gramscian

concept of common sense in the context of an ethnographic cultural analysis allows the ethnographer to make sense of everyday views and interpretations of the world that are taken for granted in the field they study *in terms of hegemony*. That is, it allows them to understand such worldviews in the context of the social negotiations for power and interpretive sovereignty (Sutter 2016). That is because, for Gramsci, common sense is not a politically neutral terrain: it is a site of struggle. Different political actors aim to influence common sense so that their particular worldview becomes—or remains—dominant (Crehan 2016:119). The fight over common sense, in other words, is part of the fight for hegemony. As Ove Sutter has argued, this is why the Gramscian notion of common sense can help disciplines focused on people’s everyday life (such as anthropology) to make sense of the phenomena it studies in terms of power (Sutter 2016).

One element that illustrates the common sense of the far right in the vignettes is the signifier *bunt* (colorful, multicolored) which appeared on the poster that Jens and Gregor held up in Düsseldorf (“The blood of the victims is not colorful!”). There were many other situations during my fieldwork in which people distanced themselves from the word *bunt*—which, from my point of view, had a positive connotation. In Jörg Meuthen’s speech at the event in Essen, there was a particularly striking example: “Almost sixty per cent [of Muslim immigrants] [...] reject friendships with homosexual people. This must be the colorfulness that the Merckels, Stegners, Göring-Eckardts, Roths and Kippings of this republic rave about on a continuous loop. Really colorful. As colorful as a burqa.”

Such rejections of the word *bunt* refer to the numerous German civil society initiatives against the far right that use *bunt* as a cipher for ‘diverse’, ‘multicultural’, and ‘tolerant’ and thus want to speak out against racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of discrimination. *Bunt*, in other words, constructs a broad “chain of equivalence”¹⁰ amongst democratic political forces against a constitutive outside constructed as bigoted, racist, and intolerant: the far right. Excluded in this way from the ‘colorful’ multicultural imaginary, the far right in turn makes “the infantile buzzword ‘colorful’” (Lichtmesz 2018) its constitutive outside. In the sentence from Meuthen’s speech quoted above, he refers to different German politicians who, he says, “rave about [colorfulness] on a continuous loop”. While former chancellor Angela Merkel was a member of the Christian-democratic conservative CDU, Ralf Stegner is from the social democratic SPD, Katrin Göring-Eckardt and Claudia Roth from the Green party, and Katja Kipping from the democratic

10 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe introduced the term “chain of equivalence” to describe a process whereby a common political cause is constructed among different actors with particular interests against a common opponent (Laclau and Mouffe 2001 [1985], xviii and *passim*). The differential elements of the chain—i.e., the different demands—are equivalent to each other to the extent that they share a common outside (*ibid.*:127–34).

socialist *Die Linke. Bunt*, in other words, becomes an “empty signifier” similar to the *Altparteien*, the established parties, “the enemy” of German right-wing populism (Kim 2017).

In their book “Mit Linken leben” (“Living with Leftists”), the far-right publicists Martin Lichtmesz and Caroline Sommerfeld attempt to explain the popularity of *bunt* in anti-right-wing civil society, combining it with a critique of the egalitarianism of leftists and liberals. They call it the “Smarties dogma”:

“A ‘Smartie’ is a chocolate bean with a brightly colored frosting; underneath this layer, however, all Smarties are made of the same chocolate. This is roughly how leftists imagine ‘diversity’, and this is why every Green believes that in every immigrant there is a ‘cosmopolitan’ [‘weltoffener’], liberal, bourgeois, Western do-gooder, as he usually is himself” (Lichtmesz and Sommerfeld 2017:62–63; my translation).

What happens by celebrating the “colorful”, according to Lichtmesz and Sommerfeld, is a naïve leveling of ontological differences. A “Green”, the quote implies, is not even capable of recognizing the danger posed by migrants, because he (sic) adheres to a fatal conception of “diversity” that recognizes superficial external differences but not internal, essential ones. This, Lichtmesz and Sommerfeld claim, is a projection: the “Green” universalizes his own particular ideological position. As organic intellectuals, Lichtmesz and Sommerfeld thus take up the common sense of the far right to which *bunt* appears as something worthy of rejection and try to establish coherence between this common sense and their right-wing ideology (concretely: the ideology of inequality).

By participating in the vigil with their poster, Gregor and Jens show that they share this common sense, thereby staging themselves as belonging to the far right. However, it is not so clear that the far right *recognizes* them as such. The event in Essen shows how the *Alternative Homosexuals* try to spread their particular interests *by expressing them in the ethnosexist register of the far right’s common sense*. That is, in order to be recognized as belonging to the far right, the AHO propagate a narrative that frames them as victims of ‘Islamization’, akin to the way in which ethnosexist frames white women and girls as victims.

The event in Essen can thus be read as an attempt to establish a chain of equivalence between the demands of homosexuals and the demands of right-wing actors, that is, a common cause against a common enemy, namely, ‘Islam’. By winning over the party leadership to its cause, the AHO wants to actively influence and affect the far-right common sense because they are aware that it has not yet integrated gays in a coherent way. In Essen, it was obvious to me that the AfD doubted whether or not it would be a good idea to integrate gays. The doubt came not only from the openly expressed irritation of my table neighbors, who before the event had apparently not even perceived what the evening would be about (“I thought it was a speech by Professor Meuthen!”, said one of them, as if Meuthen could not speak about homosexuality).

The speeches themselves also explicitly referred to this doubt. Tassis seemed to think it necessary to “explain” the evening. But Meuthen also could not help but justify his presence at an event of homosexuals in the AfD. His talk began like this: “Yes, dear fellow party members, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I really feel the need to thank you for today’s invitation. Of course, I accepted the invitation [...], of course. I always do. And I also see my role as the party’s federal spokesman as accepting such invitations. That is a matter of course for me.”

His insistence on a supposedly self-evident fact seems a bit peculiar since that which is self-evident does not usually need to be mentioned. Then, he clarified: “Some were surprised, I think even here in the room, that I had come. Others also wondered: *Where* are you tonight? (Laughs.) Yes, I answered, *there*. That’s a matter of course for me, and I mean it.”

“Yes, I answered, *there*”—words like homosexual or gay don’t seem to cross his lips easily. Meuthen ended his speech as follows: “Part of this identity, of this culture, and also of our homeland, is a completely relaxed and liberal approach to the subject of homosexuality. I ask the question: What else? That is part of our love for freedom, and we will not let that be changed. I promise.”

The fragility of the relationship between the AfD and homosexuals can not only be grasped through this somewhat unrelaxed relaxedness. Ultimately, only one discursive moment seems to be capable of articulating the AfD and homosexuals. The signifier ‘Islam’—a product of anti-Muslim racism—can take on this function because it is constructed as the common enemy of both the AfD and homosexuals and because ‘Islam’ is so firmly embedded as an enemy in the field’s common sense. The AfD, however, remains a heteronormative party, and it was impossible not to sense a certain uneasiness with the topic of homosexuality in Essen.

6. Concluding Remarks

My contribution focused on the ways in which the AfD responds to the homonationalist interpellation. As we have seen, for some in the AfD, homonationalism represents a strategic moment, a way to integrate gays into the far-right hegemonic project, thereby blurring the boundaries between a political force opposed to the widening of LGBT rights and (some) gay actors themselves. This, however, is an ambivalent process; for gays to be integrated into a far-right ‘us’, acceptance of gay people must become part of its common sense. Through an ethnographic analysis of two events in which my interlocutors took part, I have shown how they try to influence this common sense.

I considered two sides of this politics: On the one hand, the AHO members demonstrate that they share the far-right common sense and thus position themselves as belonging to it. On the other hand, they seek to influence the common sense so that they are also *recognized* by the far right as belonging to it, and they do so by framing their concerns in the register of ethnosexism. They want to integrate their narrative into the common sense of the far right. It became clear that this leads to friction. It is true that—in principle—a chain of equivalence between homosexuals and the AfD can be discursively constructed on the basis of ethnosexism, which I have shown to be the “ideological cement” of the far right: To the extent that the AfD constructs ‘Islam’ as the enemy, as a dangerous ‘other’, homosexuals might take up the position of the ‘endangered’ members of the ‘us’. However, the notion that homosexuals are part of the far right and that there is a need for a right-wing gay politics is not taken for granted in the AfD—at least not yet. The political project of the AfD remains a strictly heteronormative one, and both the party’s leadership and its gay members know about this potential conflict. In this respect, the far right’s common sense is not coherent. As I have argued elsewhere, it is only a very particular embodiment of (mostly white, male, and ‘respectable’) homosexuality that is acceptable to the far-right common sense (Wielowiejski 2021). My interlocutors put a lot of effort into proving that they represent this kind of conservative homosexuality. It takes a lot of work for them to show that they are not *bunt*, and often, they are met with skepticism.

Such ambivalences are typical of any kind of hegemonic project. In a society like Germany, anti-Muslim racism is anchored in the common sense of many people, not only on the far right, and therefore it serves as an ideological link between different political groups. Sometimes there can be sharp contrasts on other issues between these groups linked together through anti-Muslim racism. Benjamin Opratko writes that a hegemonic analysis of racism asks what role the construction of inferior and/or dangerous ‘others’ plays in the articulation of political leadership and the formation of consensus and compromise in a given social formation (Opratko 2019:15). Anti-Muslim racism, viewed as a relation of hegemony, has, among other things, a community-building function; it generates a broad social consensus (ibid.:317). From this perspective, we can understand how far-right discourse may appear attractive to some white gays (in my material, mainly gay men) in spite of the heteronormativity constitutive of far-right ideology. Anti-Muslim racism, in other words, is the factor that opens the doors for this alignment.

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that a coherent historical block is constituted here. In my analysis, anti-Muslim racism appeared as a node potentially capable of articulating gays and the far right. But it is only one articulating moment. The figure of ‘Islam’ establishes all kinds of strategic connections between heterogeneous actors (some of which could also be white gays who do not see themselves as right-wing, such as Karsten P.). But these connections are also

dependent on this one nodal point—‘Islam’—and in this respect, the question of whether these connections are sustainable at all arises. Sometime after the event in Essen, I saw that Karsten P. was arguing with the AHO on their Facebook page. It appeared that the AfD’s policy positions on homosexuality were, after all, too homophobic for him.

Analytically, I conclude that viewing the far right and gay people as mutually exclusive social groups is a flawed perception. From the perspective of my interlocutors, it is reasonable for a gay man to be active in the AfD. So, is it true that the case of gay men in the AfD is an example of “blurred boundaries” between ‘anti-gender’ and gay actors—or have these boundaries never existed in the first place? Or put a little differently, boundaries between the far right and gay men are not a given: it takes political effort to establish them, just like it takes political effort for my interlocutors to establish a link between gays and the far right. After all, the history of homosexuality is full of examples of masculinist homosexual men who were not in the far right despite its misogyny and anti-feminism, but because of it (Marhoefer 2015:152–54).

Politically, therefore, it is important to include a consequently intersectional perspective in feminist and queer politics. The promises of white supremacy and the patriarchy play a role in the attractiveness of the far right for some members of the LGBT ‘community’. At the same time, it is vital that feminist and queer politics also be anti-racist. Unfortunately, as my analysis shows, this does not go without saying.

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