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‘The Great Replacement’ – Reproduction and population policies of the far right, taking the Identitarians as an example

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Abstract

The starting point of this paper is a reconstruction of the key argumentation patterns that the extreme right in German-speaking countries use for supporting their reproduction and population policies. It will then continue with an analysis of relevant narratives, taking the far-right group of Identitarians as an example and in particular their campaign *Stoppt den Großen Austausch* (‘Stop the Great Replacement’), which was initiated in 2014 by their Austrian chapter (IBÖ). Within the framework of a critical discourse analysis, I will investigate how the Identitarians in Austria and Germany have updated the key argumentation patterns of far-right reproduction and population policies – although they basically only modernized the language of decades old ideas – and which role gender-specific aspects have played in this context.

Keywords

Identitarians, Identitarian Movement, The Great Replacement, Reproduction policies, Population policies, Antifeminism

Introduction: Right-wing extremist demographization

Right-wing extremist¹ policies often refer to agendas of population policy, which also include topics of reproduction policy. The societal discourses on demography have been shaped by the extreme right² during the past decades on the basis of an imagined ‘Great Replacement’ or ‘White Genocide’³, a declining birth rate of the autochthonous population, and the ‘ageing of society’. Their leading role was made possible by the fact that ‘no other political camp dealt with questions of demographic developments and with ways of promoting a higher birth rate so early and so intensively’ (Butterwegge, 2002, p. 167). This does not seem surprising as this approach brings numerous advantages for the far right. By using demographic developments as their key point, they were not only able to address topics of social, family, women’s and reproduction policy, but also to link these with questions of migration and immigration on the one hand and with gender relations on the other hand. The narrative of demographic change – which is still present today – opened up opportunities for the extreme right to modernize racist discourses and to establish their topics in mainstream media and thus the so-called center of society (ibid.). The potential resulted primarily from the fact that talk of social and demographic change is very widespread and has been discussed in many areas of society. The extreme right was able to build on these discourses and introduce and further disseminate their (mostly racist) points of view. In an essay on the reproductive policy of white supremacists Barbara Perry (2004, p. 89) also considers ‘the extent to which it reflects the mainstream’ to be ‘remarkable’.

To deal with the demographic discourse of the extreme right thus seems to be particularly important because it is one of those ‘political-ideological overlaps between the “center” and the extreme right (...) which will probably gain in importance in the years to come’, as Christoph Butterwegge stressed already in 2002 (Butterwegge, 2002, p. 167). Regarding the increased reference to population policy (in Germany after reunification), Susanne Schultz (2016) also states an ‘increased significance of discourses of demographic crises.’ Diana Hummel and Eva Barlösius coined the term ‘demographization’ for the tendency to ‘discuss social problems and conflicts as originating from demographic developments’ (Barlösius, 2007, p. 27; Hummel, 2006 quoted after Schultz, 2016).

The usefulness of this ‘current revival of demography’ (Schultz, 2016) was also recognized by the so-called Identitarians⁴, a right-wing extremist group which had been active in German-speaking countries since 2012. In 2014, its Austrian chapter initiated a campaign that made the fight against the ‘Great Replacement’ its central point for several years. Against the backdrop of key fear-mongering ‘scenarios of doom, degeneration and decay which have occupied the extreme right since forever’ (Botsch & Kopke, 2018, p. 64), far-right activists tried to amalgamate different enemies – from Islam to feminism, equal opportunities, gender theories and LGBTIQ+ rights to the EU and left-wing policy in general – within the framework narrative of the ‘exchange of populations’ and to reinterpret them as

¹ When using the term ‘right-wing extremism’, I refer to Willibald I. Holzer’s critical concept (1993); basis for his definition of right-wing extremism is the ideological background, most importantly anti-egalitarianism. Unlike traditional theories of extremism, it does not see society as resembling a horseshoe with two extremist ends and a seemingly neutral middle. At the core of right-wing extremist thinking, there is thus the rejection of the idea of equality of all human beings, a reference to the principle of nature/naturalness as well as undemocratic and anti-pluralistic attitudes. This ideology provides the theoretical background from which actions and policies of the extreme right are inferred.

² The extreme right includes all groups, parties and individuals who identify or sympathize with the ideology described in footnote 1 or who unknowingly take corresponding political points of view.

³ Davey and Ebner (2019, p. 6) define ‘White Genocide’ as ‘a conspiracy theory popularised by white supremacist David Lane, who argued that white populations are being replaced through immigration, integration, abortion and violence against white people’.

⁴ The correct proper name would be ‘Identitarian Movement’ (‘Identitäre Bewegung’). However, as this self-designation follows the strategy of appearing more important than is really the case, the term ‘movement’ will not be used here. Thus, I will speak of Identitarians but not of a movement.

demographically caused to suit their intentions. Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner also come to this conclusion in their study “‘The Great Replacement’: The violent consequence of mainstreamed extremism” (2019, p. 5). They write that ‘Great Replacement propagandists have found ways to co-opt the grievances of different fringe communities on the internet by connecting anti-migration, anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), anti-abortion and anti-establishment narratives.’

I will investigate how the Identitarians have updated the key argumentation patterns of far-right reproduction and population policies, although they basically modernized only the language of decades old ideas, and which role gender-specific aspects have played in the demographization of social concerns.

Starting from an evaluation of secondary literature, I will in a first step trace the central argumentation patterns of right-wing extremist reproduction and population policies in the German-speaking countries. After a short outline of the methodological approach, I will concentrate on the reproduction and population policies of the far-right Identitarians in Austria and Germany⁵, in particular their campaign *Stoppt den Großen Austausch* (‘Stop the Great Replacement’), which was initiated in 2014 by their Austrian chapter (IBÖ 2014). In the following section, I will emphasize the significance of gender roles in preventing the ‘Great Replacement’. A summary of the solutions propagated by the Identitarians for problems of population policy shows that the objective of the ‘biological reproduction of the people’ always takes center stage; thus, corresponding discourses of demographization can open up spaces of political resonance. Concluding, I will show that the narrative of the ‘Great Replacement’ played an important role in the rise and fall of the far right.

Right-wing extremist reproduction and population policies

‘One of the key ideological elements of *völkisch* nationalism has always been the firm belief that the survival of their own people needed to be guaranteed by appropriate means (like promoting an increase in the birth rate, and the prohibition and severe punishment of abortions)’, as political scientist Butterwegge (2002, p. 167) pointed out already. He shows the long-lasting preoccupation of right-wing extremists as well as neo-Nazis with the ‘body of the German people’. Given the decline in births in Germany, they were able to reach a wider public and to suggest ‘solutions’ which ‘radically break with taboos in the formation of public opinion that were established after the national-socialist era, and which attack at the same time the core of fundamental democratic beliefs’ (ibid., p. 165). Discourses of demographic policy are thus used by the extreme right to meet two objectives: the popularization of their political agenda, and the normalization of right-wing extremist ways of thinking. In addition, the demographic and family policy of the extreme right is closely linked to its core ideology, which is based on the idea of homogeneous communities based on traditional gender identities and relationships on the one hand and on the idea of an autochthonous (white) Europe on the other hand.

Three issues play an important role in right-wing extremist discourses with regard to demographic change, the ‘demographic apocalypse’ or ‘White Genocide’ conjured up by the far right: Firstly, the decline in the birth rate of the autochthonous population; secondly, the ‘exchange of populations’ due to immigration, multiculturalism and Islamization; and thirdly, the ‘senescence’ or ageing of society (see i.a. Botsch & Kopke, 2018; Butterwegge, 2002;

⁵ The focus on the German-speaking Identitarian results on the one hand from the fact that the group has been able to record significantly greater successes in Austria and Germany than in other European countries. On the other hand, the justification for the selection is also related to the fact that the campaign “Stop the Great Replacement”, which will be a central part of the analysis, was started by the Austrian chapter and was also widely spread in Germany.

Butterwegge et al., 2018; Davey & Ebner, 2019; Ferber 2004; Mayer et al., 2018; Schultz, 2016; Sierck, 1995).⁶

According to right-wing extremist ideas, the first issue is caused by feminism and women's emancipation, gender theories and LGBTIQ* rights; by allegedly fueling professional ambition and anti-family attitudes, these are said to promote childlessness. Other factors referred to are legal access to abortions, in some cases even birth control in general and sex education which promotes diversity, decadence and an increase in selfishness. Right-wing extremists, however, do not promote general pro-natalist policies, but rather want to control which children should be born - after all, they believe that the reproduction of poor people and immigrants should be severely restricted. Thus, the alleged lack of children of the autochthonous population is lamented, whereas the large size of immigrant families is criticized. There are also warnings of an exploding population, especially in the Global South. This pattern of thought makes visible the connection with the second issue. It is based on a number of – openly and less openly racist – mental figures and follows the logic that the autochthonous (white) people will be replaced through immigration which will finally even lead to a situation in which they become a minority within their own country. While in the USA corresponding debates in the extreme right are carried out under the catchphrase 'White Genocide' (Ferber 2004; Miller-Idriss 2020; Perry 2004), in the German-speaking discourse, however, right-wing extremists – not least because of taboos resulting from the national-socialist past – tend to avoid open references to the 'white race' or its genocide. Instead, they used other terms like *Volkstod* (the death of the people) or *Umvolkung* ('ethnicity inversion') (Botsch & Kopke, 2018), which basically describe the same idea. Miller-Idriss (2020, p. 9) also highlights: 'In its most extreme iterations, far-right extremists rely on three overlapping dystopian fantasy theories: the "great replacement" (used globally), white genocide (used predominantly in the United States), and "Eurabia" (used primarily in Europe).' Overall, the US-American right-wing extremist discourse makes much more explicit references to the extinction of the 'white race' by considering, for example, 'race-mixing' as a threat to the continued existence of the 'white race' (see i.a. Perry, 2004). However, the arguments put forward are very similar.

As in Europe those immigrants are mostly Muslims, the conspiracy narrative⁷ continues. According to those conspiracy narratives, Muslims are trying to 'Islamize' Europe by means of targeted immigration. This development is said to be favored by the fact that immigrant women are usually having many children. Also, the allegedly influential ideology of multiculturalism, which is said to be negating the differences between peoples, ethnicities and cultures, is named as a factor which contributes to the demise of autochthonous people due to a misconceived tolerance towards 'amalgamation'.

In addition to this, mostly culturally argued, racism, another, more biologicistic narrative, presents the autochthonous 'people' as a unique species that needs to be preserved, or as an organism that needs to be kept clean and that cannot take too many foreign influences, and that is put in mortal danger by amalgamation. (Butterwegge 2002, Botsch & Kopke 2018) This transfer of evolutionary mechanisms from animal and plant kingdoms to human society is the proof of a naturalization process of the social. Taking this thought further, it not only affects the idea of how persons of different origins could live together but it also influences the envisaged gender relations. In this sense, Botsch and Kopke (2018, p. 64f.) agree:

⁶ Some right-wing extremist publications also blame the anti-authoritarian education of the movement of '68 or the consumption of drugs.

⁷ In this paper, I use the term 'conspiracy myth' (or 'conspiracy narrative') instead of the common term 'conspiracy theory' in order to make clear that these views are by no means rational or (scientifically) verifiable theories. On the contrary, secret objectives and conspiracies are assumed behind certain events, usually not taking into account counterarguments or empirical proof.

When (...) biological metaphors, which are used to describe political, sociological and cultural phenomena, develop a life of their own, this goes hand in hand with a naturalization of traditional constructs of sex and gender and with a binary attribution of male and female roles and characteristics.

The third issue, which is the ageing of society, is interpreted by right-wing thinking as the absence of young virile men, which is said to contribute to the weakening of the people by undermining their defensive potential and their ability to compete in economic and more general terms.

A common characteristic of all these strands of discourse is the use of menacing metaphors like death, dying, or fight for survival, which also make visible the continuities with national-socialist population policy. The nightmare image of the ‘dying German people’ was in particular employed by national-socialist propaganda (Butterwegge, 2002, p. 168). Also the narration of the people that is said to perish due to a mixing of cultures and ethnicities, reminds of the national-socialist warning of *Rassenvermischung* (mixing of the races). Additionally, the notion of an externally controlled ‘exchange of populations’ refers to anti-Semitic thought patterns as it is contributed to ‘global elites’.

Gender aspects of right-wing extremist population and reproduction policies

Summing up, it can be stated that right-wing extremists imagine the people being threatened from within and from the outside, the process of ‘decomposition’ being caused by too little births on one hand and by foreign infiltration on the other. This threat scenario makes it possible, among other things, to declare feminism and Islamization as an enemy of the people and to imply a common interest and a common strategic approach. This insight is shared by Stefanie Mayer, Edna Ajanovic and Birgit Sauer (2018, p.54) in their analysis of the ‘battle cry of “gender ideology”’ in Austria.

‘It is claimed to play into the hands of Islam on the long run. As it allegedly means the end of the autochthonous population, in demographic as well as in cultural terms, it is seen as the companion of the supposed “Islamization”’.

The continuous criticism of current demographic policies of the far right seems to have furthered the connection between discourses of anti-feminism and population policy: the anti-gender discourse in particular ‘provides right-wing extremist activists with a narrative which allows them to articulate genuinely *völkisch* ideas in a way that is acceptable within the circles of the far right’ (Mayer & Goetz, 2019, p. 217).

Ultimately, as Schultz (2016) also points out, current discourses of demographic policy center around questions of ‘how the body of the national people should be composed in the long run.’ Thus, it is possible to derive right-wing extremist solutions from these problem complexes of social, family and population policy whose primary objective is the biological reproduction of the people and whose corresponding discourses of demographization can open up spaces of political resonance. This includes, among other things, demands for the promotion of a child-friendly, pro-natalist policy, for a privileged status for the heterosexual nuclear family, and for a strengthening of national sentiment in order to increase the people’s dedication to their own preservation and to further their commitment against egalitarianism and multiculturalism which allegedly mean a ‘levelling-down’. As Butterwegge (2002, p. 209) already pointed out nearly 20 years ago, these positions have long been disseminated into the so-called center of society:

The cult around family, children and motherhood is a very well suited instrument for imposing an unsocial policy; however, it is often not recognized as such as the real intentions of its sponsors remain obscure. Conjuring up a ‘demographic apocalypse’

thus serves the purpose of re-establishing a conservative concept of family and of pushing through reactionary practices of population policy. As if in passing, it is accepted that core ideological concepts of the extreme right (biologism, social Darwinism and sexism) – which generate similar demands – gain in political influence.

The presented problems and their roots (as determined by the far right) are closely intertwined with right-wing extremist notions of gender relations. The pro-natalist, nativist and familist policy, that is proposed as a solution for the declining birth rate, means for women in particular, limitations of their right to self-determination of their own body, an increased dependency on the family breadwinner, and a re-naturalization of the social which fundamentally tries to force women back into traditional gender roles. The solutions proposed by right-wing extremists for preventing the imagined ‘exchange of populations’ also show clearly their visions on gender roles. While men are supposed to avert the ‘exchange of populations’ by means of valiant combativeness, women are supposed to do their part by having more children.

Methodology

The analysis of this paper is based on the critical discourse analysis as developed by Siegfried Jäger (2012). Inspired by Michel Foucault’s discourse theory, he questions the generation, dissemination, function and effect of valid knowledge, which is imparted by means of discourses – understood as a social practice –, at the center of his approach. In this understanding, discourses themselves are factors of power as they influence social interactions and thus contribute to the structuring of relationships of power and dominance.

First, I identified the relevant discourses and discourse positions from the Identitarians in Austria and Germany in the period between 2012 and 2019. These consist of 1) official statements (texts published on Identitarian websites), 2) ideological positions expressed by individual frameworks and activists in video blogs (vlogs) as well as postings on social media, 3) messages conveyed by political actions and campaigns, and 4) statements in the context of their reception in the media. The chosen material had to meet two requirements: it had to contain statements or comments that were relevant for the main topic of reproduction and population policies of the Identitarians, and the speaker had to be a person with an important position within the group. In the next step, following Jäger (2012), the material was classified into sub-topics such as declining birth rate, ‘exchange of populations’ / ‘Great Replacement’, ageing society, mass immigration, abortion, pro-natalism and gender concepts. This made possible the identification of central messages and of points where different strands of discourse intertwine. Subsequently, I mapped out which statements of reproduction, population and, going hand in hand, gender policy could be considered representative for the Identitarians, and which discourses and discourse positions they could be attributed to.

The Identitarians and the ‘Great Replacement’

Recent publications about the Identitarians in Austria and Germany (i.a. Bruns et al., 2014; Goetz et al., 2017; Speit, 2018) hardly touch upon the field of reproduction and population policy. The Identitarians’ positions on abortion or population policy were mentioned only occasionally in analyses of their gender policies (i.a. Goetz, 2017b; Haas, 2020) or in media reporting on the group (i.a. *Stoppt die Rechten*, 2017). These references could be found particularly in texts about anti-feminism or women’s activism within Identitarian structures. An exception is the study by Davey and Ebner (2019), which does not deal exclusively with German-speaking Identitarian groups, but also refers to their partner organizations in other European countries such as France, Italy, the UK and Ireland. As a deeper investigation is still missing, this text aims at filling that gap.

An analysis of the Identitarians' political agenda reveals the dominance of two topical fields: discourses around migration and discourses around population policy (Goetz, 2017b, p. 255), often in combination. Thus, the demographization of social problems and conflicts described above can also be observed in Identitarian statements.

The Identitarians were founded in the German-speaking countries in 2012 following the example of the French *Génération identitaire*. In Austria as well as in Germany, they soon played an important role within non-parliamentary right-wing extremism, gaining significant (media) attention because of their spectacular actions. From the beginning, they pretended to have broken with the 'old far right' in order to distance themselves from National Socialism and the far right, and to present themselves as 'young patriots' or a 'patriotic NGO' instead. In reality, however, the Identitarians are typical right-wing extremists. Their *völkisch* conception of the world, their misogynist ideology, their anti-Semitism and their deeply racist views show that this classification is entirely warranted. By using less tainted terms (e.g., 'ethno-pluralism' for a classic right-wing blood-and-soil-ideology) they hope to appear different and more harmless than the 'old far right' (Goetz, 2020a, p.16). Incorporating elements of youth culture and using a modernized language, the Identitarians no longer demand mass deportations but re-migration, don't see themselves as racist but as Identitarian, and rally not against the 'death of the people' but against the 'Great Replacement'. In their political propaganda, they portray themselves as the 'last generation' who could still prevent the 'Great Replacement' of the population and thus of European culture and identity, saving the Occident from its demise (DÖW, n.d.).

The three narratives of the extreme right described above (declining birth rate, 'exchange of populations', ageing society) are used by Identitarians as well, especially in their campaign against the 'Great Replacement', which was initiated in 2014 and was able to disseminate this narrative of conspiracy. Where the extreme right in the past talked about *Volkstod* (death of the people) or *Umvolkung* ('ethnicity inversion'), this has been replaced by the synonym 'Great Replacement' during the past few years. This term goes back to Renaud Camus (2016), a French writer of the extreme right. From the beginning onwards, it served as a strategic alternative to those older, politically tainted concepts. In accordance with the meta-political approach of the Identitarians, the term was also meant to 'give new meaning to key discourses, thus changing and updating their hegemonic and therefore dominant interpretation and embedding them on the long run firmly within social awareness' (Goetz, 2017a, p. 105). In an interview, Martin Sellner, long-time leader of the Austrian Identitarians, noted that the term was able to describe 'in a communicable and yet vivid way what is really behind Islamization, infiltration, foreign violence etc.' and that it was predestined 'to unite our camp by providing a clear image of the enemy' (Sellner quoted after Wegner, 2015). Sellner then went on to talk freely about their plans for action:

In a first step, we need to popularize the 'Great Replacement' in all of the patriotic camp and to infuse it into everyday usage. From there, it will more and more enter the media debate. In the past month, our actions already provoked some media reports where our term was used (ibid., para. 9).

Miller-Idriss (2020, p. 9) even estimates the 'Great Replacement' currently to be 'the leading far-right conspiracy theory of demographic change'.

Identitarian reproduction and population policies

The Identitarian core narratives are more or less identical with the discourses of the far right as described above and illustrate the demographization of social problems. Along this line, the Identitarians see 'the "Great Replacement" as a demographic process resulting from a combination of mass immigration and a low birth rate among the native population' (IBÖ, n.d.c). In vlogs with titles like *Wir tauschen euch aus. Bevölkerungsaustausch in den Tagesthemen* (We ewill xchange you. Population exchange in the daily news) (2018b), *Der*

Bevölkerungsaustausch – alles was du wissen musst! (The population exchange - everything you need to know!) (2019a) or *Entlarvt: Ist der Bevölkerungsaustausch ein Völkermord?* (Debunked: Is Population Exchange a Genocide?) (2019b), Sellner elaborates on his conspiracy myth of a planned ‘exchange’, which allegedly wants to change a ‘mono-ethnic’ population into a ‘multi-cultural’ one, being forced ‘upon the European peoples by supra-national elites’ (Sellner 2018a). ‘Reason for this,’ he said, ‘is the mass immigration which makes Austrians a smaller and smaller part of society. They will finally become a minority within their own country!’ (IBÖ, 2014).

Within this campaign, the Identitarians also refer to the declining birth rate: ‘Due to the declining birth rate among Austrians, the native population continues to shrink, year after year. And yet, the total population keeps growing.’ Or: ‘Whereas there are less and less Austrians, the total population continues to grow.’ This threat scenario is reinforced by drastic wordings like: ‘We Austrians will become extinct because we don’t have enough children’ (IBÖ, 2014). The campaign page also includes a diagram comparing the birth rates of Austrian- and Turkish-born women. The diagram gives a significantly higher birth rate (2.4) for Turkish-born women in comparison with Austrian-born women (1.38) thus reinforcing the narrative of ‘migrant fertility’. Davey and Ebner highlight in their study about ‘The Great Replacement’ (2019, p. 27) that:

White nativist sources also reference a range of statistics created by international and national bodies (...), as well as work from academic demographers. (...) These statistics were cherry-picked, used out of context, and misinterpreted. In a number of instances statistics were falsely accredited to official bodies and instead linked to extremist websites. This demonstrates how extreme-right communities deliberately concoct disinformation, which they then ‘brand cleanse’ by associating them with credible sources even when they seek to distance themselves from these groups, itself a potentially valuable tactic for engaging a range of different audiences.

The Identitarians’ demands are mostly identical with those raised by the extreme right so far: ‘We demand a child- and family-friendly policy so our people will still exist in the future’ (ibid.). Using slogans like ‘*Lebensschutz ist Heimatschutz!*’ (Pro-life is pro-homeland), which are well-known in right-wing extremist circles, the German Identitarians (Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland, IBD) also condemn abortion as it allegedly contributes to releasing ‘the individual from their responsibility’, thus ‘degrading children to disposable products, to interchangeable commodities like old cell phones or empty coffee cups’ (IBD 2015). Additionally, the number of births and abortions are offset against each other and associated with the change in population: ‘Demographic change and infiltration are thus the home-grown evil of an unmanly and decadent society’ (ibid.).

Taking this argument one step further, Sellner calls abortion a ‘stupid term’ which should be replaced by ‘pre-natal infanticide, that is an infanticide before the child is born. Of course, it is a child, even before birth’ (Sellner Vlog, 2019c, min 19:36-19:45). Brittany Pettibone, alt-right activist and Sellner’s spouse, also published a vlog in 2019 with the title *Apparently, Abortion Is A Moral Good* (Pettibone Vlog, 2019), where she refers to the ‘innocent baby’ (ibid., min 0:51) and its body –without mentioning women’s bodies – and speaks of a ‘trend that fetishizes abortion’ (ibid., min 6:59). Health reasons for an abortion ‘could mean almost anything’ (ibid., min 9:25), and she makes clear her opposition towards abortion even in cases of rape or incest. She depicts a horror scenario in which abortions might be legalized ‘maybe even after the children are born’ (ibid., min 11:10) and demands the right of co-determination for men. Whereas Sellner’s arguments are mainly based on population policy, Pettibone gives a more religious reasoning and asserts that only a ‘turn to God’ (ibid., min 11:56) could prevent abortions, making it a moral problem. This example

demonstrates that right-wing extremist and conservative ideologies overlap widely when it comes to questions of gender policy.

Finally, the discourse around the ageing of society also found its way into the political statements of Identitarians. In an article with the title *Wohlfahrtsfestung* (Charity Fortress) in the right-wing magazine *Sezession*, Sellner (2017) writes that a 'senescent society also creates a lame and weakened youth', directly alluding to the idea of the lack of combativeness.

Gender roles in preventing the 'Great Replacement'

Groups like the Identitarians create a doomsday scenario for their 'own people', where the demise can only be held back through swift and decisive action. For themselves, they have cast the role of victims threatened by these (demographic) developments, of the 'heroic savior' (Goetz, 2017a, p. 255) and of the 'last generation' being able to do something about it. In the past few years, several well-known identitarian activists like Melanie Schmitz, Ingrid Weiß or Alina Wychera have become mothers themselves and use their own reproduction (and thus their contribution to preventing the 'Great Replacement') to put it in scene and celebrate it in a number of social media channels. Their political statements show a pro-natalist and familist approach, for example in a quote by IBD (2017):

The most wonderful of all gifts is new-born life, which is the blessed offspring of the love between man and woman, which makes a family and binds it at its innermost core. (...) This gives us the opportunity to see ourselves as a unique moment and as part of a continuous, communal narration and experience, opening us up for a deeply-felt connection with those who have preceded us, making us one with our ancestors.

In this view, family and the wish to have children or actually having them function as the 'fundamental unit of all community' (ibid.) and as the connecting part between the individual and their people: 'What family is for the individual, the people is for families, offering the next higher level of community and affinity' (ibid.). Therefore, children and families are necessary in order to preserve the people and to prevent its 'exchange'.

At the same time, the construction of this doomsday scenario always contains an appeal to men and women alike to become active and to take part in the Identitarian savior fantasies. According to the Identitarian rhetoric, this means for men to become valiant again and to take on supposedly natural masculine tasks like 'protecting the fatherland, the people and the women' from the invoked threats. The valiant combativeness of men, it is said, was destroyed mostly by the generation of 68, who 'took away masculinity from men, educating them to become weak cuddly bears without any energy and drive, without any courage to be strong, in one word: without any will to power' (Willinger, 2013, p. 21). The Identitarians as well as the extreme right attribute the responsibility for this 'de-masculinization' (Faye, 2006, p. 105) to the anti-authoritarian upbringing by the generation of 68, to a decline or even loss of values due to decadence, liberalism, feminism and a cult of homosexuality, to the decline in birth rates among the native population and to the welcoming culture towards migrants (Goetz, 2020b, p. 22).

Women as well play a central role in several levels of the 'Great Replacement' narrative: 1) women as victims; 2) women as culprits; and 3) women as mothers. On the first level, women are presented as the main victims of the 'Great Replacement'. On one hand, it is said that men defined as a foreigner intend to curtail their rights. On the other hand, autochthonous women are threatened by sexualized violence by those same men. This approach was used for example in the campaign #120db, which was initiated by Identitarian women in February 2018 in order to create an Identitarian #Aufschrei ('yelp', a German hashtag raising awareness about sexism from 2013) or a right-wing #MeToo. In a video published on YouTube, several female Identitarian activists made reference to recent violent

crimes against women and stated they felt continuously threatened by men defined as foreign. According to them, this was the reason why they always had to carry a 120-decibel pocket alarm with them. Subsequently, they asked – with little success – other women to post their experience with sexualized violence perpetrated by allegedly foreign men under the hashtag. Looking back, it can be stated that the novelty of this campaign resulted more from its form and context than from its content, in particular as the right-wing extremist camp has been trying for some time to use the topic of sexualized violence for promoting racism (Bitzan, 2000). #120db thus followed this tradition, however the hashtag stood out due to its professional Internet presence and its attempt to re-interpret the debate triggered by #MeToo. Moreover, the campaign was initiated in the aftermath of the 2015 ‘summer of migration’ and after the New Year’s Eve assaults in Cologne 2015/16. The ethnicized debates around the topic of sexualized violence seemed to promise far-reaching resonance. Given the fact-resistant reproduction of known stereotypes in the video and the refusal to acknowledge white men as perpetrators of sexualized violence, the campaign was quickly exposed as racist and generated little attention in the media and in society in general, so can be rated overall as a flop (i.a. Goetz, 2020a; Jäger et al., 2019).

In the second strand of Identitarian discourse, women are assigned responsibility for the ‘Great Replacement’. Because women vote significantly more often than men for liberal or left-wing parties, they are portrayed as enablers of the ‘exchange of populations’ through liberal immigration laws and refugee policies. This view is expressed by Sellner (2016) in a vlog with the title *Frauen – was ist los mit euch?* (Women, what’s wrong with you?). According to Sellner, their ‘voting choices show that women vote for immigration-friendly parties, that women vote for left-liberal candidates, that women choose positions in surveys that contribute to Europe becoming more multi-cultural, more Islamic and, finally, more misogynist’ (ibid.). Following this misogynist logic, women not only play a crucial role in enabling the ‘Great Replacement’ but they have to blame themselves for the cutting back of their rights and for the sexualized threat by perpetrators defined as foreign.

The third discourse strand takes up the pro-natalist impulses among Identitarians outlined above and is centered around the notion that women could prevent the ‘Great Replacement’ by having children. Continuing the demand for a ‘child- and family-friendly policy’, the ‘accomplishments of mothers’ should be recognized as they guaranteed that ‘our people will still exist in the future’ (IBÖ, n.d.b). In the context of far/alt-right women, Ashley A. Mattheis (2018, p.123) refers to ‘women’s roles as “life givers” of the Euro/White future as “alt-maternalism”, given their use of new maternalist logics paired with anti-multiculturalism, white ethno-nationalism, and hate-frameworks, thus marking white culture as the primary issue to which white-Euro “mother-power” must attend.’ (ibid, p. 143) Referring to ‘the protection of white womanhood’, Miller-Idriss (2020, p. 34) also emphasizes that it is ‘a key rationale for a wide range of disenfranchising white-supremacist practices, including segregation laws, discriminatory lending practices, and other policies that created and perpetuated “white propertied power”.’ This promotion of childbearing was also taken up by *radikal feminin*, a project initiated by Identitarian women which has vanished from the Internet in the meantime. On a blog, supported by a number of social media channels, two women had set themselves the task of ranting against feminism and the so-called ‘gender madness’ in an anti-feminist manner and of rehabilitating traditional role stereotypes. They themselves had ‘sprung the trap of feminism’ and therefore pursued a ‘feminism to get rid of’ (radikal feminin, n.d.). In their post *Der positive Schwangerschaftstest und das vermeintliche Ende deines Lebens* (The positive pregnancy test and the supposed end of your life), they lament that although having children ‘is so natural (...) most women are afraid of it.’ They close with a demand: ‘We have to dispel this fear, otherwise demographic change will further take its course!’ Furthermore, abortion ‘should not be seen as a normal solution of a problem.’ Women should be prepared for having children, and the ‘choice of sexual partners should anew be determined by other values than just attraction and momentary lust’ (quoted after Stoppt die Rechten, 2017). These passages

show how the Identitarian's gender perceptions are modeled in a deeply biologicistic way as dichotomous and complementary archetypes. They refer to women mainly in terms of motherhood and reduce their role in preventing the imagined 'exchange of populations' to their childbearing potential (Goetz, 2017b, p. 256).

Conclusion: solutions of the extreme right and the Identitarian's demise

To conclude, it can be said that right-wing extremists imagine a 'decomposition of the people' from within – due to a low birth rate – and from the outside by means of 'infiltration'. Ultimately, as Schultz (2016) points out, current discourses of demographic policy center around questions of 'how the body of the national people should be composed in the long run.' It is thus possible to derive right-wing extremist solutions from these problem complexes of social, family and population policy whose primary objective is the biological reproduction of the people and whose corresponding discourses of demographization can open up spaces of political resonance. This includes demands for a promotion of a child-friendly pro-natalist policy, for a privileged status for the heterosexual nuclear family, or for a strengthening of national sentiment in order to increase the people's dedication to its own preservation and to further their commitment against egalitarianism and multiculturalism as these allegedly mean a 'levelling-down'.

The presented problems and their reasons (as determined by the far right) are closely intertwined with right-wing extremist notions of gender relations. The pro-natalist, nativist and familist policy proposed as a solution for the declining birth rate means for women in particular, limitations of their right to self-determination of their own body, an increased dependency on the family breadwinner, and a re-naturalization of the social which fundamentally tries to force women back into traditional gender roles. The ideas presented by right-wing extremists like the Identitarians for preventing the imagined 'exchange of populations' also show clear visions on gender roles. While men are supposed to avert the 'exchange of populations' by means of valiant combativeness, women should play their part by having more children. At the same time, women and men alike are called upon not to contribute to the 'amalgamation' and to stop 'ideologies' like feminism, multiculturalism, liberalism and egalitarianism from wielding their alleged destructive power. This Identitarian promotion of pro-natalist, nativist and family-centered policies hides their fear of change and their desire for upholding existing orders, which find their expression in a racist mania of homogeneity and in biological gender concepts. As their policy leaves no room for differences or plurality, there's a fundamental conflict with egalitarian and democratic concepts of society. Butterwegge (2002, p. 207) also emphasizes the effects of such measures:

When the human procreation rate (of a people or of its families) becomes the center of public attention, there remains only little attention for other questions like structures of ownership or relationships of power and dominance, or for the resulting necessity of social change in the sense of greater social justice and equality – redistribution of income, property and gainful employment.

Reducing women to their childbearing potential in particular is not only contrary to all efforts for equal rights and opportunities but would have drastic effects for the social situation of women in general. However, the Identitarian desire for a 'ethnically relatively *homogenous* community' (IBÖ, n.d.a, p. 15) could as well only be realized with the use of massive force.

The Identitarian campaign against the 'Great Replacement' initiated in 2014 helped the group generate great social attention and growing recognition. By continuously repeating the term 'Great Replacement' and its framing narrative in combination with a number of spectacular actions, which were covered in many daily papers, the Identitarians could successfully motivate other right-wing and right-wing extremist actors and politicians to join them, further popularizing the term. The corresponding strands of discourse, however, did

not remain limited to the right-wing extremist bubble but also found their way into the so-called center of society through traditional and social media. The fact that by now, the ‘Great Replacement’ has sometimes been a topic independently from Identitarians shows the success of the Identitarian project of meta-political hegemony, whose aim was to influence societal discourses and to re-interpret them in their sense.

But although the Identitarians have achieved remarkable successes in disseminating their political agenda for some years, this suddenly changed with the terrorist attacks of Christchurch. As the attacker had used their slogan as a title for his manifesto *The Great Replacement*, and as he had also donated a large sum of money to the leader of the Austrian group, the focus of societal debates shifted more and more to the dangers of the underlying ideology. Also, there were wide-ranging commonalities in terms of content, reaching from a lamentation of the declining birth rate of the autochthonous population and the commitment to ethnic diversity in the sense of a mono-ethnic parallel existence to the evocation of a valiant hyper-masculinism. The terrorists of Hanau, Halle and El Paso as well referred to the conspiracy narrative disseminated by the Identitarians in the reasoning of their racist attacks. These events not only led to a political discussion about possibly banning the group but also caused large-scale dissociations with them in the right-wing camp. This resulted in the Austrian political party FPÖ discontinuing their contact (under pressure). Towards the end of 2019, the far-right publisher Götz Kubitschek announced that the Identitarians brand name had been ‘contaminated to untouchability’ (quoted after Rafael, 2019). Despite repeatedly surfacing scandals, triggered by overlaps between party officials and Identitarian activists, the German AfD has also adopted a widely distanced attitude. It can thus be concluded that the narrative of the ‘Great Replacement’ played an important role in the rise but also in the downfall of the Identitarians.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

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