Chapter 2

Alternative für Deutschland's Appeal to Native Youth in Dresden

Heritage Populism

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Introduction

It is often presumed that right-wing populist parties' supporters are political protestors, single-issue voters, "losers of globalisation", ethno-nationalists, "fascists", "Nazis", "neo-Nazis", and/or racists. However, the reality appears to be much more complex. Right-wing populist party voters are dissatisfied with, and distrustful of, mainstream elites and, most importantly, hostile to immigration and rising ethno-cultural and religious diversity, "super-diversity" (Vertovec, 2007), or ethnic hybridisation (Rodriguez-Garcia et al., 2019). Sympathisers of right-wing populist parties appeal to nativist, Eurosceptic, Islamophobic, and Manichean parties as they are mostly subject to relative social-economic deprivation, spatial deprivation, and nostalgic deprivation. Hit by three recent crises simultaneously – global financial crisis, refugee crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic – right-wing populist groups perceive ongoing neo-liberal forms of governance and demographic changes as a set of security challenges threatening the social, political, cultural, and economic unity and homogeneity of their nation.

Many of the European citizens residing in remote places, which "no longer matter", such as formerly industrialised towns, agricultural, rural, and mountainous regions (Rodrigues-Pose, 2018), are more likely to be subject to social, economic, political, spatial, and nostalgic forms of deprivation (Boym, 2001; Gest et al., 2017; Kaya, 2020). Remoteness is not necessarily limited to geographical distance. It is also associated with the political, ideological, and ideational distance of an individual to the political centre that claims to have hegemonic power over the constituents of the political and societal whole. A growing number of European citizens have become affected by unemployment, poverty, and feelings of insecurity, alienation, obliviousness, and abandonment. They have become resentful of their current social, economic and political situation as compared to how it was before. Many such individuals are facing a discrepancy between understandings of their current status and perceptions about their past. In this sense, right-wing populism has become even more attractive for those

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experiencing a kind of *spatial deprivation*, meaning that they believe that they live in a place "that no longer matters", and thus have become peripheral (Kaya, 2020).

Right-wing populism is a rejection of the order imposed by neoliberal elites who have failed to use the resources of the democratic nation-state to harness global processes for local needs and desires (Mouffe, 2018). Such populism originates in deep-rooted structural inequalities and general impoverishment that mainstream political parties have actively contributed to in their embrace of neoliberal governance. There is not enough space in this chapter to extensively elaborate on the literature on right-wing populism of the present age. However, the working definition of populism to be here is borrowed from the disciplines of anthropology and geography. Anthropological approaches mostly understand populism as "the moods and sensibilities of the disenfranchised who face the disjuncture between everyday lives that seem to become extremely anomic and uncontainable and the wider public power projects that are out of their reach and suspected of serving their ongoing disenfranchisement" (Kalb, 2011: 14). Combining socio-economic and cultural dimensions, anthropological approaches focus on "those left behind by the march of neoliberalism" – abandoned by the ones labelled as liberals, globalists, urban-centred elite, cosmopolitans, Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and the traditional centre-left that have embraced neoliberalism since the 1990s (Boyer, 2016).

As Andrés Rodrigues-Pose (2018: 196–198) put it, populism as a political force has taken hold in many of the so-called spaces that "do not matter". As in developing countries, the rise of populism in the developed world is fuelled by political resentment. Populist votes have been heavily concentrated in territories that have suffered long-term declines and reflect an increasing divide between urban and regional. It is not a surprise then to see that right-wing populism has become a recurring phenomenon in remote places such as Dresden as well as rural and mountainous places, which "no longer matter" (Glorius, 2017). As Ernesto Laclau (2005) noted, situations in which a plurality of unsatisfied demands and an increasing inability of the traditional institutional system to absorb them differentially coexist, creating the conditions for a populist rupture. This rupture may result in right-wing or left-wing populism, depending on the historical path each country has taken. Right-wing populists are anti-elitist and they capitalise on culture, past, civilisation, migration, nation, and race, while left-wing populists prefer to invest in social class-related drivers (Kaya, 2020; Mouffe, 2018; Mudde, 2016; Reynié, 2016). As this chapter is mainly interested in the depiction of heritage populism, it is more relevant to concentrate on right-wing populism.

Based on the hypothesis that all kinds of populisms, radicalisms, extremisms, and fundamentalisms are local, this chapter will exploit the field research findings gathered in Dresden, rather than making general claims

about right-wing populism in Germany. The *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) became the first party in Dresden by winning 23.3 per cent of the votes while they received 12.6 per cent of the votes across the nation in the 2017 federal elections.[1] With a 3.5 per cent difference, the party gained 18.8 per cent in the 2021 federal elections.[2] Dresden is a city that has unique characteristics as far as the popularity of the AfD is concerned. The aim of the chapter is to document the ways in which the past is being used by the AfD to mainstream its political objectives, and how young supporters of the party respond to that. The focus will then be both on the investigation of the ways in which AfD leadership is involved in the production of *heritage populism*, i.e. efforts to use the past to mobilise different social groups, and on the exploration of its consumption by young right-wing nativist voters.

Theoretical and Methodological Deliberations

In this chapter, "right-wing populism" will be perceived and explained as a form of radicalism as elaborated on in the social movements literature. As Robert Gurr (1969) pointed out earlier, angry people rebel. Some youngsters become increasingly angry and radicalised as a result of a variety of root causes. No consensus has emerged on the root causes of radicalisation. Competing narratives have co-existed since its inception between socio-economic and political marginalisation and grievances on the one hand and ideological motivations on the other hand. In the aftermath of 9/11, the term radicalisation has become intertwined with "recruitment" by extremists, who try to persuade these angry individuals to join their war (Coolsaet, 2019). Those who recruit these angry individuals may be both Islamist extremists (e.g. ISIS, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram) and white-supremacist extremists (e.g. Identitarian movement, Combat-18, and the Soldiers of Odin) (CEP, 2019). However, one needs to benefit from an interdisciplinary perspective to understand the root causes of radicalisation without causing a confusion with regard to the meanings of the terms such as radicalisation, extremism, fundamentalism, terrorism, and violence (Calhoun, 2011; Della Porta, 2008, 2014, 2018; Della Porta and Parks, 2016; Tilly, 1986, 1977). To do so, this chapter will benefit from the social movements theory that tries to understand the processes of radicalisation from a relational perspective, and will challenge security-based approaches that are likely to reduce radicalisation to extremism and terrorism. This chapter is based on the hypothesis that social movements theory is more explanatory for the elaboration of the radicalisation of native youth in Dresden – the birthplace of Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Western World) and a stronghold of the AfD – since it scrutinises relational elements that underpin the reactionary attitudes of native Dresdner youth against the destabilising political, societal, demographic, and economic factors that have been prevalent since the unification of Germany in 1990. In their influential

scientific intervention, Donatella della Porta and Louisa Parks (2016) state that the major objectives of social movements have shifted from the search for global justice to the quest for answers to more domestic issues revolving around direct democracy, environmentalism, deindustrialisation, mobility, diversity, and representation.

Craig Calhoun (2011)'s intervention on the elaboration of the term radicalism is also very beneficial for the analysis made in this chapter to understand the root causes of radicalisation of Dresdner youth who tend to generate a reactionary response to social, spatial, and nostalgic forms of deprivation. The chapter proposes an alternative reading of right-wing nativist and populist radicalism: assessing the protests of some right-wing nativist and populist youngsters as struggles for democracy, rather than threats to democracy (Muxel, 2020). Being exposed to socio-economic, spatial and nostalgic forms of deprivation, our young interlocutors have generated different forms of coping mechanisms such as resorting to the past, myths, traditions, culture, *völkisch* ethno-nationalism, anti-Muslim racism, anti-interculturalism, and nativism. These are the items that they could easily pick up from their cultural repertoire as Charles Tilly (1977) would put it, when they need to express their anger, fear, protest, and discomfort. Their reliance on a rather distinct Saxonian culture and history with the memories of the Democratic Republic of Germany (GDR) as well as of the Prussian heritage is also something that the organised right-wing political formations such as the AfD and Pegida tend to exploit to recruit followers.

The research has been conducted with a multitude of techniques, ranging from desk research to discourse analysis of the public speeches of the party leaders of the AfD. Discourse analysis is a qualitative research method focusing on the investigation of the relations between discourse and socio-cultural developments in everyday life. It views discursive practices as an important form of social practice contributing to the constitution of the social and cultural world including social identities and relations (Fairclough, 1992). The main material to be analysed in this chapter is the semi-structured in-depth interviews held with twenty young supporters of the AfD in Dresden and Saxony (age bracket 18 and 30) between April 2020 and April 2021 by a native researcher working under the supervision of this author within the framework of a European Research Council Advanced Grant research (Prime Youth).[3] The chapter starts with the elaboration of the ways in which right-wing populist parties use the past to mobilise different social groups. To that effect, the concept of *heritage populism* will be discussed in detail to pave the way for the following sections in which the political leadership of the AfD will be elaborated on in terms of the ways in which they exploit the past for their own political agenda. Eventually, the work will delineate how young AfD voters respond to such efforts exploiting the past for the formation of a kind of heritage that is to be used for coping with the ills of the present.

The Use of the Past: Heritage Populism

Heritage is an operational instrument of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense. Heritage is a cultural practice utilised by political actors in the construction and regulation of a range of values and understandings at the national level. If it is shaped by state actors, then it can be termed "authorised heritage" (Smith, 2006). Museums, national myths, and various other narratives were institutionalised as manifestations of national identity and cultural achievement in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is not only state actors but also some of the right-wing populist parties in Europe and elsewhere today that are engaged in mobilising their supporters through a particular sense of history, past, heritage, authenticity, and culture inscribed in their party programmes and speeches (Aslanidis, 2020). Particular peripheral communities may use the same symbolic elements to define and constitute who they are and are not. This is what Smith (2006) calls "subversive heritage", and it is formed by the centrifugal forces in remote peripheral spaces opposing the hegemony of "authorised heritage discourse". The use of "subversive heritage", or what Robertson and Webster (2017) call "heritage from below", as a peripheral, communal, and local cultural practice is an act of convenience that our research team often encountered in Dresden. In this sense, right-wing populist parties are more attentive than mainstream political parties to the ways in which local populations express their claims for "heritage from below" (Robertson and Webster, 2017).

Historically speaking, populisms often involved agrarian populations facing hostile socio-structural conditions in the context of a changing socio-economic environment where industrialisation and modernisation imposed a power shift away from traditional rural communities. Hence, the American People's Party of the 1880s and 1890s, the Russian Narodnik movement of the 1870s, the German Farmers League of the 1920s, the Polish Peasant Movement of the 1920s and 1930s, and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union of the early 20th century would qualify for the populist family (Aslanidis, 2020; Finchelstein, 2019). Similar to the conditions of the late 19th century and early 20th century in Europe, the recent global financial crisis, the "refugee crisis", and the COVID-19 pandemic have caused many changes in the everyday lives of individuals residing in remote and peripheral places in Europe. They exacerbate tendencies that existed before, e.g. the feelings of people in geographically and politically remote places that they are not only exposed to testimonial and hermeneutical injustice but also to spatial and nostalgic deprivation (Gest et al., 2017; Macmillan, 2017; Rodrigues-Pose, 2018) that leads to a loss of status and even of personal dignity felt by the impoverished middle class as well as working class in the face of globalisation processes that delegitimise social positions built up over time. Social, spatial, and cultural frustrations make some local residents sensitive to political offers of populism which come from outside,

mainly right-wing populists, as in the cases of former East German towns such as Dresden.

Heritage populism is built on material and cultural concerns prompted by economic globalisation, depopulation, and population ageing. Its characteristic feature is a propensity to invest intangible heritage with a set of values, principles, and rules that supposedly inhere in the European or Western way of life, such as individual freedoms, gender equality, and secularism (Reynié, 2016). Right-wing populist parties in Europe instrumentalise heritage as a cultural, political, and economic resource for the present. In this way, their strong emphasis on the past – be it colonial, republican, imperial, traumatic, dissonant, and/or dark – illustrates how heritage is being created, shaped, managed, and exploited by these political parties as well as by the ruling parties to meet the demands of the present and to come to terms with the challenges of contemporary global conditions. Nostalgia as a mythic vision of the nation's golden past has become an essential element of heritage populism since the present and future do not offer bright prospects for many individuals across the world.

Svetlana Boym (2001) distinguishes between "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia. While the former hopes to restore a golden past as in the time of Augustus II the Strong in Dresden in the early 18th century, the latter draws on the past for a critical re-evaluation and active changing of the present. Restorative nostalgia has become a prevalent aspect of the AfD's political campaigns in Saxony. During the campaigns of 2019, the AfD emphasised a regional identity in Saxony. The poster "Courage for Saxony" (*Mut zu Sachsen*) included an image of a famous monument of Augustus the Strong, former Elector of Saxony and the King of Poland (1670–1733), in Dresden (Weisskircher, 2022). Such a nostalgic element of cultural identity is not only visible in Saxony, but also common to the other East German provinces. For instance, the AfD Brandenburg frames Brandenburg as the heartland of Prussia, and therefore Germany as a whole:

> Beyond the borders of the German cultural space, Brandenburg-Prussia is known for a number of secondary virtues such as modesty, discipline, progressiveness, punctuality and thrift. Character traits that those who direct the fortunes of our Heimat sadly lack. Politics in the state of Brandenburg must return to those virtues that once led to the blossoming of our entire body politic. Today our Prussian virtues are still admired and often carried over to the whole of Germany. They are an important part of our national identity.[4]

The AfD Brandenburg State Election Program 2019 continues by referring to further historical elements of national identity by emphasising important geographical locations, historical dates, buildings and monuments, pictures,

emblems and symbols, works of literature such as songs and poetry, but also common traditions and festivals peculiar to Brandenburg.[5]

Our young interlocutors have shown that they are inclined to use both forms of nostalgia in Dresden. In this sense, restorative nostalgia may become prevalent when individuals are in search of attempts to reinstate a particular vision of a neglected and forgotten glorious past, while the reflective form of nostalgia may play an important role for disenchanted individuals to renegotiate the tension between the charming and familiar tenets of the past and the ills of the present such as the loss of work, deindustrialisation, diversity, transnationalism, anomy, insecurity, and ambiguity (Boym, 2001; Orr, 2017; Smith and Campbell, 2017). While restorative justice discourse is more a matter of choice among the right-wing populist political circles such as the AfD, both restorative and reflective forms of nostalgia become prevalent at societal level among young supporters of the party whom we interviewed. However, one should not immediately associate such a constant state of nostalgia with only a strong sense of loss; at the same time, it should also be associated with "a strong sense of hope or longing for a better future" (Smith and Campbell, 2017: 616).

Heritage is intangible and is all about the present-day use of the past that gives meaning to traditions (Aronsson, 2015). Heritage is a social practice, enacted by groups of people to redefine the boundaries between in-groups and out-groups. The debates about an Islam-free Europe are all manifestations of a Manichean world dividing between "us" and "them", "civilised" and "barbarian", or rather between "us" and "Muslims". Since the so-called refugee crisis in the summer of 2015, the boundaries that are reconstituted by right-wing populist parties and their supporters are not necessarily meant to exclude refugees in need, but rather Muslim-origin immigrants and their descendants, who have become more competitive, visible and outspoken over time with their social, political, economic and cultural demands.

Dissonant Heritage: Dresdner Population as the "Double Victims of Nazism and Western Imperialism"

Heritage is not always associated with comfortable, harmonious, and consensual views about the meaning of the past. Ashworth and Tunbridge (1996) argued that all heritage is, by its very nature, "dissonant", as the disputed authority to control stories told about the past makes it a conflicted resource (Harrison, 2013). Resulting from the need to come to terms with the remains of a past that can be actively uncomfortable, embarrassing, traumatic, sensitive, negative, dark, and painful, the concept of dissonant heritage has become popular to refer to the sites, objects, and practices that have been, or still are, contested (Huyssen, 1995; Smith, 2006). Although heritage is always made in the present, by the present, and for the purposes of the present, the literature on dissonant heritage, or dark heritage

(Macdonald, 2009), tends to separate heritage that is dissonant, dark, and problematic from all other "normal", comfortable, and consensual forms of heritage. Similar to the other cities of the former GDR, Dresden is a remarkable city with a contested set of narratives about its dissonant past. Since the early days of the Cold War era, the bombing of the city on 13 February 1945 was at the centre of East German memory politics, which offered East Germans an integrative myth of collective innocence based on a discourse of anti-Fascism. However, the anti-fascism discourse was not devised to cope with Germany's Nazi past, but rather as a political weapon for confronting the new "Fascist" and "imperialist" Western threat (Benda-Beckmann, 2015: 83). Hence, East Germans were indoctrinated for decades during the Cold War era to believe that they were the victims of the renewed threat of imperialist war aggression that could be stopped only by the "peaceful" Soviet Union. Over the Cold War years, some of the Dresdner inhabitants also developed anti-Soviet aspirations and motivations to save the *abendländische Kultur* from being colonised by the USSR (Coury, 2016). Hence, both Pegida and the AfD became popular in Dresden, the population of which did not go through a similar process of coming to terms with the Nazi past and Holocaust (Benda-Beckmann, 2015).

The nationalist-conservative wing of the AfD grew stronger after the state elections in eastern Germany in the summer of 2014 (Arzheimer and Berning, 2019; Decker, 2016). In the autumn of that year, marches organised by Pegida took place in Dresden. Demonstrations held every Monday evening in Dresden sometimes amounted to more than ten thousand participants. Spurred on by the accelerating pace of the debate on asylum and refugee policy, these "Monday walks" beginning in October 2014 increasingly resonated with the public and, above all, the media throughout and beyond Germany. Pegida opened a Facebook page created by Lutz Bachmann, a former cook, titled *Friedliche Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* ("Peaceful Europeans against the Islamization of the West"). Bachmann later had to step down from the movement following public protest against his posing in front of the media dressed as Hitler.[6] He once stated that the movement's name was modelled after a slogan from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)'s election campaign in the late 1940s and 1950s; *Rettet die abendländische Kultur* (Save Western Culture). This slogan was formed in reference to the threat from the USSR and Bolshevism during the Cold War (Benda-Beckmann, 2015: 59; Coury, 2016). Flagging up some topics such as identity politics, homeland politics, anti-interculturalism, anti-religious diversity, and anti-immigration agitation particularly attractive for youth by adopting social media communication tools such as Facebook, Pegida has contributed to the formation of *Identitäre Bewegung* (Identitarian Movement) in Dresden and elsewhere in eastern German provinces, and functioned as a propaganda tool against immigration and encouraging *völkisch* nationalism (Salzborn, 2016: 50; Virchow, 2016).

Hence, one could argue that Pegida was not only a protest against refugees and Muslims, but also a representative of a much broader resistance to the loss of Christian civilisation's core values and to the German political elite.

The AfD portrays eastern Germans as distinctly prone to protest and resistance, referring to the memory of the "peaceful revolution" of 1989 during the months of the dissolution of the GDR. The AfD is not alone in revitalising the regional identity in Saxony, there are also other far-right political and societal groups such as the Pegida, *Institut für Staatspolitik* (IfS, Institute for State Politics), *Freie Sachsen* [Free Saxons], or *Zukunft Heimat* [Future Heimat]. IfS is a "think-tank" founded in 2000 and now based in Schnellroda, a small town near Leipzig, Saxony-Anhalt, that publishes offline and online, organises seminars, and has a publishing house. *Freie Sachsen* was established in February 2021 during the pandemic as an umbrella organisation aiming to offer everyone to be united for a free region similar to Carinthia, South Tyrol, and Corsica.[7] *Zukunft Heimat* is an anti-asylum initiative founded in August 2015 and active in southern Brandenburg.[8] Such far-right political actors also portray the Federal Republic's political system, the national government and decisions made over the course of the "refugee crisis" (Kaya, 2020) as well as the COVID-19 pandemic as illegitimate. Hence, the dominant function of right-wing populist interpretations of a distinct eastern German identity in Saxony is not only the exclusion of immigrants, but also the delegitimisation of Germany's political elite and the institutions of real-existing democracy (Weisskircher, 2022).

Pegida demonstrators warned against the "Islamisation of the Western World", and they grew into a movement of right-wing radicals. This was another issue on which the neo-liberal faction distanced itself from Pegida and its sympathiser the nationalist-conservative faction. By January 2015, the number of weekly demonstrators for Pegida in Dresden rose to around 20,000. During this period, the influence of the New Right on Pegida increased steadily (Coury, 2016). Based on what Dominique Reynié calls "heritage populism", Pegida and the AfD institutionalised their hostility towards Islam and immigrants based on concerns with secularism, gender equality, freedom of speech, press freedom, and a victorious past, rather than on expressions of racism or xenophobia (Coury, 2016: 51). The interviews conducted in Dresden revealed that all interlocutors had been involved in Pegida demonstrations from the very beginning. Many of them expressed anti-systemic sentiments resulting from their belief that mainstream political parties have neglected their social-economic and political claims (see also Weisskircher, 2022: 96–97). They also expressed their concerns about Germany's liberal refugee policies, and the security challenges posed by the growing number of Muslim immigrants and their descendants. Dresden has a tiny Muslim population, but one that feels increasingly besieged due to the escalation of brutal images of ISIS terror by both the mainstream and social

media. More than 30 years after unification, political activism of the Pegida demonstrators strongly focuses on opposition to Muslim immigration and, recently, the politics of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews we conducted with young natives also demonstrate that these protestors reject Germany's *Energiewende* (energy transition) and liberal gender policies (see also Simpson, 2020).

The interviews conducted in Dresden reveal that young AfD supporters have a different interpretation of the past than their peers residing in the western parts of Germany as far as the historical "heroisms" of German soldiers are concerned. Since heritage is the use of the past as a cultural, political, and economic resource in the present (Aronsson, 2015; Ashworth et al., 2007: 2–3), right-wing populist parties are often selective in instrumentalising various artefacts, mythologies, memories, and traditions as resources for the present. Heritage operates as a cultural, political, and economic resource at local, national, supranational, and global levels. As right-wing populist parties are more engaged in the idea of investing in local heritage, they have an advantage over mainstream political parties. For instance, calls for the preservation of German soldiers' deeds from the public in former East German provinces and cities are translated, or rather reinforced, by AfD leadership and have recently become prevalent. One of the co-leaders of the AfD, Alexander Gauland publicly made the following statement in Thüringen, a former East German province neighbouring Dresden, on 2 October 2017:

> If the French are, quite rightly, proud of their Emperor, and the British of Churchill, then we [the Germans] have the right to be proud of what soldiers achieved in the First and Second World Wars.[9]

Both Sharon Macdonald (2009) and Bill Niven (2002) maintain that East Germans cast Nazism largely as a feature of the West, not the socialist state. The East was understood by the GDR population as the location of those who had opposed it. This account was evident in how some of the material remains of the Nazi period, particularly from concentration camps, were publicly represented. In the memorialisation of concentration camps, the emphasis was on political prisoners, especially communists, all of whom were seen as victims of the Nazi actions that the socialist state opposed (Macdonald, 2009; Niven, 2002).

Saxon conservatism has its roots in the pride of the historical legacy of Saxon chauvinism and the state's independence (Volk, 2020). Since the unification in 1990, this historically renowned "Baroque city" has become the meeting point for large-scale European far-right extremist marches, which have appropriated the commemoration of the wartime destruction of the Old Town on a regular basis for the past two decades (Benda-Beckmann, 2015; Eckersley, 2020Volk, 2020). The city of Dresden is also pronounced by

many local actors through a “victim narrative” (victim of both Nazism and Western imperialism) as part of the popular memory because of the 1945 fire-bombings by the Allied Powers (Benda-Beckmann, 2015: 90). The far-right has long used the victim narrative as a means to justify their presence in official commemorations. Pegida and the AfD have also appropriated such narratives (Volk, 2020). Most of the interlocutors in Dresden expressed concerns about being haunted by the past. They firmly believe that the world was conspiring against Germany. When responding to inquiries about political participation, a 30-year-old craftsman from Dresden voiced his worry that the rest of the world has been conspiring against Germany since World War II:

> It’s self-explanatory: The ones who are elected don’t have the power for making decisions. I can’t vote for those who make decisions. I mean the lobbyists [Bilderberger conspiracy]. Back then, I used to think that you can change something with your vote, and that democracy is a real one, let’s say it like that. At the moment, I don’t vote. I rather try to contribute to humanity. Otherwise, I wouldn’t sit here.
>
> (interview, 22 October 2020)

Studies of populism have already discussed the intensive use of conspiracy theories to understand the world (Ghergina et al., 2013). Such theories provide their adherents with a world lacking depth and thus a world that can be more clearly understood. The populist discourse revitalises a “theology of roots” against the conspirator’s intentions, to make it possible for its followers to escape from the burden of history by defending the purity and innocence of the “community” (Leontis, 1991: 193). Another lesson to be learned from Dresden regarding right-wing populism’s growing appeal is the political resentment various groups express toward the current policies of the leading political parties. A 24-year-old male interlocutor from Dresden said the following when asked about the mainstream political parties:

> … Regarding the corona crisis they only show one perspective of scientists while the other one doesn’t matter… And of course, everything becomes more global and it is no longer possible that you can talk… about countries. One rather talks about the Eurozone and laws imposed by Brussels, and all the countries are supposed to abide. It is no longer about German politics but it is about continental politics… These are all different countries with different cultures and it is impossible to impose one system on all countries.
>
> (interview, 25 October 2021)

Evidently, right-wing native youth in Saxony are inclined to establish links between the misdeeds of the ruling parties in Berlin and the

growing anti-Muslim racism in the region where there are actually very few Muslims (Kalmar, 2020). Capitalising on the Islamophobic and xenophobic sentiments of their electorate, the AfD leadership has also used every opportunity to mainstream their party by underlining that Islam simply poses societal challenges to the liberal way of life of the European citizens (Schmidtke, 2020). To that effect, they are exploiting symbols of the past that are paradoxically anti-Nazi.

To illustrate this, following the murder of a local resident of German–Cuban origin, Daniel Hillig, who was stabbed to death by three immigrant-origin youngsters in Chemnitz, near Dresden, on 26 August 2018 during a festival celebrating the city's founding, a stream of street protests broke out in the city. The protests were intensified by the arrest of an Iraqi and a Syrian suspected of killing Hillig.[10] Soon after the immediate protests, in which the crowds openly paid homage to Nazism, Islamophobism, and xenophobia, the AfD leadership organised a "funeral march" for Hillig, who, it is thought, would have been opposed to the idea of being associated with such an AfD-led procession. The march took place in the Chemnitz city centre on the International Day of Peace, 1 September 2018 – a symbolic day (International Peace Day) chosen to attract more demonstrators. Although previously denied by the AfD leadership, the march was held in collaboration with Pegida.[11] The organisers of the march, AfD MPs, Andreas Kalbitz (Brandenburg), Björn Höcke (Thuringia), and Jörg Urban (Saxony), decreed that the march should be a funeral: there would be no smoking and no food or drinks. Colourful clothing, usually worn by Pegida protesters, was forbidden. Only black-red-golden flags and the white rose as a sign of mourning were permitted. It is commonly known in Germany that this flower is a symbol of the resistance by siblings Hans and Sophie Scholl, members of the "White Rose" resistance movement against Nazi rule. The funeral march caused a heated debate in Germany among citizens opposed to the rise of the AfD. Many people were disturbed by the AfD's appropriation of a historical symbol of the anti-Nazi movement and a victim who was reportedly anti-AfD. It was also reported that the AfD had earlier tried to publish an election poster with the slogan "Sophie Scholl would vote for the AfD". However, this was prohibited for copyright reasons by the Berlin district court.[12] The appropriation of the resistance movement against the Nazis, and its leading figure, Sophie Scholl, reflects the AfD's self-elevation as revolutionaries against the forthcoming Islamisation of Germany (Lewicki and Shooman, 2020: 38).

It is striking to see how the AfD has been successfully using peaceful symbols of a dissonant, hurtful, and dark past to attract more popular support for their demonstrations and public meetings organised against the "Islamization and forced multiculturalisation of Germany". One could also view such acts as performative acts of right-wing heritage populism, as they are staged to appeal to large numbers of people at a local level (Reynié, 2016). Such acts are

intended to present the AfD as the chief protectors of liberty who are resisting against mainstream political parties, chiefly Chancellor Angela Merkel and her CDU, for failing to uphold the values and rules of a liberal society and for being complacent in the rise of multiculturalism and Islamism resulting from globalisation and "irresponsible" immigration policies.

Ostalgia in East Germany: Longing for the Lost Home ...

East Germany provides other lessons as well. It is not only fear of the present but also unresolved socio-economic disparities of the past which inspire right-wing populism. Most of the interlocutors in Dresden said that they feel forgotten and that their economic interests are not being properly considered. A 30-year-old male from Dresden, a former self-identified neo-Nazi who was enrolled in the de-radicalisation programme a few years ago, expressed his resentment of the unification policies of Helmut Kohl's government in the 1990s and their after-effects:

> In this neighbourhood there is no youth. Those who live here are losers. Most young people move away. This place has no future. The businesses here have not understood digitalisation. The area is middle class. The place here survived the *Wende* [process after the unification] but it has not developed. Despite the fact that Berlin and Poland are not far away, from an entrepreneurial perspective, nothing new develops here …
> (interview dated 12 May 2020)

The collective memory of the socio-economic disparities during the unification years seems to be kept intact by many east German inhabitants in opposition to versions of the past disseminated by the official historiography and museology, which they believe is aimed at throwing them into the dustbin of the past (Huyssen, 1995; Lowenthal, 2015). It is also possible to track all sorts of deprivation, be it socio-economic deprivation, nostalgic deprivation, or spatial deprivation in the following quotation extracted from an interview held with a 23-year-old male AfD supporter in Dresden. When asked about whether his family's socio-economic status has somehow changed over the last few years, he said:

> Considering his new work contract, my dad is working under worse conditions now. Instead of a 25-year lasting work contract and pension money, he was unemployed again after four and a half years. Now he is working in a job where he is working in night shifts for minimum wage, and has a 20 km way to work. Without the special supplements for night shifts it wouldn't be worth it if you consider the gas expenses for getting to work. 24 days of holiday a year is also a joke. The tavern my mom used

> to work at was also closed in 1990. Then she looked after her children. In 2003, she started working part time as a seller. During GDR times the profession of cook was a renowned profession and you earned good money. But what you earn in this job today that's a joke. And a tavern is better than a restaurant because you have better working hours …
>
> (interview, 10 October 2020)

Young natives in Dresden who are feeling affiliated with the AfD are more inclined to have nostalgic feelings about the Communist past, which they have not experienced themselves. As such, Pegida demonstrators gathering every Monday in Dresden city centre, and AfD supporters joining the party's rallies, have actively produced a past in the present, a past that is heavy with "empty" promises from previous German governments as well as a nostalgic deprivation resulting from the absence of the Communist past, a past that these young people have not experienced themselves. Such a widespread "Ostalgia", in other words "Eastern nostalgia", the declared love for the "good old times" when the German Democratic Republic still existed, corresponds to a more prevalent rejection of a cosmopolitan social value change in the former east German provinces (Kaya, 2021a; Rensmann, 2019: 40; Yoder, 2020). Ostalgia demonstrates that some of the native youth have generated an interest in symbols of the socialist past and a defence mechanism against the uncertainties caused by rapid political, societal, and economic changes (Göpffarth, 2021: 63; Kaya, 2021a). Ostalgia helps some of the residents of the former GDR form a symbolic resistance to West-dominated politics. Surveys continue to demonstrate that there is a link between support of the AfD and sentiments expressed by East German voters that seems to stem from the emotional, social, and economic challenges surrounding unification (Betz and Habersack, 2020). Even more than 30 years later, eastern German AfD voters define their social identity in relation to western Germans, and they view themselves as "second-class citizens" (Vees-Gulani, 2021: 59). The AfD has capitalised on the grievances of easterners by claiming that they have not been adequately represented in positions of power in unified Germany. The idea of a political elite, uninterested in the concerns of "regular" German citizens, and the perceived lack of freedom and democracy in today's Germany also stand out as fundamental pillars for the AfD, which describes itself as an alternative to the established political parties in the centre (Vees-Gulani, 2021: 60).

In Saxony and other former eastern *Länder*, nostalgia is not simply a passive longing for a lost home and past but a political means to reconfigure the future through reference to the reinvented national past (Kenny, 2017). It provides an emotional basis for the mobilisation of individual, social, and political memories (Assmann, 2008) from the socialist as well as Prussian past to politicise and mobilise electorate through the construction of an alternative German collective memory and right-wing populist future

(Göpffarth, 2021: 58). Dresden is a unique city in Germany. With its rich cultural, architectural, and artistic history, the city is renowned as the "German Florence", or "Florence of the Elbe" (Benda-Beckmann, 2015). The positive myth about Dresden had been established long before its destruction on 13 February 1945. For instance, the famous Frauenkirche has a symbolic power in the narration of the city as a site of cultural heritage (Eckersley, 2020). The Church has even become one of the epicentres of the unification narrative (Vees-Gulani, 2021 64). The city is one of the most touristic cities in Germany with a very rich tangible cultural heritage. However, Dresden had various specific markers other than being a tourist destination. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Dresden was an economic and military centre. It was engaged in war production, housed a large number of soldiers, and functioned as an important transportation hub. Since it was encoded as the baroque city of culture and art (Benda-Beckmann, 2015: 81), most of such aspects of the city were intentionally, or unintentionally, ignored by various local actors. Right-wing political organisations such as AfD and Pegida seem to have intentionally neglected these facts since they try to deal with the "dark heritage" (Macdonald, 2009), or "dissonant heritage" (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 1996; Harrison, 2013) of the Nazi past, and to promote Dresden as the "innocent city" especially during the commemoration of the firebombing of the city around the week of 13 February (Eckersley, 2020). On the other hand, the ruling parties of the city, mostly CDU and Free Democratic Party, have so far been interested in promoting the city as a touristic centre with baroque features, a move that has contributed to the deindustrialisation of the city leaving locals with the feeling of "being left behind" (Salzborn, 2016; Weisskircher, 2022: 93). A 30-year-old young male in Dresden expressed his frustration resulting from the failure of the tourism industry during the pandemic as well as his nostalgic feelings about the industrial past of the city:

> I think that the city has made itself pretty dependent on tourism. Now during Corona, you notice that the city cannot live without tourism anymore. The whole industry is based on tourism, hotels, restaurants, and steamboats. The steamboat company crashed during Corona; it was sold to Italy. I noticed before that many companies were relocated abroad, but through Corona it became more obvious that there is a dependency on tourism. What has changed since my childhood is that the main industries that were here are now relocated abroad. The company Pentacon [camera manufacturer] was sold to China; the tobacco industry doesn't exist anymore; office technology, and the Volkswagen veteran, a luxury vehicle, was constructed here …
>
> (interview, 9 September 2020)

There is a deep-rooted discourse in the city about the idea of protecting Dresden and its cultural integrity from the intrusion of outsiders. The

Remembrance Day, 13 February, is symbolically an utmost important day when the locals commemorate their losses during the war, especially during the bombing of the city by the Allied Powers on 13 February 1945. The city has been appropriated by far-right groups as a place to be protected against all kinds of intruders such as colonialist western German corporate companies, multiculturalist cosmopolitan political elite, and Muslim refugees (Weisskircher, 2022). The interviews conducted and observations made during the field research made it very obvious that there is a robust opposition in the city between Dresden residents who moved to the city from the west after the unification and "true Dresdner" who connect their own identity with Dresden's memory. The AfD and Pegida have strongly invested in the popular emotion among the "true Dresdner" that "Dresden needs to be protected!" (Vees-Gulani, 2021: 67)

Furthermore, the AfD's calls to protect the national community from a variety of "threats" and its articulation of German and European cultural authenticity seem to provide an anchor for those who feel overwhelmed by the pace and extent of change they have experienced in recent decades (Yoder, 2020: 53). The idea of returning to the "great German authentic history" is very much orated by AfD leaders. Björn Höcke, AfD leader in Thüringen, puts the question of German nationhood at the centre of his speeches and calls for the reinvention of traditions through the rediscovering of "German authentic history": "I think we founded a great tradition that is forward-looking … We … as a Volk need a spiritual return to our great history, our great culture, to shape the future and to win back the future" (cited in Göpffarth, 2020: 263). Dresden has always been an acritical city for the AfD leaders since it symbolises the spark of German self-assertion in rejuvenating a destroyed city from its ashes (Vees-Gulani, 2021: 68). As such, Pegida demonstrators gathering every Monday in Dresden city centre, and AfD supporters joining the party's rallies, have actively produced a past in the present, a past that is heavy with "empty" promises from previous German governments as well as a nostalgic deprivation resulting from the absence of the Communist past, a distant past full of glory, as well as the dissolution of a distinct regional identity (Göpffarth, 2020; Orich, 2020). A 24-year-old male interlocutor, member of the AfD and Young Alternative (*Junge Alternative für Deutschland*) who moved from Detmold, a historical city in North Rhein Westphalia, to Riesa, a small town located on the Elbe River near Dresden emphasised the cultural and demographic homogeneity of Saxony in general that pleases his feeling of living at *Heimat* (home) and experiencing the ethnonationalist understanding of German *Volk* (see also Salzborn, 2016: 38–39). He reiterated the following when asked about his take on the refugees and migrants in Germany:

> Those individuals who may be nice, are not welcome insofar because they abandoned their women and children. And there we have the main problem again: it is not because one argues that they are inferior because of their descent, it is because of the foreign infiltration (*Überfremdung*)

> which is taking place. It comes to a point where not only the *German cultural structure* is destroyed but the German *Volk* is also alienated in its biological substance…There are sick cultural Marxists who are talking about creating a one unified person (*Einheitsmensch*)… I want people to know that they want to mix people to destroy cultures, identities and races… Well, soon there will be no more Germans.
>
> (interview, 27 October 2021, italics mine)

Nostalgic deprivation drives this young male to search for his *Heimat* in a place far from his own place of birth. The kind of nostalgic deprivation he is going through seems to stem from the feeling that established notions of home, identity, nation, culture, and tradition have been threatened by the perils of globalisation such as mobility, migration, and ethno-cultural and religious diversity (Rensmann, 2019). His statements in the rest of the interview are similar to the rest of the interviews conducted with the native youngsters in Saxony who coupled such feelings of anxiety, nostalgia, anger, rage, and distrust with Islamophobic prejudice, frequently sliding towards explicit statements about Prussian-Saxonian cultural superiority. These kinds of myths about cultural and civilisational superiority are crucial elements in providing their recipients with homelands and rootedness in "liquid times" as Zygmunt Bauman (2000) suggested earlier. This is also the main rationale behind the birth of Pegida, which was originally established to defend the "Christian" and "European" values against the Muslim migrant "invaders" (Kalmar, 2020). The shift of the AfD from an anti-EU party to a racist anti-refugee party that aligns itself with groups like Pegida also demonstrates that Islamophobic discourse pays off for the right-wing political formations (Weber, 2020). The rise of an anti-Muslim discourse here demonstrates how right-wing populist political communities have become engaged in the consumption of an ancient dualism between "civilisation" and "barbarism" (Bonacchi, 2022: 45).

The AfD's Attacks on Multiculturalism Appeal to Young Natives: The Fear of the Islamisation of Europe!

The AfD has positioned itself in resistance to a multicultural Germany, rather than in opposition to immigration per se. The party argues that immigration and integration policies should safeguard a Christian society in Germany and should be especially wary of immigrants of Muslim faith (Lochocki, 2015). The protection of "Christian values" must receive far greater state support, and heterosexual German couples should be encouraged to have more children. Shortly before the Federal Election in 2017, Alexander Gauland, said that "German politics just cannot cope with the surge of immigrants and asylum seekers any longer."[13]

AfD's manifesto revolves around anti-Muslim sentiments. It declares that "Islam is not part of Germany", a stronger stance than the previous

"stop Islamism but seek dialogue with Islam".[14] During discussions about its manifesto's principles, the AfD leadership has constructed anti-Islamism as a "political ideology" in contradiction to the German Constitution. As the Federal spokesman for the AfD Jörg Meuthen reasoned, "although, religious freedom was an essential part of German culture, the Western Christian world view was the guiding principle, and not Islam".[15] This emphasis on Christianity as the cornerstone of Western culture and civilisation has been used to discursively construct Islam as the underpinning of eastern/middle eastern culture, which allows for the articulation of a civilisational antagonism. The AfD's propositions to ban Muslim calls to prayer and religious attire, mainly the *burka*, while reinforcing representations of Christianity in the public sphere, also use this logic. These points of conflict are predominantly rooted in the historical antagonisms between West and East over the struggle for cultural dominance. One example is the efforts of Muslim migrants to attain social and political recognition in Germany without being subjected to the process of "othering". Moreover, under the "Islam is not a part of Germany" subheading of their manifesto, the AfD declares that "Islam does not belong to Germany. Its expansion and the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country are viewed by the AfD as a danger to our state, our society, and our values."[16]

According to the AfD's party programme, German identity is "primarily shaped by culture" and is based on a "unique core inventory" that remains intact. Accordingly, the inclusion of other cultures is considered a threat since it "degrades the German value system", leading to a loss of cultural homogeneity in Germany (AfD, 2016: 45–46). Anti-Muslim racism is an essential aspect that often appears in election posters, the party programme, and party leaders' speeches (Kaya, 2020). Manuela Caiani and Donatella della Porta (2011: 185) explain the stronger emphasis on racial frames to be used by right-wing populist organisations and individuals in Germany as a symptom of an ethno-cultural conception of citizenship and national identity that has prevailed in the country for many decades. In other words, anti-Muslim racism plays an important role in everyday discursive acts of nation-building, and it assists in upholding a diverse spectrum of patterns of dominance over those who are culturally alien (Lewicki and Shooman, 2020: 32). The will to protect traditional values has also a strong resonance with the followers of the party. A 30-year-old male supporter of the AfD stated the following when asked about why he joined right-wing populist circles:

> I hoped to find values and ideals such as discipline, honour, loyalty, pride and strength. I hoped that I could find those values in the ideology. I wanted to protect the family, the people and *Heimat* [home] with values that today are no longer important.
>
> (interview, 12 May 2020)

It is important to keep in mind that the AfD identifies different types of migrants. In effect, there exist "welcome" Muslims, who are willing to step outside their community and enter the German public space where a homogeneous German identity is dominant, and "unwelcome" Muslims, who seek economic gain while refusing to forego their cultural traditions in favour of German culture. Moreover, as Alice Weidel, current co-leader of AfD, stated: "From our perspective, the government's policies offer no long-term, sustainable solutions and ideas for these problems at all … There's a lot of talk, particularly in election periods. But absolutely nothing gets done."[17] As this complaint indicates, the AfD exploits Europe-wide concerns about mass migration by criticising Germany's political culture, thereby legitimising their anti-establishment views. In turn, party members have been promoting stricter border controls and the deportation of Muslims. Alexander Gauland, the AfD's co-founder and lead candidate in the 2017 federal election, asserted that "German interests must be a guiding principle" in deciding the approach to the refugee crisis.[18] The AfD's stance against "culturally alien" residents of Germany is discernible in a 2013 personal e-mail sent by Alice Weidel, which was leaked two weeks before the election day of 24 September 2017:

> The reason we are inundated by culturally alien [*kulturfremde*] peoples such as Arabs, Sinti and Roma etc. is the systematic destruction of civil society as a possible counterweight to the enemies of the constitution by whom we are ruled. These pigs [sic.] are nothing other than puppets of the victor powers of the Second World War …
>
> (as quoted by Ash [2017])

Today, the AfD's stance on culture can be understood through an exploration of their Islamophobic, Arabophobic, and Turkophobic statements (Kaya, 2020). For instance, Alexander Gauland is an outspoken advocate of a homogeneous national culture and identity. In response to then Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration, Aydan Özoguz's observation that "a specifically German culture is, beyond the language, simply not identifiable", Gauland argued: "That's what a German-Turk says. Invite her to Eichsfeld [of the state of Thuringia] and tell her then what specifically German culture is. Afterwards, she'll never come back here, and we will be able to dispose of her in Anatolia, thank God."[19] Gauland, then, implied that the AfD harbours racial animosity towards the "other". Similarly, speaking in Berlin the morning after the election results, he insisted that there was "an invasion of foreigners", more precisely an invasion of Europe by Muslims which began with "the influx of refugees".[20] During the press conference, he said: "One million people – foreigners – being brought into this country are taking away a piece of this country, and we as AfD don't want that … We say we don't

want to lose Germany to an invasion of foreigners from a different culture. Very simple."[21]

As this statement suggests, AfD has been constructing a discourse centred on exploiting the so-called Islamisation of the West, which relies on fears of the domination of Western culture(s) by Islam. In this context, Gauland has also remarked, "Islam is not a religion like Catholicism or Protestantism. Intellectually, Islam is always linked to the overthrow of the state. Therefore, the Islamization of Germany poses a threat."[22] Alongside the AfD manifesto and much-publicised statements by other AfD leaders, Gauland's comments carry the perception that Islam is defying the separation of religion and state, and that the AfD considers religion the cornerstone of German and European culture.

Conclusion: Grasping Things at the Root

Bringing together the lessons learned from social movements theory, which elaborates on the processes of radicalisation from a relational perspective, and from critical heritage studies, this chapter has scrutinised the ways in which some nativist youngsters politically affiliated with the AfD have expressed their socio-economic, spatial and nostalgic deprivation. In their reactionary form of radicalism, they revealed that they have a rich cultural repertoire, which offers different tools for their use in expressing their feelings of deprivation, alienation, humiliation, and subordination that result from the destabilising political, societal, economic, and environmental factors since the unification. Myths, traditions, culture, *völkish* ethno-nationalism, anti-Muslim racism, anti-interculturalism, and nativism become pivotal tools to be employed by these youngsters. The same tools are also being used by organised political structures such as the AfD and Pegida to connect with these Dresdner youths and to recruit them in their political endeavours. Hence, heritage becomes a very practical tool to be used by such parties to reach out to new clients who feel politically excluded, socially alienated, spatially left behind, neglected, and nostalgically deprived. Then, heritage becomes a compensatory tool to come to terms with the destabilising factors of deindustrialisation, modernisation, urbanisation, migration, diversity, and globalisation. In the eastern states of Germany, the AfD is more engaged in a kind of heritage populism boosting up artistic, cultural, historical, and architectural elements of the GDR years (Ostalgia) as well as the Prussian past.

This chapter has demonstrated that the AfD's popularity in eastern parts of Germany lies in its communicative strategies, which efficiently address social-economic and psychological needs of the native populations experiencing relative social-economic, spatial, and nostalgic deprivation. Many interlocutors expressed their disappointment with unfulfilled promises made since the unification of the two Germanies in 1990. The Dresdner

youths explained that they have been experiencing various social-economic, demographic, spatial, and psychological problems, which have not been adequately addressed by the ruling elites in Berlin or Brussels. In this sense, the perceived weakness of democracy seems to be one of the root causes for right-wing radicalism in Saxony. When normal channels of access to political system are blocked, reactionary forms of radicalism are perceived as necessary, as there is no other way out.

With reference to the testimonies of the young interlocutors, the chapter has also discussed the ways in which the AfD has exploited the dissonant past. This work has also argued that young AfD supporters tend to gravitate towards an Islamophobic discourse to attract attention from mainstream media and political parties. Populist political parties, particularly their leaders, seek to connect with individuals who are, on the one hand, socially, economically, and politically deprived and, on the other, in search of communities to cope with their nostalgic deprivation and to defend themselves against the destabilising effects of globalisation. Thus, seeking to appeal to these disaffected, right-wing populist discourses simplify, binarise, culturalise, civilisationalise, and religionise what is social, economic, and political in origin. AfD party leaders seem to be heavily capitalising on civilisational matters by singling out Islam. The discourse analysis of the speeches and manifestos of the AfD operating in the eastern provinces of Germany are in parallel with the observations of Rogers Brubaker (2017), who contends that the semantics of "self" and "other" are radically changing in Europe. The collective self in Europe is being increasingly defined in civilisational terms. The civilisational-level semantics of "self" and "other" lay a claim to have internalised liberalism, secularism, philo-semitism, gender equality, gay rights, and free speech. One should not underestimate the fact that current forms of right-wing populist and nativist forms of radicalisation occur when there is a civilisational paradigm prevailing in the world, a paradigm that divides the world into religiously defined civilisational blocks (Della Porta, 2008).

This civilisational identity is underlined by right-wing populist parties as an identity marker of the Christian West *vis-à-vis* so-called illiberal Islam. However, in many interviews conducted in Dresden, it was observed that the interlocutors who have embraced Christianism as a cultural form, but not as a religious form, were mostly atheists and agnostics, who felt that the rise of radical Islam threatened their secular ways of life. The interviews also demonstrate that feelings of socio-economic, political, spatial, and nostalgic deprivation are not only expressed through resentment against multiculturalism, diversity, migration, and Islam, but also through resentment towards the European Union institutions, which are believed to be imposing a unified transnational identity, and thus challenging established notions of national sovereignty and nativism. In one way, the relative success of right-wing populist parties demonstrates that there is a growing discontent against European efforts to assemble cosmopolitan and transnational identities.

This chapter has highlighted the importance of what is local in understanding reactionary forms of protests conveyed by right-wing populist youngsters, whose anti-systemic aspirations resulting from their socio-economic, spatial, and nostalgic deprivation have been exploited by the AfD at the local level. One of the central arguments of the chapter is that right-wing populist parties are more likely to be stronger in geographically and/or ideologically ideationally remote places, where inhabitants are particularly prone to experience a sense of periphery, and possibly a sense of *spatial* deprivation, in addition to social, political, and economic deprivation. Suffering from the destabilising effects of the processes of deindustrialisation, mobility, diversity, depopulation, and unemployment, young generations generate a nostalgia about the way things used to be in the past, such as better job opportunities, cultural homogeneity, prosperity, golden times, and a better treatment by the political centre.

This chapter has suggested that sometimes radical tendencies may be part of a quest for meaning and benchmarks to help individuals deal with the loss of meaning in a world in transition. The quest for meaning may be performed by individuals in different ways subject to the content of their cultural repertoire. This could be possible with the use of a *völkish* ethno-nationalism as in the case of young AfD supporters in Dresden, or with the use of an Islamist mythology as in the case of self-identified Muslim youngsters we interviewed in different European cities (see Kaya, 2021b). Hence, this chapter was an attempt to offer an alternative way of assessing the protests of right-wing nativist and populist youngsters as struggles for democracy, rather than threats to democracy. As Angela Davis (1989: 34) put it, "radical simply means grasping things at the root". Hence, it might be wiser to concentrate on the elaboration of socio-economic, political, and psychological factors shaping reactionary forms of radicalisation of young people, and thus generate an alternative scientific lens to understand the root causes of their radicalisation instead of fiercely judging them as "a bunch of Nazis", "Fascists", racists, or extremists.

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Notes

1 For the 2017 federal election results, see https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2017/ergebnisse/bund-99/land-14/wahlkreis-159.html (last accessed 25 March 2022).

2 For the 2021 federal election results in Dresden, see https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2021/ergebnisse/bund-99/land-14/wahlkreis-159.html (last accessed 25 March 2022).
3 For more information on Prime Youth research, see https://bpy.bilgi.edu.tr (last accessed 25 March 2022).
4 AfD Brandenburg, "Landtagswahlprogramm für Brandenburg 2019", p. 4, https://afd-brandenburg.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Wahlprogramm_Brandenburg_2019_ohne_kapitelbilder_kommentare_acc2144-01-06-19-final.pdf (last accessed 8 April 2022).
5 AfD Brandenburg, "Landtagswahlprogramm für Brandenburg 2019", p. 19.
6 For further discussion on Bachmann as Hitler, see http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/21/germany7pegida7adolf7hitler7lutz7bachmann (last accessed 17 April 2022).
7 For further information about *Freie Sachsen*, see https://freie-sachsen.info/ (last accessed 8 April 2022).
8 For further information about *Zukunft Heimat*, see https://zukunft-heimat.org/ (last accessed 8 April 2022).
9 Alexander Gauland at Kyffhäusertreffen 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bt4if8KecaA (last accessed 14 March 2022).
10 For further information on the murder of Daniel Hillig and the street protests, see https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/germany-gripped-by-worst-far-right-clashes-in-26-years-8ctk2b89k (last accessed 7 April 2022).
11 For further information on the 'Funeral March' of Daniel Hillig, see https://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/afd-demonstration-in-chemnitz–die-rechten-rosenkavaliere-8238506.html (in German) (last accessed 7 April 2022).
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15 http://m.dw.com/en/germanys-populist-afd-party-debates-islam-as-congress-continues/a-19227807 (last accessed 8 April 2022).
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