

April 2019

## Right-wing, Nationalist Discourses and Counter-Discourses on Twitter during the European Migrant Crisis

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Right-wing, Nationalist Discourses and Counter-Discourses on Twitter  
during the European Migrant Crisis

by

Ramona Kreis

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in  
Linguistics and Applied Language Studies  
Department of World Languages  
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Date of Approval:  
March 28, 2019

Keywords: digital discourse, critical discourse analysis, multimodal discourse analysis,  
social media, Germany

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am incredibly grateful to Dr. Camilla Vásquez, who has been an inspiration and a role model for me. She supported me during all the difficult times and made my Ph.D. journey a wonderful experience. She made me the scholar I am and I will be forever grateful for all the opportunities she provided for me.

I would like to express my gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Jennifer Wolgemuth, Dr. Nicole Tracy-Ventura, and Dr. Tara Deubel for broadening my horizon and showing me different perspectives, and for all the valuable feedback during this process.

I would like to thank the German section at USF for always supporting me as a teaching assistant and for providing great opportunities for me as an educator.

I am also very grateful to Janie Barner, who has been my mentor and a true friend. My journey in the U.S. started because of you and I am so thankful for all the experiences we have shared.

I am deeply grateful to my husband, Jhon Cuesta, for helping me find my research topic and for his continuous and unconditional support, encouragement, and love. ¡Gracias por todo lo que hemos compartido y lo que nos falta por compartir!

And finally, danke Mama, für deine Liebe und Unterstützung. Du hast mich zu dem Menschen gemacht, der ich bin, und ohne dich wäre meine Promotion nicht möglich gewesen. Deshalb widme ich dir diese Dissertation.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines right-wing, nationalist-conservative discourses on Twitter. Specifically, this study explores the features of right-wing discourses and counter-discourses in the context of the European migrant crisis in 2015 and the terrorist attack in Berlin, Germany, in 2016. Informed by critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis, the analysis focuses on discursive strategies and semiotic and multimodal resources found in tweets that either endorse or challenge anti-refugee stances during the aforementioned time frames. Additionally, this study explores to what extent the platform-specific technological affordances facilitate dialogic interaction between users who express right-wing opinions and users who challenge right-wing discourses.

The findings show that right-wing discourses construct negative presentations of migrants as well as mainstream politicians. Users employ discursive strategies to depict migrants and refugees as a threat to German culture and society and to the national security, and blame mainstream politicians, particularly the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, to be responsible for the perceived downfall of Germany. Users leverage the technological affordances of Twitter, which promotes new forms of political discourse. Conversely, counter-discourses construct positive presentations of refugees triggering empathy and compassion and encouraging others to contribute to refugee relief efforts. At the same time, discursive strategies are used to construct negative presentations of right-wing supporters. In fact, right-wing discourses are identified, explained, and criticized, particularly when users interact with right-wing supporters.

This study contributes to a better understanding of how right-wing discourses are constructed and reproduced, facilitated by the affordances of digital communication, as well as challenged and contested. With social media becoming an increasingly important source for information gathering, the study also highlights the need to educate social media users about platform usage and the dangers of ideological manipulation and confirmation bias in order to prevent the naturalization of right-wing discourses through repetition, downplaying, and misinformation.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **The Revitalization of Right-wing, Nationalist Discourses**

Right-wing, nationalist, xenophobic, and anti-immigrant discourses are currently increasing in Western societies (Jiwani & Richardson, 2011; Richardson & Colombo, 2014; Richardson & Wodak, 2009; Wodak, 2015b). In the United States, those discourses have been supported and fueled by the Trump administration, which has led to a rise in extreme-right groups (Lee, 2017) and the implementation of isolationist, anti-immigrant policies. These policies can be seen in executive orders like the so-called “Muslim ban” as well as the administration’s decision to rescind the “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals” (DACA) policy. In Europe, the migrant crisis has contributed to putting such discourses in the focus. Right-wing politicians such as Marine Le Pen of France or Geert Wilders of the Netherlands have consistently employed a nationalist, anti-immigrant rhetoric and received significant numbers of votes during 2017 elections in their countries. In Germany, the migrant crisis has led to the formation of a new far-right political party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), which is not only openly xenophobic but also deliberately employs Nazi-diction. As of January 2019, the AfD is represented in all 16 state parliaments. In the September 2017 federal elections of the national parliament, the *Bundestag*, the AfD received 12.6% of the vote. Consequently, a far-right political party not only entered the *Bundestag* for the first time since 1961, but became the

largest of the third parties after the two mainstream political parties, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

The increased popularity of right-wing discourses is also connected to the rise of nationalist ideologies in Europe. In Post World War II Western Europe, there was a strong movement by the European nations to create peace, to cooperate, and to move beyond the interests of the mere nation-state in order to achieve a prosperous and peaceful international community. This eventually led to the creation of the European Economic Community (ECC), which was based on the belief that states which share trade and integrated markets are less likely to engage in conflict. After this economic cooperation had proven successful, the Maastricht Treaty was signed on February 7, 1992 and the ECC was renamed the European Union (EU), while also adding additional economic as well as political and judicial dimensions. Since 1992 more countries have joined the EU committing a partial delegation of their state sovereignty to the European Union and its institutions. This partial loss of sovereignty as well as the general perception of an increased bureaucracy and democratic deficit on the European Union level, have led to a recent rise in anti-EU sentiments and the desire to return to the nation-state (Wodak, 2015b). In the last few years, political parties that advocate the revitalization and sovereignty claims of the nation-state have gained power throughout the EU. In the United Kingdom (UK), for example, the rise of the British right-wing, nationalist UK Independence Party (UKIP) contributed to the British electorate voting to leave the EU after 44 years of membership in the European Union (i.e., the so-called “Brexit”). While the EU was celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in February 2017, the UK started to prepare its withdrawal, and populist right-wing leaders in France, the Netherlands, or Austria were calling for a Frexit, Nexit, and Auxit respectively (Lyons & Darroch, 2016).

The contemporary nationalist discourse is often about securing the nation-state and its borders from foreigners and maintaining a national identity, culture, and language. This national identity and culture is based on the construction of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) that is depicted “as an essentially bounded entity whose integrity is threatened by the presence of residents supposedly belonging to a different ‘culture’ and not being willing to learn and adopt ‘our’ conventions and norms, or assimilate” (Wodak, 2008, p. 66). While belonging can be defined by citizenship, heritage or ethnicity may also be considered a prerequisite in order to be part of the imagined community. In Germany, for example, birthright citizenship did not go into effect until 2000, and due to the long tradition of nationality based on parentage, the common perception still prevails that one is not a “real” German unless one’s heritage is German (Wolff, 2002). Group membership may furthermore be connected to factors like language. Language requirements for immigrants are often used as “gatekeepers.” Immigrants are required to show a certain level of proficiency in the official language of the state. Furthermore, they may be required to take Integration Courses and are expected to assimilate to the respective culture. Such policies legitimate the discursive constructions of migrants as “others” because language and language use are employed to define group membership. The Austrian mainstream conservative political party, for instance, uses language policies to construct the concept of a “welcoming” country by highlighting the importance of becoming proficient in the German language and of assimilating to the culture in order to be welcomed (Wodak & Boukala, 2015b). Many countries such as Greece, Germany, the UK, and some East European countries have similar policies and produce and circulate similar types of discourses (Blackledge, 2005; Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2013; Michalowski, 2011; Piller, 2001; van Oers, Kostakopoulou, & Ersbøll, 2010; Wodak & Boukala, 2015b).

## **The Role of Social Media for Right-wing, Nationalist Discourses**

While right-wing, nationalist-conservative tendencies have been observed across Western countries top-down at the level of government institutions, “grassroots” activity also plays a role in circulating such discourses bottom-up. Digital communication tools have contributed substantially to bottom-up activity, and right-wing, nationalist discourses have gained ground in digital and social media. Several studies have shown how right-wing groups and political parties leverage the opportunities that social media provide in order to disseminate their ideologies, reach larger audiences, or connect across geopolitical and linguistic boundaries (e.g., Baumgarten, 2017; Daniels, 2009; Doerr, 2017). Right-wing populist politicians and political parties, for example, benefit from social media as they allow them to communicate directly with the people without the mainstream media functioning as a gatekeeper (Ott, 2017). The use of social media for campaign purposes and for the unmediated dissemination of right-wing ideologies has been observed in the U.S (Ott, 2017) as well as in European countries like Austria, France, Switzerland, and the UK (e.g., Berbuir, Lewandowsky, & Siri, 2015; Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2016; Gimenez & Schwarz, 2016). According to Lohse (2016), social media have also contributed to the rise of the far-right political party, AfD, in Germany. In November 2016, no other political party had more Facebook followers and “likes” than the AfD.

Digital and social media have taken on an important role for many people who frequently rely on these types of media for verbal and visual communication, as well as a source of news and information. Social media may produce and spread societal discourses and have become increasingly influential due to large amounts of daily users who employ social media for not only connecting with others but also sharing information and to becoming informed about current news. One can therefore say that social media share “many traits and functions often ascribed to

traditional mass media, not least by framing issues and events and thus shaping people's perceptions of reality and of social and political issues" (Moscovici & Duveen, 2000 as cited in Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016, p. 403). Moreover, digital and social media users are often not just passive consumers and observers but have become content "curators," "distributors," and "creators" (Tagg, 2015). When it comes to getting informed about current events, for example, users both share news links and thus contribute to informing their network, and also consume news shared by their network. The 2016 U.S. Presidential election demonstrated how the dissemination of information and news on social media may lead to so-called filter bubbles (Ott, 2017). Filter bubbles are facilitated by algorithms that select and recommend web content based on the user's online behavior. That way, users are constantly exposed to the same perspectives and ideologies, which may lead to the reproduction of discourses within networks. Social media may thus also contribute to the normalization of socially unacceptable, non-mainstream discourses as extreme-right discourses are continuously repeated in these filter bubbles (O'Callaghan, Greene, Conway, Carthy, & Cunningham, 2013).

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Racist, xenophobic, and nationalist ideologies are taboo in mainstream German discourses due to Germany's Nationalist Socialist past. After World War II, West Germany made great efforts to denazify every part of society and develop a consolidated democracy, and has continually engaged in the process of coming to terms with its past. At the same time, the country has faced several waves of immigrants, such as ethnic Germans from the former German territories located in Poland or Russia (Wolff, 2002), guest workers from Italy or Turkey (Höhne, Linden, Seils, & Wiebel, 2014), or refugees and asylum seekers from former Yugoslavia in the

1990s (Lederer, 1997) or from Syria in the last few years (Park, 2015). All of these immigration waves resulted in increasing xenophobia and racism, however with the most current wave of Syrians there has been a strengthening of extreme-right groups on a broad national level. In fact, since 1961, there has not been a far-right political party represented in the federal parliament. The rise of the extreme-right political party, AfD, and of extreme-right groups such as Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident; German: Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes) can be considered a new phenomenon for Germany and one that aligns with trends in other Western countries (Doerr, 2017; Gür-Şeker, 2015; Reetz, 2017).

Along with the waves of immigrants, the religious spectrum of Germany has changed. Although the population in Germany is predominantly Christian and the influences of Christian values on German society and culture cannot be denied, around five percent of the population in Germany is Muslim (Stichs, 2016). Even though the German minister of the interior claimed in 2006 that Islam is part of Germany and Europe (Detjen, 2015), Muslims and Islam in general are targets of right-wing, nationalist discourses that advocate a homogeneous national identity and culture.

Given the increasing influence of digital and social media, Wodak and Meyer (2016) have called for new studies that “explore what impact new communication networks really have on social and political change in systematic detail” (p. 13). For this reason, this research study examines nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses in social media with the focus on the micro-blogging service, Twitter. With this study, I attempt to contribute a better understanding of how right-wing discourses are constructed and reproduced, facilitated by the affordances of digital communication, as well as challenged and contested. This study explores



how the nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses fit into the social, cultural, and political context of Germany and Europe, and specifically, in the context of the European migrant crisis and the 2016 Islamic terror attack in Berlin, Germany. Furthermore, I hope to raise awareness about these discourses. Even though Twitter is not as widely used in Germany as in the U.S., it is gaining importance as the number of users is increasing. It is thus important to inform and educate social media users in order for them to make educated judgments about claims and fake news spread via Twitter and other social media. This will hopefully enable users to be able to better detect misleading and manipulative strategies. Therefore, I attempt to reveal social media strategies that are employed to promote discrimination, domination, and inequality, and to show that they can also be challenged and condemned.

### **Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the features of nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses on Twitter?
  - a. What discursive strategies are used?
  - b. What semiotic and multimodal resources are employed?
2. What are features of counter-discourses to right-wing positions?
  - a. What discursive strategies are used?
  - b. What semiotic and multimodal resources are employed?
3. To what extent do the technological and communicative affordances of Twitter lead to a potential for dialogic interaction between the opposing discourse communities?

I am, therefore, interested in exploring how Twitter users employ strategies to construct a negative image of refugees and immigrants in the context of the European refugee crisis. Specifically, I focus on self- and other-presentations as well as topics and themes to which explicit or implicit references are made. Since Twitter facilitates the use of multiple modes and resources for meaning-making, I believe it is vital to also examine the semiotic and multimodal resources employed by tweeters in this context. Given the public visibility of these types of discourses on Twitter, I am also interested in how other Twitter users, who do not share extreme-right ideologies, react and respond in order to challenge and condemn the domination and exclusion of refugees and immigrants. Lastly, I am interested in exploring if and how Twitter affordances lead to dialogic interaction between those who express right-wing, nationalist-conservative ideologies and those who challenge these discourses. Dialogic interaction in this context is to be understood as an interaction where users reach out to other users who do not share the same ideologies in order to try to understand and potentially accept each other's positions.

### **The Context of Twitter**

Twitter is one of the most popular social networking sites and “has become the ‘real time’ of the digital media landscape because of the precipitous speed of its propagation of messages, information and ‘news’” (Sharma, 2013, p. 49). It has generated new forms of interaction with specific conventions and communication practices (Squires, 2015). The three main Twitter-specific features are #, @, and retweet. Hashtags enable searchability because they are labels used to identify and categorize messages based on specific topics. Registered users can create new hashtags or use existing hashtags when they send tweets, that is, messages limited to

140 characters before November 2017 and 280 characters since then. A tweet may also include pictures, videos, gifs, polls, emojis, or a location. Users can also address other users by including @username in their tweets and thus directly respond to other users or engage in a conversation. Although users are limited in characters when contributing tweets to the community, Twitter users can make great use of these 140 characters by relying on multimodal features and semiotic resources. The function of the @ character to enable addressivity is available in other social media, but the hashtag was originally specific to Twitter. Tweets can also be retweeted. They are then labeled RT. This feature is comparable to the “share” option on Facebook.

The majority of user profiles are publicly available and the default relationship between users is non-reciprocal (Page, 2012). Unregistered users are also able to read tweets and search the platform for hashtags, users, or news. Unlike on other SNS, on Twitter, there is no expectation of turn-taking (Zappavigna, 2011) and, therefore, the subsequent tweet with a particular hashtag may not be directly connected to a previous tweet but may still refer to the same context or point to similar opinions, beliefs, or attitudes. Moreover, users often do engage with others by responding directly to someone’s tweet or by retweeting. Sometimes this may result in a discussion thread on a given topic.

Twitter’s character limitation promotes an informal, conversational style. Combined with the depersonalized interaction common for the use of technology (Tait, 2016, as cited in Ott, 2017), it may “[undermine] norms that tend to enforce civility” (Ott, 2017, p. 62). According to Ott (2017), Twitter may in fact foster impulsivity and incivility.

## **Definition of Terms**

In the following section, I will provide definitions of terms that are relevant for this study since these terms may be conceptualized differently across research fields and geographical regions. By providing my understanding of the terms, which will serve as the foundation for my reasoning, I hope to minimize ambiguities.

### **Discourse and Discursive Strategies**

Discourse can be understood as language in use, that is, how interlocutors use linguistic units like sounds, words, sentences, or larger groups thereof to communicate in a specific context (Gee, 2014). The meaning of these features can be conventionalized or created through the interaction and identities of the interlocutors. Discourse is thus contextually situated (van Dijk, 2011b) and a tool for “‘social practice’ that is both determined by social structure and contributes to stabilizing and changing that structure simultaneously” (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 7).

Discourse may also refer to larger systems of beliefs, values, and behaviors in which users enact socially situated identities and which reflect social orders (Gee, 2014). For this reason, Gee distinguishes between little-d discourse and big-D Discourse. In this project, I follow Gee’s twofold notion of discourse as well as the notion of discourse as a social practice. I

operationalize discourse as twofold, with the micro level being concerned with linguistic and semiotic resources and the macro level being concerned with the realization of socially and historically significant structures and identities. For the analysis of discourse, I am interested in

the relationship between the ‘micro’ level of discourse (having to do with the way texts are put together and used to take specific actions in specific situations), and the ‘macro’

level of discourse (having to do with the way texts reflect and help perpetuate certain social orders (Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015, p. 4)

To operationalize discursive strategies, I follow Reisigl and Wodak (2016), who define a strategy as a “plan of practice ... adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal” (p. 33).

### **Filter Bubble**

The term “filter bubble” was coined by Pariser (2011, as cited in O’Callaghan et al., 2013) and refers to the concept that algorithms and recommendation services select and limit the content that is available to and thus consumed by users based on the users’ previous online behavior. This may lead to the constant presentation of aligning perspectives and conversely the perhaps unintentional avoidance of diverging perspectives, “potentially leading to immersion within an ideological bubble” (O’Callaghan et al., 2013, p. 1). The term became particularly relevant during the last US presidential election as well as the European migrant crisis as increasingly more users started to rely on social media as a source of news and information.

### **Intertextuality, Interdiscursivity, and Recontextualization**

The terms intertextuality and interdiscursivity refer to the connection among and between texts and discourses. According to Bennett (2016), “texts are linked diachronically to other texts via content, style, and genre and synchronically via reference to, and the presence of, other discourses” (p. 7). Although these contexts are often associated with literary texts, they are particularly relevant in digital media, where texts may include references to other texts and content via hyperlinks (Tagg, 2015). Recontextualization refers to the transformation of texts for

the purpose of changing the context, for example, in the case of right-wing groups, by “repeating the same historical phrases but changing their meaning via the use of tropes, pragmatic presuppositions, and implicatures” (Bennett, 2016, p. 9). The technological affordances of social media like Twitter facilitate intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and recontextualization, and previous studies have shown that Twitter users take advantage of these affordances to legitimize their ideologies and discourses.

### **Multimodality**

Multimodality refers to the availability of, combination of, and meaning-making through multiple modes, that is, semiotic resources that are socially shaped and culturally contingent (Kress, 2012). Semiotic resources in written discourse may include text, typographic expression, image, layout, or color, and graphic representations of emotions or facial expressions (van Leeuwen, 2015). Multimodality is particularly relevant in digital media; digital communication often cannot rely on paralinguistic features which may serve as contextualization cues. Hence these cues are represented differently in digital media, for example, via emoticons, emojis, letter capitalization, and letter repetition. It is important to highlight that such non-verbal signaling may serve a variety of functions and is highly context-dependent (Darics, 2013). Due to Twitter’s word limit, users often rely on a variety of multimodal resources in their contributions.

### **Nationalist**

In order to operationalize nationalist, I refer to the definition of nationalism as “a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations or supranational

groups” (“Nationalism,” 2017). Wodak et al. (2009) further point out that nations are “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) and national identities are produced and reproduced discursively. Nationalist-conservative discourse supports the concept of a nation as an existing, bound, and homogeneous entity that is sovereign and superior to other nations. It is further characterized by the conservation of national identity and culture, and traditional values. Nationalist-conservative discourses tend to be employed by right-wing groups and have been fueled the European migrant crisis.

### **Right-Wing**

Although the term “right wing” has different connotations in different geographical regions, it is usually associated with a conservative, political ideology. Right-wing political parties and groups advocate the “return to a traditional way of life, with established morals and (usually Christian) values; ... [and] ‘law and order’ ideologies, thus a strong state and authoritative leader” (Wodak, 2015b, p. 52). Furthermore, right-wing discourses may draw on national identity and belonging, on the one hand, and openly fascist and Nazi ideologies, on the other hand. Hence, it may be conceptualized as a continuum from moderate to far-right positions. Nonetheless, the common denominator is the preservation of the national identity and culture, which “suggests contrasting ‘our community’ with dangerous ‘others’” (p. 52). In recent years, especially extreme-right ideologies seemed to have (re-)surfaced across Western societies and have been fueled by the migrant crisis and terror attacks across Europe.

## **Social Representations**

Social representations are “set[s] of beliefs, images, metaphors and symbols collectively shared in a group, community, society or culture” (Wagner, 1994, p. 199), and “serve to classify circumstances, phenomena and individuals with whom we deal, theories which permit us to establish facts about them” (Jodelet, 1991, as cited in Howarth, 2006, p. 4) such that they may contribute to the maintenance of social inclusion and exclusion across communities (Howarth, 2006). For the context of this study, social representations of the perceived and constructed other are particularly relevant. Othering serves to establish and reinforce relations of inclusion and exclusion.

## **Topoi**

Topoi are “content-related warrants or ‘conclusion rules’ which connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim” (Wodak, 2008, p. 6). Topoi are argumentative devices that are used to justify discrimination, inequality, and exclusion. Examples of topoi in the context of right-wing discourses about immigration are danger and threat, burdening, or culture. The term is used in the discourse-historical approach to CDA.

## **Xenophobia and the Other**

Xenophobia is the fear of the foreign and other. According to Wodak (2014), racism and xenophobia are linked to “the construction of ‘differences’ on many levels, which serve ideological, political and/or practical discrimination at all levels of society” (p. 402-303). These differences rely on the discursive construction of in-group and out-group. Xenophobic rhetoric may be used along with or as part of a nationalist-conservative discourse to distinguish between



in-group and out-group and to legitimize the exclusion of the constructed other. The out-group, or the other, is depicted as homogeneous and associated with negative attributes and characteristics, which also serves to blame the other as responsible for real and imagined issues and problems. The negative presentation of the other is further used to justify and legitimize exclusion and inequality. According to Wodak, the rhetoric of exclusion focuses “on the *discursive construction of in-groups and out-groups* which relates to strategies of *positive self- and negative other-presentation*; on strategies of *justification and legitimation* of exclusionary practices through argumentative devices; and finally on the *denial of racism* which frequently accompanies and introduces discriminatory rhetoric” (2008, p. 57, emphasis in original). In recent years, the expression of xenophobia seems to have increased in Western societies (Wodak, 2015b), and it is an element of right-wing, nationalist-conservative discourses.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The first section of this literature review offers an overview of right-wing, nationalist tendencies in political and mass media discourses thus focusing on the elites who are traditionally associated with the (re)production of discourses. In order to account for the increasing influence of digital and social media as news sources and thus on the (re)production of ideologies, the subsequent section includes a review of the literature on right-wing, nationalist discourses and counter-discourses in digital media such as commentaries to online newspapers, discussion forums, and participatory websites as well as social media like Facebook and Twitter. The last section presents a discussion of the perceived gaps.

### **Right-wing, Nationalist Discourse in Elite Discourses**

Right-wing, nationalist, anti-immigrant discourses produced by the elites can be found in diverse media outlets ranging from mass media texts such as newspapers to the various forms of political discourse, including but not limited to legislation, policy documents, or political party leaflets. These texts are produced by the elites and the analysis of such texts is concerned with “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 10).

## **Political Discourse**

Political discourse can be defined as the discourse created by politicians and may focus on the spoken and written texts created by politicians, but according to van Dijk (1997, 2002), as politics is located in the public sphere, the conceptualization of political discourse should include the discourse of “*all participants in the political process*” (van Dijk, 1997, p. 13, emphasis in original) and thus include not only what is produced by politicians and political actors but also by everyday citizens. In fact, van Dijk (1997, 2002) points out that political discourse should be conceptualized “*contextually*, viz., in terms of special events or practices of which the aims, goals or functions are maybe not exclusively but at least primarily political” (van Dijk, 1997, p. 15), since political discourse is known to play a significant role in the development of popular opinion on national identity (van Dijk, 1993, 2002).

Most research studies, however, focus on the analysis of texts that are produced by political actors. Richardson and Wodak (2009), for example, analyzed political leaflets and slogans about employment in the UK and Austria and showed how, by using anti-immigrant and anti-foreigner discourse, mainstream political parties legitimized xenophobic phrases and enabled far-right groups to reappropriate such discourses. The authors used the discourse-historical approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) because “it integrates and triangulates knowledge about historical, intertextual sources and the background of the social and political fields within which discursive events are embedded” (Wodak, 2012, p. 529). The focus of such analysis is on intertextual and interdiscursive relationships, extralinguistic social variables, the history of texts and organizations, and institutional frames of the specific context or situation. Using this approach, the authors illustrated that the recontextualization of slogans like “jobs for

Brits” or “Austria first” into contemporary rhetoric still draws on historical connotations based on fascist ideology.

Richardson and Colombo (2014) also analyzed political leaflets of far- and extreme-right political parties in Europe and showed how these parties used fear concerning national identity, culture, and security to construct an imminent threat of Muslims. The multimodal analysis of leaflets found across Europe showed how inter-ethnic conflict was constructed discursively and visually by referring to two recurring images: the first image showed a woman wearing a niqab and seven minarets which were placed on the national flag of the respective countries depicting the invasion of Muslims, and the second image portrayed a black sheep being kicked by a white sheep depicting the exclusion and scapegoating of the other. The Internet allowed these political parties to share their leaflets with a wider audience and to make use of intertextual and interdiscursive relationships by addressing the broader sociopolitical and historical contexts, such as anti-immigrant ideologies, in which these discursive strategies were embedded.

According to Doerr (2017), the use of the same images enabled right-wing groups to unite and join forces. Doerr combined the discourse-historical approach to CDA with multimodal analysis in her analysis of cartoon images used in electoral posters by right-wing political parties. In order to find out “how far-right political groups use[d] the aesthetic and visual dimension of transnational network publics for their political activism” (p. 7), she analyzed the visual image and the written text of the black sheep poster (cf. Richardson & Colombo, 2014) which was used and recontextualized by far-right political groups. Based on the original that was created by the far-right political party in Switzerland, she collected (via Google searches) translated versions that were used in Germany and Italy, and illustrated how these images were used to construct a shared ethno-nationalist identity across multilingual and transnational social networks:

Although each of these parties appeals to a specific national context, they all share the systematic strategy of visual or symbolic media provocation that speaks to multiple audiences. The use of visual images to reinforce anti-immigrant discourse serves as a means for right-wing groups to bond with their constituents, while eliding actual social and cultural differences within differentiated national audiences. (Doerr, 2017, p. 4)

Mainstream media tend to be reluctant to report on extreme-right groups and political parties to not give them the platform to disseminate their ideology. For this reason, right-wing groups use “transnational social networks” for political activism. However, Doerr also pointed out that the analysis of the anonymous public space “cannot reveal the true identity and relationships between these groups” (p. 10).

Lastly, Atton (2006) analyzed the far-right discourse of the British National Party’s website using a Foucaultian perspective and found that power, culture, and oppression were reappropriated to represent themselves, that is, their perceived in-group, as oppressed by the other, that is, foreigners and immigrant sympathizers.

### **The Discourse in Mass Media**

Right-wing, nationalist, and anti-immigrant discourse is not only found in political discourse but is also evident in mass media. Wodak and Boukala (2015b) examined how the depiction of immigrants by the press in Austria and Greece contributed to the construction of national identities. Some mass media not only depicted immigrants and refugees as out-group members but also contributed to the development of negative connotations with refugees such as “criminality, danger, and burden” (p. 257). Similar trends of negative representations of refugees and asylum seekers in the press were also documented in the United Kingdom (Baker et al.,

2008; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). Using a CDA approach in combination with corpus linguistics (CL), the researchers investigated how refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants (RASIM) were linguistically defined and constructed in British news articles. They further explored the topics that were discussed and the attitudes that emerged in relation to RASIM. The 140-million-word corpus covering ten years of several national and regional British newspapers provided a map of lexical patterns that were then further analyzed using CDA to discover topics and legitimation strategies related to RASIM. Baker (2012) also used CL and CDA to analyze the British press but focused on the representation of Islam and Muslims.

Kuusisto and Östman (1997) analyzed how anti-foreigner discourse was constructed in Finnish newspapers. The authors found that the media, as a mediator between political officials and laypersons, helped shape a negative public opinion about refugees and migrants and construct a Finnish culture and identity in response to voters' fears of negative influences of foreigners on Finland. Wiggen (2012) researched anti-immigration rhetoric in Norway and showed how both media and politicians contributed to the spread and normalization of xenophobia, particularly against Muslims who were blamed for domestic issues. Religion may thus also be used to distinguish between those who belong and those who do not and are considered as harm to the in-group. This kind of "othering" based on religion has intensified and manifested itself as increasing xenophobia and Islamophobia due to the European migrant crisis (Doerr, 2017; Ekman, 2015; Gür-Şeker, 2015). Terror attacks associated with the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) in Paris (November 2015), Brussels (March 2016), Nice (July 2016), and Berlin (December 2016) have also contributed to the othering. It is important to point out that Christianity is the largest religion in Europe and many refugees come from Muslim-majority countries (Park, 2015).

Although Europe is currently in the spotlight for the ongoing migrant crisis, anti-immigrant and anti-refugee discourse can also be found in mass media outside of Europe, for example in Australia (Lueck, Due, & Augoustinos, 2015) and the United States (Stewart, Pitts, & Osborne, 2011). Both Australia and the United States are affluent societies where people from underprivileged and conflict-laden neighboring countries seek refuge. Both nations have a long history of immigration, yet, studies have shown that immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are often portrayed negatively by mass media, which may lead to negative opinions about and rejection of migrants by parts of the population.

The overview of research literature focusing on right-wing, nationalist, anti-immigrant, and xenophobic discourses found in mass media texts and political discourse showed similar trends as regards the discursive construction of the other through xenophobic, nationalist, and even extreme-right discourses. Such discourses are found in diverse media outlets and have been investigated by researchers from various disciplines. The studies reviewed above illustrate how topics and discursive strategies used in elite texts are employed to discursively construct a positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation and thus facilitate the legitimization of the exclusion of the constructed others.

### **Right-wing, Nationalist Discourses in Digital and Social Media**

The discourse of the elites such as mass media or political actors certainly contributes to building the public opinion, and a critical analysis of texts produced by these actors can uncover hidden inherent belief systems. But although mass media and political discourses are important and have received well-deserved scholarly attention, increasingly more research has focused on digital and social media discourses. As Androutsopoulos (2013) points out, “digital media

evolved from socially exclusive to almost ubiquitous in the Western world” (p. 492).

Furthermore, “a large proportion of day-to-day verbal and visual communication has migrated to various participatory web platforms” (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 230). It is, therefore, crucial to also investigate these new media to understand how nationalist, right-wing, xenophobic, anti-immigrant discourses present themselves in online platforms, because researchers “interested in describing, explaining, and criticizing the ways dominant discourses influence socially shared knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies, ... must naturally continuously follow the source of these discourses as they shift in society.” (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016, p. 403).

Although the widespread access to digital and social media may lead to the assumption that users have the opportunity to participate freely and equally, internet researchers have observed that this idealized view might not necessarily hold true (Tagg, 2015). For instance, Herring, Johnson, and DiBenedetto (1995) observed early on that offline behavior may transcend into online behavior. In their study of aggressive behavior on academic online forums, the authors showed that the “mutedness [of women] ... is actively constructed and enforced through everyday discursive interaction” (p. 92), and therefore old power hierarchies were reproduced.

Many contributions to online platforms such as comments to online newspapers or on discussion boards are posted anonymously and Harlow (2015) suggested that “allowing readers to post anonymous comments seem[ed] to be encouraging racist diatribes” (p. 38). Tagg (2015) also pointed out that online “anonymity worries many people, who see it as facilitating a range of dangerous activities from terrorism to paedophilia” (Tagg, 2015, p. 60). However, social media have reduced online opportunities for anonymous participation because users’ online identities can often be linked to their offline identities. Facebook, for instance, is often primarily based on



one's offline network of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. Twitter, on the other hand, does allow for more opportunities to stay "anonymous" or to use and perform a different identity, because the default relationship between tweeters is non-reciprocal (Page, 2012) and followers are not always connected in the offline world. Unless a Twitter profile is verified and thus associated with a real person, one has to rely on other factors to identify a user; usernames, profile descriptions, profile pictures, and the content in tweets may give clues about the real or performed identity of a user. However, due to the increasing occurrence of bots and fake profiles, it is becoming more difficult to recognize the author and the intention of a message. This consequently also means that any radical group or movement can take advantage of the technological affordances of digital media to disseminate their ideas and opinions with neither being held accountable nor with having to personally face negative repercussions for propagating extreme discourses. The repeated unmediated and uncritical dissemination of non-mainstream discourses in digital and social media may then also lead to the normalization of these discourses.

Although digital communication may enable wider participation and facilitate community building (Tagg, 2015), researchers have pointed out that online communication may reproduce old hierarchies, and the emergence of filter bubbles and echo chambers may contribute to the uncritical dissemination of extreme opinions, including xenophobia and racism.

### **Commentaries to Online Newspapers**

The Internet has become an integral part of every-day interactions and many people rely on digital media to get informed (Klein, 2012). Consequently, many newspapers have developed online versions and social media are also increasingly used for news retrieval (KhosraviNik &

Unger, 2016). Furthermore, many online newspapers provide the opportunity for user-generated content such as comments. Although readers' comments in the form of letters to the editor are not a new phenomenon, not all reader responses were printed and the ones that were appeared in the following issue creating a time lag. Online comments, on the other hand, are published faster as registered users can directly write comments at the end of an article, consequently providing other readers access to these comments while engaging with the article.

Alonso Belmonte, Chornet, and McCabe (2013), Gomes (2014), and Harlow (2015) investigated user comments to online newspaper articles. All three studies discovered that xenophobic comments were common and widespread in their respective online contexts (online newspaper articles in Spain, Singapore, USA).

In an exploratory case study of 497 commentaries to an article in the online version of the Spanish daily newspaper, *El País*, Alonso Belmonte et al. (2013) drew on CDA to examine the discursive positioning of the commenters toward immigration, race, and racism. Although overt racism was denied in the commentaries, the authors identified the dominant ideology of whiteness and the depiction of immigrants as a financial burden. The newspaper article under investigation in this study was about African immigrants being refused admittance to nightclubs near Madrid.

Adopting a different methodology, Harlow (2015) used quantitative content analysis to examine reader comments to the front page stories of 24 U.S. American newspapers (resulting in 747 articles) in order to determine the relationship between news stories and reader comments about race or ethnicity. The study showed that readers often made references to race and applied negative racial or ethnic stereotypes regardless of whether or not the focus of the article was

related to issues of race or ethnicity. Latinos and African Americans were the predominant target of these racial comments.

Xenophobic comments to online newspapers are not an exclusively Western phenomenon. Gomes (2014) examined online comments to two online opinion pieces about educated migrants in Singapore. Specifically, these articles referred to “foreign talent” migrants, that is, educated professionals, in Singapore. The analysis showed that online commenters expressed xenophobia and disappointment at the government, and incited hatred toward foreign migrants particularly if they were originally from Mainland China, South Asia, or the Philippines. Moreover, the comments pointed to the construction of “true Singaporeans,” representing those whose lineage goes back to the time when Singapore was still a British colony. The author also argued that this increase in xenophobia resulted from the emergence of social media platforms which “provided Singaporeans with a much needed avenue for expressing their dissatisfaction towards the government” (p. 33).

Both the studies of Gomes (2014) and Alonso Belmonte et al. (2013) are limited in applicability and transferability because they focus on a very specific and confined context. Furthermore, neither of the studies was able to give information about the demographics of the commenters (other than self-described within the posts) due to the anonymity of online comments. Therefore, the platform-specific features may constrain the type of data a researcher can collect.

### **Discussion Forums and Participatory Websites**

Research on right-wing discourses was also conducted on discussion forums and participatory websites. An example of an extreme-right participatory website is *Stormfront*.

Sociologist Daniels (2009) examined how white supremacist groups entered the digital world and transitioned into virtual communities. In her comparison of five predominant groups, she demonstrated that Stormfront could be considered one of the most “successful” examples, because it took advantage of participatory Web 2.0 features. Using ethnographic observations, discourse analysis of text, graphic design, layout, and images, and analysis of Web analytics, Daniels (2009) found

that old forms of overt white supremacy (e.g., racist hate speech) have entered the digital era alongside new, emergent forms of white supremacy that include mass e-mail, user names, participatory discussion boards, overtly racist online games [such as “Border Patrol” where players are encouraged to shoot immigrants], and covertly racist websites with obfuscated propaganda addressing the meaning of civil rights. (p. 23)

Her analysis of user identities is also insightful. Users make intertextual and interdiscursive references in their user names and enact translocal whiteness. The discursive construction of user identities is also analyzed by McLaughlin (2014) in the context of a Senegalese web portal (“Seneweb”) and by Vásquez (2014) in the context of online consumer reviews. Offline and online identities are socially constructed and fluid, but while offline identities are “generally more constrained by their physical appearance and other material circumstances” (Vásquez, 2014, p. 53), users can mold their identity in digital spaces to some extent. Depending on the platform and its requirements, user IDs, for example, may serve to deliberately portray oneself or to unconsciously ‘give off’ clues. Pseudonyms thus offer the opportunity to index a specific, contextually relevant identity (Vásquez, 2014). In Mc Laughlin’s (2014) study of “Seneweb,” for instance, many user names include references to places or cultural items and markers of authenticity or ethnicity. According to the author, “the majority of

the names used on Seneweb commentaries index Senegalese locality ... thereby contributing to the construction of an interactive, virtual Senegal” (p. 31).

The far-right movement, Stormfront, was also examined by Caren, Jowers, and Gaby (2012). The authors analyzed close to seven million posts from the online community of white nationalists collected between 2001 and 2010 to draw similarities and differences between offline and online social movement communities. The findings of this study showed that a major goal of the social movement online community (SMOC) of white nationalists was “building and sustaining a network of like-minded individuals through such processes as the establishment and maintenance of a collective identity” (p. 165). The authors could identify similarities to offline social movement communities such as the participatory nature, the construction of a collective identity, and the creation of a “free space” for “marginalized” viewpoints, as well as distinct features of SMOCs such as rapid expansion, geographic diversity, and anonymity. The study demonstrated, similarly to Daniels (2009), how right extremists employ technological affordances in order to reach a wider, global audience. Although the analysis was concerned with the characteristics of SMOCs rather than linguistic features, the article is useful because the data “[make] up 92% of the activity on Stormfront during this period” (p. 174) and therefore gives a comprehensive overview of the platform. The authors further illustrated how right extremists used digital technologies to expand their reach, and connect across geopolitical boundaries.

In her exploratory study of discussion posts related to the topic “Europe,” Baumgarten (2017) also analyzed the extreme-right website, Stormfront, but focused on how users constructed others as out-groups. The author found that othering not only targeted individuals but also “potentially diverse entities” (p. 4) such as organizations, social institutions, geographical entities, cultural practices and belief systems, and social processes. Applying positioning and

appraisal analysis, the author showed that othering facilitated the construction of “a coherent group-internal discourse world” (p. 10). Furthermore, the analysis demonstrated that English was used as a lingua franca to discuss local contexts and build a globally connected right-wing online community.

The research by Daniels (2009), Caren et al. (2012), and Baumgarten (2017) shows how right extremists in the United States leverage the technological affordances of participatory platforms. The affordances provided by digital technology are also used by ultranationalists in Japan. Yamaguchi (2013) demonstrated through ethnographic fieldwork both offline and online how the “net far right” used the largest anonymous message board in Japan to spread racist propaganda and to connect the online and offline movement by the use of video streaming. The author pointed out that the hate speech not only targeted Koreans or Chinese but also Westerners. Yamaguchi (2013) and Gomes (2014) demonstrated in their research that right-extremism is present across contexts and thus not an exclusively Western phenomenon. Moreover, it is facilitated by technological affordances such as anonymity and the opportunity to connect translocally, similarly to Western right-extremist groups.

As shown in the research of Wodak (e.g., 2008), among others, national “identities gain their meaning and value through the relations with the *other*, that is through the construction of contrasts and oppositions” (Madisson, 2016, p. 20). Right-wing movements focus on various targets, depending on how they perceive their relation to the respective other or out-group, but in Europe, a common target is Muslims. Ekman’s (2015) analysis of three key online platforms of the Islamophobic online network demonstrated that right-wing populists use “the idea that the Western world is ‘under attack,’ ‘silently occupied’ by, or even at ‘civil war’ with Islam” (p. 1986). Ekman analyzed the discursive strategies of three Islamophobic websites: US-based

Jihad Watch, pan-European Gates of Vienna, and Swedish Avpixlat. From these websites, Ekman collected over 10,000 blog entries related to Muslims or Islam in 2012 and randomly selected 200 from each site in order “to exemplify and contextualize some of the key discursive themes in relation to the larger idea of a Muslim colonization of the West” (p. 1992). The CDA-informed analysis examined the discursive strategies present in the so-called counter-jihadist online network. He found that Islam and Muslims were represented as a threat to the Western world. The main themes of “the politics of fear” were: the demographic threat; the silent infiltration of Muslims in society, institutions, government; the imposition of sharia law; and the depiction of Islam as political ideology and as inherently violent. Ekman furthermore pointed out that “the discursive strategies of the online networks do not originate from a political and societal vacuum, but are nourished from already established media representations of Muslims and from mainstream political discourses” (p. 1998). According to Ekman, an increase in Islamophobia both offline and online is leading to the normalization of anti-Islam rhetoric and a rise in anti-Islam websites and online networks such as the so-called counter-jihad network.

Hirvonen (2013) also examined the counter-jihadist online network, but focused on the representations of unaccompanied minors in the three biggest anti-immigrant webpages in Sweden, Avpixlat, Nordic Front, National Now. In her netnography, she examined 288 comments and 60 articles and also found the construction of Europe being “under threat from mass Islamist invasion by stealth, i.e. through immigration” (p. 83). She further illustrated that the online space used by the counter-jihadist movement served as echo chambers and created an environment where socially unacceptable opinions became the norm. So-called echo chambers or filter bubbles are created by algorithms and “recommendation services [that] may limit the types of content to which a user is exposed” (O’Callaghan, Greene, Conway, Carthy, & Cunningham,

2013, p. 1; see also Bolander & Locher, 2014; Bouvier, 2015; Hirvonen, 2013; Trilling, 2015). Consequently, users have access to pre-determined pieces of information and thus types of discourse selected based on the assumption that they fit the previously accessed information. This may lead to the normalization of such discourses due to the constant repetition thereof and the concomitant lack of exposure to counterdiscourse.

Similarly to Ekman's (2015) study, Hirvonen (2013) found that in those platforms unaccompanied minors were represented as criminals and parasites who came to invade and impose sharia law in Europe. The normalization of these opinions online also influenced the national debate on immigration making it more conservative (Hirvonen, 2013). Although she illustrated how the websites served as echo chambers and contributed to the normalization of Islamophobic and anti-immigrant opinions, her analysis would benefit from a closer look at linguistic and semiotic features. This closer look at semiotic features is offered by Madisson (2016), who explored the far-right in Estonia by analyzing blogs and discussion forums over a period of three years from a cultural semiotics perspective. She "demonstrate[d] that the framework of NWO (New World Order) conspiracy theory function[ed] as an important code-textual center that guide[d] the mapping of social reality of individuals navigating the groupuscular network" (p. 32). Moreover, identities were constructed based on the contrast and opposition to the other. Her research, however, focuses on the far-right in Estonia and is, despite similarities to the far-right movement in other regions, limited in scope. Nonetheless, Madisson's case study illustrated that under the veil of anonymity, users of online discussion forums and blogs felt less inhibited to express extreme and socially unacceptable opinions, which then also influenced offline communication and discourse in Estonia. Her study thus showed that the



affordances of online communication contributed to the dissemination of extreme right discourses and ideologies both online and offline.

The influential Scandinavian discussion forum, *Flashback*, served as research site for the studies of Törnberg and Törnberg (2016) and Malmqvist (2015). Malmqvist (2015) explored two discussion threads in the forum “Integration and Immigration” on Flashback that were concerned with Roma EU-migrants begging for money. Specifically, the author focused on the use of humor and satire in racist discourse. Despite the assumption that the anonymity of the platform would lead to disinhibition and thus unrestrained forms of racism, the author found that racist discourse was rather subtle and restrained and hypothesized that users might deliberately choose this form in order to reach a wider audience. By contextualizing the discursive target of humor, examining the echo, and identifying racist affective-discursive articulations, the author further illustrated how users articulated feelings of superiority.

Malmqvist’s study was based on only two discussion threads with a total of 3196 posts and only focused on a very specific group of immigrants, however, Törnberg and Törnberg (2016) provided a more comprehensive overview of Flashback with their analysis of over 50 million posts. By combining topic modeling and critical discourse analysis, the authors analyzed the discursive connections between Islamophobia and anti-feminism. Törnberg and Törnberg (2016) showed how right-wing users exploited arguments of gender equality to criticize immigration, particularly of Muslims, and accused feminists and liberals of being hypocritical and contradictory since they were fighting for gender equality and at the same time supporting a group that was against gender equality. While users portrayed Islam “as a ‘threat’ against gender equality” (p. 414), the results also showed that within the right-wing community gender inequality was considered a minor or non-existing problem. The synergy of topic modeling and

CDA “enable[d] the analysis to start more inductively by focusing directly on the recontextualizations of various social practices and then exploring and identifying common discourses, underlying ideologies and tensions, and modifications within them” (p. 408).

While most of the studies described above were concerned with extreme-right positions, the studies of Del-Teso-Craviotto (2009) and Cleland (2014) investigated xenophobic and racist discourses that were not necessarily linked to the far-right movement. Del-Teso-Craviotto (2009) examined the racist and xenophobic discourses of Argentines expatriates in Spain on the internet forum, *PatriaMadre.com*. The author used the CDA framework to analyze eight messages on the topic “soy español y vivo en Madrid” (“I’m Spanish and I live in Madrid”) in the forum “extranjería” (“Foreign Affairs”) and revealed that xeno-racist discourses of the Spanish elite were reproduced by a Spaniard, reformulated by some Argentines toward other Latin American groups of immigrants, and contested by other Argentines and a Romanian user. Xeno-racism refers to racism “that is based not so much on biological or racial features, as happens in neo-fascist ideologies, but on economic inequalities between the rich Europeans and the poor Other” (p. 573). It is important to note, however, that the sample size of the study was very small, namely eight messages from six participants.

Cleland’s (2014) study covered a topic that is also very prone to racism and xenophobia because it is based on nationality, rivalry, and the construction of the other; he examined soccer fans’ views toward racism and xenophobia in English soccer. The analysis of two message boards demonstrated that, despite anti-racism and anti-discrimination campaigns of sports associations, the anonymity of social networking sites seemed to have brought back old racial schemata. While all other studies on participatory websites or discussion forums reviewed above collected “naturally occurring” data, that is, the researchers did not elicit users’ contributions but

analyzed what was “out there,” Cleland’s (2014) investigation differs in that he elicited responses. He made an initial post in two message boards and collected users’ contributions to the unfolding conversation. He then examined the attitudes, opinions, and views of English soccer fans in 500 posts and found that the fans’ perceptions on belonging and national identity centered around whiteness. Multiculturalism and Islam were rejected. Even though it is not explicitly stated, the study seemed to be informed by critical discourse analysis because the author draws on the work of van Dijk on racist discourse. There are ethical benefits to this kind of data collection because users are aware that research is being done with them as opposed to the collection of publicly available data without informing the user. That said, the presence of the researcher might result in some inhibition or potentially even exaggeration and could thus skew the results.

To sum up, most studies on participatory websites or discussion forums have been informed by CDA or used CDA as a theoretical framework. This makes sense because the studies focused on investigating the (re)production of racist and xenophobic discourses. Furthermore, none of the studies, apart from Madisson (2016), used multimodal discourse analysis. This may be due to the (perceived) limited availability of multimodal resources in text-based contributions on participatory websites and discussion forums.

### **Social Networking Sites**

The studies highlighted above were concerned with nationalist, right-wing, xenophobic, and anti-immigration discourse in mass media, political discourse, and online platforms like discussion boards or websites. Mainstream social media platforms like *Facebook* and *Twitter*, with over 1.87 billion and 317 million monthly active users respectively, reach a much wider

audience than any of the described websites or forums. Rightler-McDaniels and Hendrickson (2014) point out that “social networking sites, such as Facebook, are primarily based upon the notion of existing relationships” (p. 176). Users, therefore, do not have access to all Facebook content but to the content that is circulated in their networks of friends, groups, and, if the privacy settings allow, the profiles they follow. Consequently, Facebook may function as a filter bubble, which may lead to a constant reproduction of similar types of discourse. O’Callaghan et al. (2013) found that algorithms used on social networking sites foster the development of homogeneous extreme-right communities and users who access far-right online sites are likely to be directed to further far-right content. Tagg and Sergeant (2019) furthermore found that filter bubbles are also created by users’ own behaviors and actions on the platform.

On the other hand, platforms like Facebook and Twitter have rules that are supposed to prevent hate speech and discrimination. However, in a study of the Facebook pages of seven extreme-right political parties in Spain, Ben-David and Matamoros Fernández (2016) found that, despite platform rules, hate speech and discrimination were widespread. In fact, those groups took advantage of multimodal resources: they used images and encoded insults to propagate anti-immigration ideas, and they were internationally connected. Ben-David and Matamoros Fernández (2016) used multimodal content analysis and network analyses in their comparative and longitudinal study. Using textual analysis, the authors compared overt hate speech and covert discriminatory patterns found on the pages of the extreme-right political parties and compared it to the page of the governing party. The image and link analysis yielded negative targeting of the constructed other, predominantly Muslims. The results of the network analysis indicated that extreme-right groups are nationally and internationally well connected. Although the study only investigates political parties in Spain, it does so in a comparative and longitudinal

way, which reveals patterns of the extreme-right movement in Spain. Furthermore, the study illustrates the necessity to analyze how extreme-right groups employ multimodal resources because they may point to covert discrimination patterns.

Gür-Şeker (2015) examined the Facebook page of the German far-right, anti-Islam movement, *Pegida* (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident; German: Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes). The author created a corpus of over 280,000 comments (pro and con) posted between October 2014 and October 2015 on Pegida's Facebook page. Furthermore, the author collected online newspaper articles on Pegida and one YouTube video of a Pegida event. The author not only identified the movement as a populist right-wing movement opposing immigration, ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as the establishment, but also illustrated how the slogan "We are the people" ("Wir sind das Volk"), which was used in the peaceful political protests against the regime of the German Democratic Republic ("Monday demonstrations" between 1989 and 1991), was reappropriated to construct the need to reclaim a German identity while excluding Muslims represented as invaders of German culture. By recontextualizing the slogan of the Monday demonstrations, Pegida portrayed itself as a resistance movement fighting against the establishment. The study only covers a small part of the right-wing community in Germany but is an important contribution given that Pegida is a new far-right movement that has gained national attention in Germany and produced offshoots in Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK. Both studies, Ben-David and Matamoros Fernández (2016) and Gür-Şeker (2015), demonstrated how right-wing groups used the communicative affordances of digital communication for disseminating their ideology and how they constructed a national identity and discriminated against the other.

As pointed out above, Facebook is a very large social networking site connecting 1.87 billion people, but many interactions are not publicly available (Tagg, 2015). Twitter, on the other hand, “resides more as a public space that a user manages according to interests or relationships” (Rightler-McDaniels & Hendrickson, 2014, p. 176). Furthermore, the micro-blogging platform is frequently used by many politicians and celebrities, the most prevalent example being President Trump, who has used Twitter not only to connect with followers but also to conduct politics (Kreis, 2017b). The micro-blogging platform can thus be considered “a channel for discursive power and has an equivalent function in producing and spreading societal discourses just as any traditional newspaper” (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016, p. 409). For this reason, several research studies have addressed nationalist, right-wing, xenophobic, or anti-immigrant discourses on Twitter; however, these studies vary in terms of data collection.

Cisneros and Nakayama (2015) based their exploratory case study on an event, the victory of the first Indian American Miss America, which was the subject of controversial discussion on social media. The authors collected 100 tweets that were found on web or news stories on reactions to the 2014 Miss America and selected 24 representative tweets for analysis. The reactions to her pageant victory included doubts regarding her U.S. American identity and claims that she was Arab and connected to Al-Qaeda, thus representing a terror threat. A white finalist from Kansas, on the other hand, was seen more favorably. Informed by critical race theory, the authors illustrated how “‘old’ racism [which] rests on imputing difference, exclusion, and domination based on biological and cultural essentialism” (p. 111), resurfaced, on the one hand, and how racist tweets were contested but “actually reasserted norms of whiteness and ‘post-racialism’” (p. 121), on the other hand.

The discourse on Twitter can also be explored through the activity of certain Twitter accounts. O’Callaghan et al. (2014) analyzed extreme-right Twitter accounts to contribute to the understanding of the activity of extreme-right communities on social media. The researchers collected “Twitter data including followers, friends, tweets and list memberships” (p. 4) for mostly non-electoral accounts from eight Western countries (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden, UK, USA). The number of accounts from which data was retrieved ranged from 17 (Italy) to 53 (Germany). Using network analysis, the authors demonstrated that extreme-right groups interacted nationally and internationally, while geographical and linguistic proximity played a role in the connectedness of these networks. The case studies of German and English language data indicated that German accounts “used social media to propagate national socialist-related material” (p. 16), while data containing English contributions centered around the opposition to the EU and the counter-jihadist movement, but were thematically more dispersed. The study illustrates how extreme-right communities in Western societies benefit from and use the communicative affordances of social media. The data show that extreme-right groups have become increasingly active while building stable communities translocally connected across geopolitical boundaries.

Bennett’s (2016) data are linked to both events and accounts. In order to examine the topoi and legitimation strategies of political actors, and how they changed over time, he collected 180 tweets from five British political actors (including politicians as well as political parties) across the ideological spectrum during three timeframes related to key events during the European migrant crisis. More than half of the tweets included links to other texts (hyperlinks, embedded photos/video, retweets). Using a multimodal, discourse-historical approach, he illustrated the intertextual and interdiscursive nature of the discourse. While tweets of the far-

right actor remained stable and continuously employed arguments of burden, threat, abuse, and numbers to legitimate the exclusion and discrimination of refugees, the discourse as well as implemented policies of the mainstream actors shifted depending on the mediatized events. The findings further showed how existing discourses were recontextualized by right-wing actors to benefit their xenophobic, anti-immigration discourse, that is, “right-wing political parties are ... repeating the same historical phrases but changing their meaning via the use of tropes, pragmatic presuppositions, and implicatures” (p. 9). Although the study is concerned with xenophobic, anti-immigrant discourse in the UK, the results and implications are also important for other European countries given the international reach of the migrant crisis.

The majority of the studies dealing with xenophobic discourse on Twitter collected tweets with specific hashtags. Awan (2014) randomly collected 500 tweets from 100 mostly British Twitter users based on three hashtags (#Woolwich, #Muslim, #Islam) between January 2013 and April 2014 to examine how Muslims were described, stereotyped, and abused. The time frame for the data collection was chosen to compare tweets before and after the so-called Woolwich attack. Using content analysis, the author illustrated “the emerging rise of online anti-Muslim hate, prejudice, discrimination, and threats” (p. 147) fueled by a particular grievance, perceived self-confidence and power, anonymity, or the creation of alliances. The analysis showed that users targeted and abused Muslims, while claiming their freedom of speech. The author pointed out that this online abuse could become naturalized and thus called for more attention and examination of online Islamophobia.

Although Twitter only allows 140 characters per tweet, users can add emojis, photos, videos, gifs, polls, or their location, thus using more than one mode of communication to convey meaning. Furthermore, in digital communication, “users [cannot] rely ... on prosodic features



and physical clues when expressing themselves, but on visual graphic resources (such as emoticons or emojis, punctuation and font) and on spelling” (Tagg, 2015, p. 136). Multimodal resources are therefore a key feature of Twitter, albeit not unique to Twitter. Some studies described above about mass media and other digital media also analyzed how multimodal resources were employed to contribute to the meaning-making. Addressing these multimodal resources, Rettberg and Gajjala (2016) examined images and text shared in tweets with the hashtag #refugeesnotwelcome to understand how male Syrian refugees were portrayed on Twitter in the context of the European migrant crisis. Based on the claim that the majority of the refugees were male, which was continuously repeated through images depicting only men, the users portrayed refugees either as dangerous criminals or as cowards who would selfishly leave their women and children behind. However, the commentary did not explicitly identify data collection or theoretical framework. Nonetheless, the analysis of images and text illustrated how Syrian refugees were portrayed as dangerous criminals or cowards.

General Islamophobia was also discovered by Rasmussen (2015), who used Discursive Psychology to examine Twitter users’ attitudes toward Muslims after a terror threat in Norway in 2014. He analyzed 211 tweets with the hashtag #terrorthreat for prominent themes, which seemed to align with themes revealed in other studies such as threat, burden, and criminality. Although the majority of the collected tweets were related to the users’ attitudes toward securitization actors’ communication and the responsibility of the public, some tweets also took the attitude of blaming Muslims and thus pointed to Islamophobia.

While most studies on right-wing discourses on Twitter focused on the European context (cf. O’Callaghan et al., 2014; Bennett, 2016; Awan, 2014; Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016; Rasmussen, 2015), Rightler-McDaniels and Hendrickson (2014) and Graham (2016) focused on racist and

xenophobic discourses in the U.S. context. Rightler-McDaniels and Hendrickson (2014) studied the construction of gender and race in trending topics in southeastern regions of the U.S. and found that the discourse regarding race was highly stereotypical:

All dialogue dealing with race was from a Black or White perspective – no other race was presented – supporting the premise that there is a clear Black/White binary. Race, although a secondary social construct to gender in this study, was especially prevalent in the popular culture theme. White males (i.e., Maury Povich) were discussed according to their intellectual abilities and wealth, while Black males (i.e., Kobe Bryant, Shaquille O’Neal, and Tiger Woods) were discussed according to their athletic abilities and their philandering ways. (p. 186)

The authors collected 19,583 tweets containing the hashtag #becauseofhoes posted in southeastern regions of the U.S. and selected a random sample of 151. They further downsized the sample to 151 tweets by eliminating retweets in order to focus on semantic fields which “allow a critical discourse analysis of the textual element to the dialogue, and its linguistic complexity encourages an intertextual analysis that recognizes social media within an evolving cultural arena” (p. 181). In order to explore constructions of gender and race in the data set, content analysis and CDA were applied and revealed that social media discourse reinforced stereotypical representations of gender and race.

While the previous study focused on the emergence and convergence of a regionally bound community, Graham’s (2016) case study explored how the extreme right in the U.S. deliberately used hashtags to facilitate content-sharing across ideological boundaries in order to reach new audiences. Graham collected 4800 tweets via purposive sampling and snowball sampling of hashtags denoting white extremism (e.g., #whitegenocide, #antiwhite), mainstream

conservatism (e.g., #tcot, #conservative), and mainstream progressivism (e.g., #uniteblue, #progressive) in order to examine inter-ideological mingling. His hierarchical cluster analysis followed by textual analysis revealed that white extremists managed to enter mainstream political discourse by purposefully mixing hashtags that are used in both extreme-right and mainstream communities.

The default setting for tweets is public. If this setting is not changed, tweets can be searched for and accessed by registered Twitter users and even by unregistered visitors of the website. The use of a hashtag can increase a tweet's visibility because it categorizes the tweet and the tweet appears to other users who search for the hashtag. Graham pointed out that, although there was little cross-talk and people tended to stay in their filter bubbles, white extremists were able to get their message out by including trending hashtags (e.g., #tcot, #uniteblue) in their tweets in order to reach a wider audience. His research showed

that white extremists leverage the affordances of the digital environment to disseminate their ideology. They find ways to communicate with people who do not expressly commit to extremist ideology ... despite the lack of cross-talk between users, there may be episodes of content-sharing on the same platform, a process I call inter-ideological mingling. (p. 27)

### **Reactions to Right-wing, Nationalist Discourses in Digital and Social Media**

While a number of studies focus on right-wing, anti-refugee, anti-immigration, xenophobic and racist discourses on digital and social media, there are also a handful of studies that examine users' reactions and responses to racist, xenophobic, and discriminatory comments, posts, and tweets. Del-Teso-Craviotto's (2009) small-scale research study of eight messages in a

Spanish internet forum showed that some commenters also challenged the xeno-racist discourses of the Spanish elite: the users with immigration background criticized a Spaniard for his lack of differentiation, questioned his knowledge and authority, and provided explanations and examples to remind him about Spain's past as an emigration country.

Cisneros and Nakayama (2015) also examined user reactions to racist comments but in the context of Twitter. The researchers analyzed in their study on racist tweets about the victory of the first Indian American Miss America, Davuluri, also users' reactions toward the racist tweets. According to the researchers, "the tweets about Davuluri generated immediate backlash by other Twitter users, who reacted strongly with efforts to publicly shame and attack the offending tweeters. Some responses pointed out the racism in the original tweets and expressed anger, shame, or indignation" (p. 114). Some of the condemning tweeters expressed criticism by using irony or correcting the racist tweets, whereas others addressed the authors of the racist tweets directly by including their @username in order to shame or even attack them; they were called "yahoos," "rednecks," and "uneducated" in order to decrease their relevance and standing within the platform and society. The news media reports about this particular "event" contributed to marginalizing and pathologizing the authors of the racist tweets. At the same time, Miss America was celebrated as the multicultural ideal of the U.S. It is interesting to point out that both groups, that is, those who tweeted racist positions and those who challenged these positions, used the same hashtag, #MissAmerica, which not only created a shared community but also enabled an interaction between both groups and possibly led to the direct engagement with each other.

Rasmussen (2015) also took into account Twitter users' reactions to discriminatory tweets in the context of a terror alert in Norway. Although many tweets reproduced negative

prejudices against ethnic minorities, “twice as many [took] a stand against the blaming of minorities” (p. 208) and challenged the negative portrayal and generalizations of Muslims.

The Scandinavian context is also examined in the studies of Gustafsson (2012) and Pantti (2016). Gustafsson interviewed focus groups to analyze users’ attitudes toward online political participation but did not analyze publicly available tweets. His study is however relevant because he found that Swedish social media users express their political opinions by sharing facts and making comments in order to contest and fight against racism and xenophobia. Gustafsson’s findings are thus interesting since four of the reviewed studies on right-wing discourses are concerned with Islamophobic websites or discussion forums visited by Swedish users. While Gustafsson’s study is quite general and not event-specific, Pantti analyzed social media users’ reactions to a specific event: She analyzed social media users’ reactions to an anti-asylum protest in Finland where a protestor was dressed like a member of the Ku Klux Klan while waving a Finnish flag. Specifically, she examined users’ affective-discursive practices in tweets, messages posted to *Suomi24*, a Finnish social media site, and comments on news sites. She collected 1002 Finnish tweets with #kkk, #hennala (city where the protest took place), and #rasismi (‘racism’), 625 postings in 20 discussion threads on Suomi24 related to “Hennala” and “KKK”, and 553 comments that were posted in three online news comment threads. All data were collected during a one-month period after the incident. In her analysis, Pantti focused on the language of disgust, contempt, and shame toward the event, disgust being the most common response. Disgust further “worked as an expression of severe moral judgment against the violence expressed in the comments posted on Twitter” (p. 370). Similarly to Cisneros and Nakayama’s (2015) study, the authors of racist tweets were portrayed negatively as uneducated and ignorant. Furthermore, users’ disgust also addressed the physical appearance of the protestors. The users assessed the

“asylum seekers—who did not bring the suffering on themselves—[as] more deserving than the demonstrators with their beer-bellies and destructive lifestyles” (p. 374) and thus made a moral assessment of the protestors while appealing to Finland’s responsibility and duty of care for asylum seekers.

Neumayer and Valtysson (2013) investigated how Twitter is used strategically to contest power in the context of anti-fascist counter-protests in East Germany. Specifically, the authors analyzed the tactics, practices, and strategies of 6262 tweets posted before, during, and after three nationalist demonstrations (Neo-Nazi marches) and their counter-protests (October 16, 2010 in Leipzig; February 13 and 19, 2011 in Dresden). The counter-protests were formed by civil society networks and anti-fascist groups. For the first protest, neo-Nazis used #RaZ10, which is an abbreviation of the slogan of the protest, ‘Right to a Future’ (Recht auf Zukunft), and the year 2010. The counter-protestors used #L1610, which is an abbreviation for Leipzig and October 16 because the demonstration took place in the city of Leipzig on that day. The hashtags used by the counter-protestors for the subsequent demonstrations were #13februar and #19februar, denoting the dates of the protests. February 13 is also the date Dresden was bombed in 1945. Although it is a day to commemorate the victims of World War II, it has been instrumentalized by the extreme right for their propaganda.

The two different “communities” used particular hashtags which served as a filter to identify the different groups and which also had a social component used to identify with the cause, which can be described as networked publics (boyd, 2011):

The groups that form alliances on Twitter against the nationalist demonstrations are all represented by one hashtag. Despite the diversity of groups involved in the counter protests, the hashtag they recommend following on their mobilisation websites and blogs

is the same. The networked publics that are composed surrounding the events are thus connected. Their tweets on the events are filtered along a certain hashtag, which constitutes the networked publics. (Neumayer & Valtysson, 2013, p. 5)

In their analysis of the tweets, the researchers illustrated that counter-protestors used Twitter for several purposes: to share values and express solidarity, to disseminate “true” information by sharing links to videos or pictures, to monitor the other (that is, the neo-Nazis), to challenge power and domination, to criticize mainstream news media coverage, and to mock and humiliate the other. The micro-blogging platform was therefore not only used to mobilize and coordinate but also to “interact” with the neo-Nazis and the news media. Furthermore, “spamming the hashtag of the opponents” (p. 11) was employed because it served as a symbolic blockage online and to confuse the other group by providing false information about gatherings. All these strategies and practices illustrate how the counter-protestors exploited the platform-specific affordances to perform tactics of contestation. The study shows how social media “can be appropriated for subversive action to challenge power and lead to political change” (p. 4). The spamming of a hashtag was also observed by Jackson and Welles (2015). The authors analyzed how #myNYPD was hijacked to criticize police violence and racial profiling in New York. The hashtag was intended to share positive experiences with the New Yorker police but was used to “organize, generate, and promote counterpublic narratives” (p. 2).

### **Summary of Right-wing, Nationalist Discourses in Digital and Social Media**

The review of studies about right-wing, nationalist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant discourses in digital and social media illustrated that various platforms have been studied as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Summary of studies on digital and social media.*

<b>Commentaries to Online Newspapers</b>				
<b>Author</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Framework</b>
Alonso Belmonte et al. (2013)	Spanish daily newspaper, <i>El País</i>	497 commentaries	Discursive positioning of commenters toward immigration and racism	CDA
Harlow (2015)	U.S. American newspapers	747 front page stories	Readers' comments about race and ethnicity	CDA
Gomes (2014)	Singaporean newspapers, <i>The TR Emeritus &amp; The Online Citizen</i>	281 and 50 responses to two online articles	Xenophobia and hatred toward foreign talent migrants in Singapore	Discourse analysis
<b>Discussion Forums and Participatory Websites</b>				
<b>Author</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Framework</b>
Daniels (2009)	Online representations of white supremacist groups in the U.S., e.g., <i>Stormfront</i>	Ethnographic observations, discourse analysis of text, graphic design, layout, and images, and Web analytics of five predominant groups	White supremacism in the U.S.	CDA, ethnography
Caren et al. (2012)	<i>Stormfront</i>	6.9 million posts	Online social movement communities of white nationalists	Quantitative analysis and qualitative topic analysis
Baumgarten (2017)	<i>Stormfront</i>	Discussion thread about "Europe"	Linguistic-discursive construction on others	Positioning and appraisal analysis
Yamaguchi (2013)	largest anonymous message board in Japan	Offline and online ethnographic fieldwork	Racist propaganda	Ethnography
Ekman (2015)	<i>Jihad Watch, Gates of Vienna, Avpixlat</i>	10,000 blog entries related to Muslims and Islam, randomly selected 200 for each platform	Discursive strategies on Islamophobic online network	CDA



Table 1 (Continued)

<b>Discussion Forums and Participatory Websites</b>				
<b>Author</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Framework</b>
Hirvonen (2013)	Swedish anti-immigrant webpages, <i>Avpixlat</i> , <i>Nordic Front</i> , <i>National Now</i>	288 comments and 60 articles	Counter-jihadist online network; representations of unaccompanied minors	Discourse Analysis
Madisson (2016)	Blogs and discussion forums in Estonia	141 posts	Far-right in Estonia	Multimodal CDA
Törnberg & Törnberg (2016)	<i>Flashback</i>	Over 50 million posts	Discursive connections between Islamophobia and anti-feminism	CDA and topic modelling
Malmqvist (2015)	<i>Flashback</i>	3196 posts in two discussion threads in the forum “Integration and Immigration”	Satire in racist discourse toward Roma EU-migrants	CDA
Del-Teso-Craviotto (2009)	Spanish internet forum, <i>PatriaMadre.com</i>	8 messages by expats in Spain	Xeno-racist discourses	CDA
Cleland (2014)	2 English message boards	500 elicited posts	Racist attitudes and opinions of English soccer fans	CDA
<b>Social Networking Sites</b>				
<b>Author</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Framework</b>
Ben-David & Matamoros Fernández (2016)	<i>Facebook</i>	Facebook pages of 7 extreme-right political parties in Spain	Hate speech and covert discriminatory patterns	Multimodal content analysis and network analysis
Gür-Şeker (2015)	<i>Facebook</i>	280,000 comments posted between October 2014 and October 2015	Pegida	CDA
Cisneros & Nakayama (2015)	<i>Twitter</i>	Collected 100 tweets and selected 24 representative tweets	First Indian American Miss America	Critical race theory

Table 1 (Continued)

<b>Social Networking Sites</b>				
<b>Author</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Framework</b>
O'Callaghan et al. (2014)	<i>Twitter</i>	Information from extreme-right Twitter accounts from 8 Western countries	connectedness of extreme-right network	Network analysis
Bennett (2016)	<i>Twitter</i>	180 tweets from 5 British political actors	Topoi and legitimation strategies of political actors	Multimodal, discourse-historical approach to CDA
Awan (2014)	<i>Twitter</i>	500 tweets from 100 mostly British users; #Woolwich, #Muslim, #Islam	Woolwich attack (UK)	CDA
Rettberg & Gajjala (2016)	<i>Twitter</i>	Tweets with #refugees notwelcome	Portrayal of mal Syrian refugees	Multimodal analysis
Rasmussen (2015)	<i>Twitter</i>	211 tweets with #terrorthreat	Terror threat in Norway in 2014	Discursive Psychology
Rightler-McDaniels & Hendrickson (2014)	<i>Twitter</i>	Collected 19,583 tweets with #becauseofhoes and selected random sample of 151	Construction of gender and race	CDA and content analysis
Graham (2016)	<i>Twitter</i>	4800 tweets with hashtags denoting white extremism, mainstream conservatism, and mainstream progressivism	Inter-ideological mingling	Hierarchical cluster analysis and textual analysis
Pantii	<i>Twitter, Suomi24, Finnish online news sites</i>	1002 Finish tweets with #kkk, #hennala, and #rasismi; 625 postings to Suomi24; 553 online news user comments	Language of disgust in anti-racist discourses	Affective-discursive practices
Neumayer & Valtysson	<i>Twitter</i>	6262 tweets with #Raz10, #L1610, #13februar, 19februar	Tactics and strategies of anti-fascist protests	Networked publics

*Note.* The studies are in the order they were mentioned in the text.

Right-wing discourses can be found in the comment sections of online newspaper articles, on mainstream or right-wing websites or discussion forums, and on social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter. The majority of the population engaging in such discourses seem to be people who share nationalist, xenophobic ideologies, although studies have also shown how xenophobic discourses are contested (e.g., Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015; Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2009). Most studies have focused on extreme-right or far-right groups and communities. The data range from anonymous posts to tweets by identifiable political actors. Data samples vary greatly depending on the research methods used and research questions asked. Whereas Cisneros and Nakayama (2015) analyzed a purposeful sample of 24 tweets from a collection of 100 tweets, Caren et al. (2012) analyzed close to seven million posts from a ten-year period, and Rightler-McDaniels and Hendrickson (2014) analyzed a sample of 151 tweets that were posted in a 24-hour timeframe. Most studies chose to collect publicly available screen-based data and engaged in some systematic online observations, however not in contact with the users (Androutsopoulos, 2013). Twitter-specific data can be categorized as collected by event, by account, or by hashtag.

Although some studies did not focus on detailed linguistic analyses but were exploring, for example, network formations and community features (e.g., Caren et al., 2012), most studies analyzed discourse features including (de)legitimation strategies and the construction of concepts like burden, threat, and abuse. Furthermore, studies have also analyzed communicative affordances of digital media and shown how semiotic features have been used in combination with text as resources for meaning-making. Specifically, studies have analyzed hyperlinks, images, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, or recontextualizations (e.g., Bennett, 2016; Daniels, 2009; Doerr, 2017).

Most research questions have investigated the themes or topics that were emphasized by users, the strategies to express their opinions, persuade or align with others, the construction of national identity, the other, or group relations, and the connection of extreme-right movements.

Given the political dimension of the topic, many studies were informed by CDA. Another common research approach was content analysis. The major research findings indicate that

- right-wing, xenophobic, nationalist, anti-immigrant discourses are present in digital and social media,
- extreme-right groups have built stable online networks that are translocally connected and able to deliberately use technological affordances of digital communication including semiotic resources to widen their reach, and
- discursive strategies and common topics (threat, burden, othering, national identity, etc.) are employed to construct a negative presentation of others, which, in most studies, targets Muslims.

The studies reviewed above have shown that there are various ways to conduct research on digital and social media. However, the studies also have limitations. Most studies did not collect information on users' demographics; therefore, they could not make a clear statement about the authors' identity and how this might impact the data. Many online platforms allow users to post anonymously and even when users are required to create a profile, they can create fake profiles or deliberately choose to present themselves in a way that does not represent their offline identity. This is a well-known limitation of studying publicly available, naturally occurring online discourse. On the other hand, however, the data collected do represent authentic language. Another limitation is concerned with the data sample. On the one hand, studies that use large data sets in order to find general trends and generalize findings often lack linguistic detail

that would give information about discursive strategies. Consequently, co-textual detail, intertextual links, and (intentional) misspellings may be overlooked. Given that extreme statements may be censored because of platform rules, it is possible that there is a certain level of encoding to hide violations of platform rules. Boyd (2010) called this encoding of messages for specific purposes “social steganography.” On the other hand, many studies were case studies that focused on a specific context (e.g., country, group, timeframe). The studies’ applicability and transferability is therefore limited. Furthermore, although studies suggest that social media are widespread, not all platforms are equally used. When it comes to Twitter, there were only 3.83 million unique visitors in Germany in 2013, which is less than 5% of the population (Trilling, 2015), while in Norway, 18% of the population had Twitter accounts (Rasmussen, 2015). Even though the numbers are increasing steadily – in 2016, close to 15% of the population in Germany (Statista, 2017) and 21% of the population in the US used Twitter (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016) – Twitter data may not be representative of the general public opinion. Moreover, Twitter user demographics may be skewed toward certain ages, levels of education, occupations, and regions. For example, while in the German capital, Berlin, 42% of social media users are active on Twitter, only 19% of social media users are active tweeters in the rather rural state of Brandenburg. In addition, the number of Twitter users decreases with the age of the users from more than 30% among teenagers to less than 5% among the 50-69 year-old users (Statista, 2017).

Based on the reviewed literature, there are few studies that have employed multimodal CDA. Given the insights one can gain about the characteristics of digital communication and hidden ideologies, there is a need for more studies that employ multimodal CDA because such an analysis may shed light on how multiple modes and semiotic resources are employed in digital

discourse to (re)produce and challenge dominance and inequality (Jancsary, Höllerer, & Meyer, 2016).

Furthermore, a few of the studies examined the reactions and responses to nationalist, right-wing, xenophobic discourses, demonstrating that public reactions to such discourses exist. Publicly available tweets on Twitter and the platform-specific technological affordances facilitate interaction between authors of racist tweets and users who criticize and challenge these nationalist, xenophobic discourses. The platform-specific features also influence the “electronic repertoire of contestation” (Harlow & Guo, 2014; Rolfe, 2005), which are tools available to users in order to challenge domination and power as well as mobilize and organize against racism and discrimination. The strategies used to contest racism, xenophobia, and nationalism include using humor and irony, sharing facts to reveal fake news, as well as attacking and insulting the opponent. Certain features facilitate the interactions between these two communities, such as @username to address other users, retweets to share or challenge other users’ statements, or the use of hashtags to mark a conversation and “creat[e] a particular interpretive frame” (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015, p. 5). The studies reviewed above showed that the same hashtags may be used by opposing groups, which may lead to interaction between these groups.

Lastly, many studies concentrated on accounts of extreme-right groups around the world, but few studies addressed nationalist, right-wing, xenophobic discourses in Germany, even though nationalist ideologies and xenophobia have increased and have gained attention in Germany in the last years, especially in the context of the European refugee crisis.

## Perceived Gap

Nationalist, right-wing, xenophobic, anti-immigrant discourses are on the rise in Western societies. Networks, communities, groups, or political parties which employ these discourses leverage the affordances of digital communication. They are thus able to not only bond and affiliate around their opinions and ideologies but also to widen their audience and increase the number of followers by recontextualizing mainstream discourses. Klein (2012) points out that far-right ideas and ideologies may turn into “information” because they are made available, shared, and taken up by mainstream users and mainstream media. The repetition and reappropriation leads to normalization. Hate speech is also being laundered into information because of technological features of search engines that “[designate] the most relevant websites upfront in their directory pages usually based upon the ‘popularity’ and ‘freshness’ of those sites” (Klein, 2012, p. 436). Therefore, the more it is repeated, the more it continues to be repeated.

Studies have revealed that right-wing actors use common themes of economic burden, abuse, threat, and security, and discursive strategies to construct an ethno-nationalist identity and to exclude and discriminate against the “criminal” and “dangerous” other, often targeting Islam and Muslims. The (de)legitimation strategies often draw on historical connotations that reflect fascist ideology and thus the supremacy of white Europeans. According to Benbassa (2007), Islamophobia has replaced anti-Semitism as a reason to secure the future of Europe. She argues that “the expansion of the European Union, unfettered globalization, and economic neo-liberalism have resulted in the hardening of identities and the growth of nationalism. This time, the Other is the Muslim Arab, who replaces the Jew of yesteryear” (p. 89).

It is, therefore, important to continue to reveal the strategies used by such groups and actors to prevent the naturalization of such discourses through repetition, downplaying, and misinformation. It is equally important to educate social media users, as social media like Twitter are becoming an “increasingly important source for the (re)production of discursive power in society, ... [and are] a unique source for studying everyday discourses outside the scope of mass media” (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016, p. 402). Given the different possible forms of meaning-making opportunities, linguistic creativity, and “hiding” or encoding messages in a public space in a platform like Twitter, the examination of multimodality is pivotal. Furthermore, more research using a discourse-historical approach, that is, an integrated analysis of topics, discursive strategies, and linguistic means, is needed in order to investigate how historical discourses are exploited for the sake of right-wing, nationalist, anti-immigrant discourses.

Lastly, there are few studies that also take into account the reactions and responses to right-wing, nationalist discourses. Little research has focused on how these discourses are challenged and condemned by social media users. In order to draw a more comprehensive picture of the right-wing, nationalist discourses on Twitter, it is beneficial to address not only tweets that discriminate against refugees and Muslims, among others, but also tweets that challenge these negative representations as well as anti-refugee and anti-immigration stances.



## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **METHOD**

This chapter describes the research methods that were used to conduct the study. First, I will describe the research design and the theoretical and analytical framework. The outline of sampling strategy, data collection, and data management and storage will be followed by a presentation of the data analysis procedures including a sample analysis. Lastly, I will address the validity criteria and ethical considerations.

#### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

Right-wing, nationalist, xenophobic, and anti-immigrant discourses are currently on the rise in Western societies (Jiwani & Richardson, 2011; Richardson & Colombo, 2014; Richardson & Wodak, 2009; Wodak, 2015b). In the United States, those discourses are currently fueled by the Trump administration and executive orders like the so-called “Muslim ban,” and in Europe, right-wing populist groups have availed themselves of the migrant crisis to advocate the return of the sovereign nation-state, to oppose immigration, and to construct the Islamization of Europe. Moreover, nationalist forces are gaining power all over Europe. The UK voted to leave the EU in 2016 and the leader of the French populist right-wing and nationalist political party, Front National, received one third of the votes during the run-off of the French Presidential Election in 2017. In Germany, a new far-right populist political party has entered all 16 state parliaments as well as the national parliament in September 2017, and in several other European countries,

nationalist-conservative political parties are part of the national governments (e.g., Hungary, Poland, Switzerland, etc.).

Nationalist-conservative, right-wing, and xenophobic discourses are not new to Europe and research studies have examined the discursive construction of national identity (e.g., Wodak, 2015a; Wodak et al., 2009), negative representations of immigrants and refugees (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008), and right-wing discourses on nativism (Richardson & Wodak, 2009). These studies analyzed mass media or political discourse such as speeches, legislation, or political leaflets and showed how right-wing ideologies have been produced and reproduced. But given that digital and social media have become part of many people's daily lives (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016), it is necessary to investigate the role of these new media in the (re)production of such discourses.

For this reason, this research study examines national-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses in social media with the focus on the micro-blogging service, Twitter. The purpose of the study is to contribute to a better understanding of how right-wing discourses are constructed, reproduced, and challenged on Twitter, and facilitated by the affordances of digital communication. Specifically, this study explores nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses in the context of the European migrant crisis and the terror attack in Berlin, Germany, in 2016.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the features of nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses on Twitter?
  - a. What discursive strategies are used?
  - b. What semiotic and multimodal resources are employed?

2. What are features of counter-discourses to right-wing positions?
  - a. What discursive strategies are used?
  - b. What semiotic and multimodal resources are employed?
3. To what extent do the technological and communicative affordances of Twitter lead to a potential for dialogic interaction between the opposing discourse communities?

For the first research question, I focus on social representations of the perceived “other,” that is, perceived out-group members, and the topics and themes employed in such discourses. I also analyze how users take advantage of the communicative affordances of Twitter to create meaning. This includes semiotic resources, multimodality, and intertextuality. For the second research questions, I explore how Twitter users react and respond to nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses on Twitter. For the third question, I investigate if and how the technological and communicative affordances of Twitter lead to dialogic interaction between those who express right-wing, nationalist-conservative ideologies and those who challenge these discourses.

### **Research Design and Theoretical/Analytical Framework**

In order to investigate nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses on Twitter in the context of the European migrant crisis and the terror attack in Berlin, Germany, in 2016, I conducted a study that is guided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis. CDA scholars “conceive discourse as the result of jointly constructed meanings of the world. They assume that understanding, significance and meaning are developed not separately within the individual, but in coordination with other human beings” (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 16). In this study, I explore the “role of discourse in the (re)production and

challenge of dominance” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 249). Specifically, I explore how social representations of the “other” are constructed and presented, and I analyze discursive strategies that “underpin the justification/legitimization of inclusion/exclusion and the constructions of identities” (Wodak, 2015a, p. 370). I adopt CDA as a framework in this study because it allows me to analyze how “discourse (re)produces social *domination*, that is, the *power abuse* of one group over others ...” (van Dijk, 2009, p. 63), and to reveal how such discourses and the hidden values, positions, assumptions, and ideologies are used to build a community and (national) identity, legitimize inclusion and exclusion, and contribute to the discrimination against others and the (re)production of inequality.

Wodak (2015a) points out that many debates about immigration and nationhood are linked to a place and ideologies such as “our” place “here” within the European Union or a European/Christian/homogeneous/superior nation-state where “foreigners” do not belong. Foreigners are often merged “into one homogeneous group, which is subsequently stigmatized as the negative ‘other’” (Wodak, 2008, p. 56). The expressions “our” and “here” are deictic, that is, they point to the context and center of the speaker, and thus reflect ethnocentricity. This rhetoric of exclusion is a discursive construction of in-group and out-group through strategies of positive self- and negative-other presentation. Both positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation are linked to justification and legitimation discourses to depict culture as an essentially bounded entity whose integrity is threatened by those who do not belong because they have different norms and values.

Wodak (2015a) and Reisigl and Wodak (2009) name five discursive strategies which represent the positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation: referential/nomination,

predication, argumentation, perspectivization, intensification/mitigation. Further explanations can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

*Discursive strategies (adapted from Reisigl & Wodak, 2009).*

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Referential/nomination	How are people named and referred to?
Predication	How are these people described and what qualities or characteristics are attributed to them?
Argumentation	What explicit/implicit arguments are used to support these characterizations and to justify exploiting and discriminating against others?
Perspectivization, framing or discourse representation	From whose perspective are such names, descriptions, and arguments expressed?
Intensification/mitigation	Are these utterances stated explicitly or implicitly and are they intensified or mitigated?

Similarly, van Dijk (2011a) provides discourse strategies with which group relations (in-groups and out-groups) are depicted in text and talk. These strategies are represented by the concept of the “ideological square” and linked to positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, that is, to emphasize “our” good qualities and characteristics, de-emphasize “our” bad qualities and characteristics, emphasize “their” bad qualities and characteristics, and de-emphasize “their” good qualities and characteristics. These evaluations can be achieved by formal and semantic structures (See Table 3).

Table 3

*Formal and semantic structures (adapted from van Dijk, 2011a).*

<b>Formal structures</b>	<b>Semantic structures</b>
Superstructures	Negative topics
Visual, sound, and syntactic structures	Level of description and completeness
Definite expressions	Implications and Presuppositions
Pronouns	Denomination and Predication
Demonstratives	Modality and Agency
Rhetorical moves	Focus

For this study, the discourse-historical approach (DHA) of CDA is applied because “it integrates and triangulates knowledge about historical, intertextual sources and the background of the social and political fields within which discursive events are embedded” (Wodak, 2012, p. 529). The DHA has three levels of analysis: topics, discursive strategies, and linguistic means. Furthermore, it takes into account intertextuality, the linkage of past and present texts, and recontextualization, that is, the restating of arguments in new contexts (Wodak, 2012).

Since this study is about digital discourse and also interested in multimodality and semiotic resources and how they are used for meaning-making, this study is also guided by Multimodal Discourse Analysis in order to account for Twitter-specific affordances of digital communication. As KhosraviNik and Unger (2016) point out, social media are “inherently and substantially multimodal” (p. 211). Therefore, this research study also takes into account multimodality and the usage of semiotic features as afforded by Twitter.

In spoken language, modes may include intonation, voice quality, rhythm, or stress. Since Twitter works, *inter alia*, with written text, the aforementioned paralinguistic features may be represented typographically, via letter repetition, capitalization, or emoticons/emojis. However, these non-verbal signals are context-dependent and provide contextualization cues to interactional partners who can “make situated inferences about the most likely interpretation of an utterance” (Darics, 2013, p. 143). Consequently, the same sign may be interpreted differently in different contexts based on the contextualization cues provided by the author.

According to multimodal discourse analysts (e.g., Jewitt, 2014a; Kress, 2012; van Leeuwen, 2015), language is just one of many resources for meaning-making. The modes and the combination or ensemble of modes are constructed, shaped, and influenced by cultural, historical, social, and situational contexts and conventions as well as technological affordances. The organization of the ensemble is meaningful and a multimodal discourse analysis “provides tools for analysing and describing the full repertoire of meaning-making resources which people use to communicate ... and how these are ‘organized’ to make meaning” (Jewitt, 2014a, p. 15). Applying multimodal discourse analysis may thus “provide insight into the relation of the meanings of a community and its semiotic manifestations” (Kress, 2012, p. 37).

A limitation of multimodal discourse analysis may be that there is not enough focus on language itself and that the analysis is not put into the larger social context (Paltridge, 2012). For this reason, I draw on multimodal critical discourse studies (Machin, 2013) in order to “show how choices of visual semiotic resources can be used to communicate ideologies and discourses” (Jewitt, 2014b, p. 32). The purpose of critical multimodal discourse analysis is “to reconstruct the ways in which the combination ... of modes suggests particular versions of social reality that are not neutral with regard to power: they serve some interests while marginalizing others”

(Jancsary et al., 2016, p. 185). Consequently, multimodal discourse can also contribute to naturalization processes, for example, because a message that is supported visually may evoke stronger emotions that feed into existing social representations of groups, or because a picture is worth a thousand words as illustrated in the following example offered by Machin (2013):

if we see a news item about a particular issue in a Muslim community and we find an image of a woman in a full Burhka to represent ‘Muslimness’, it would not be possible to write ‘all Muslims look like this’, or ‘this is representative of all Muslims’. Yet, the image does tend to suggest this and certainly places the story into a particular news frame of traditional values, difference and threat. As many theorists on the visual have observed, images do not have such specific denotative meaning as language and therefore it is a less easy matter to pin down precisely what meanings they convey; images do not specify relations in the same precise way as there are no verbs to indicate ‘this *is* the women in the story.’ (p. 350)

It is thus easy to deny visually communicated xenophobia; the invoked message can be dismissed since it is not explicitly present and it is open other possible interpretations (versus a lexical referent, which normally has fewer meaning potentials). For this reason, a critical investigation of multimodal discourse is necessary (van Leeuwen, 2004, 2015).

### **Sampling Strategy**

The sampling strategies used in studies that investigate the discourse on Twitter differ depending on their research design and research questions. In order to examine my research questions, I collected tweets that include specific hashtags; were tweeted within a specific timeframe; and are publicly available.



The sampling strategy of this study is guided by Page, Barton, Unger, and Zappavigna (2014) and Androutsopoulos (2013) who provide recommendations for how to collect and select data for qualitative research in social media or digital media respectively. Following the suggestions of Page et al. (2014), I limited the data collection to one platform, that is, Twitter. Guided by Androutsopoulos (2013), I sampled by theme, that is, I collected data from “thematically organized streams of online discourse (e.g., hash-tagged tweets)” (p. 496) because it allowed me to explore the linguistic and semiotic features of the tweets (Page et al., 2014). Micro-blogging on Twitter is a semiotic activity, and hashtags are used so that tweets can be found by others in order to establish a community that shares similar values. Zappavigna (2012) points out, “discourse tagging is the beginning of *searchable talk*, a change in social relations whereby we mark our discourse so that it can be found by others, in effect so that we can bond around particular values” (p. 1). Hence, hashtags, which can be topic-based or evaluative, are ideological resources and used to indicate identity, beliefs, and group membership. This characteristic feature of Twitter enables people who may not be connected otherwise to align around shared values; labeling the topic of a tweet may thus be considered a process of “ambient affiliation” (Zappavigna, 2011, 2012). Ambient affiliation refers to the process of “bonding around evolving topics of interest” (Zappavigna, 2011, p. 800). The hashtag functions as the connection between users who “may not have interacted directly and likely do not know each other, and may not interact again” (p. 801). Since I am interested in the discursive strategies and semiotic features of nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses on Twitter, I consider it appropriate to sample by hashtags.

Furthermore, I confined the data collection to a limited time period (Page et al., 2014), which is useful because it reconstructs a shared context for the tweets (Bennett, 2016), and to a

limited number of tweets. As regards the time period, I focus on two different, yet connected events. The first event is represented by a press conference of German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, on August 31, 2015. During that press conference she made the statement “We have managed so many things – we can do it” (German: Wir haben so vieles geschafft – wir schaffen das) in order to justify her policy of open borders and allowing refugees in Germany who had not followed Dublin procedures. This statement was a reaction to the increasing numbers of refugees arriving in Europe and the consequential humanitarian crisis that unfolded at the borders of the European Union. The statement is linguistically ambiguous because the referent of “it” in “we can do it” is unclear (Delcker, 2016). Furthermore, the German verb “schaffen” is polysemous and thus lends itself to word play. It can be glossed as “to manage,” “to handle,” “to create,” and, in Southern German varieties, “to work.” The second event is represented by the terror attack that occurred in Berlin in December 2016 and was committed by a person who entered Germany as a refugee in the summer of 2015.

As regards the hashtags, I selected two hashtags for each of the two events. All hashtags were trending in the aftermath of the events and thus represent the dominant discourses on Twitter related to the context of the chosen events. For the first event, I chose #wirschaffendas (‘we can do it’) and #openborders. Both phrases are associated with Chancellor Merkel’s refugee policies and thus allow me to analyze Twitter users’ reactions to the significantly increasing number of arrivals and the pro-refugee policy of the German Chancellor, which was heavily contested by right-wing groups.

For the second event, I chose #MerkelsTote (‘Merkel’s dead’) and #BerlinAttack. I chose #MerkelsTote for the second time period based on a tweet by a German politician of the far-right political party, Alternative for Germany (German: Alternative für Deutschland) shortly after the

attack, even before there was a suspect, “When will the German state strike back? “When does this damn hypocrisy end? They are Merkel’s dead! #Nizza #Berlin” (German: *Wann schlägt der deutsche Rechtsstaat zurück? Wann hört diese verfluchte Heuchelei endlich auf? Es sind Merkels Tote! #Nizza #Berlin*). With this tweet, he supported the debate about the correlation between open-border, pro-refugee policies and the increased Islamic terrorist activity in Europe.

The first tweet that took up the politician’s phrase, “Merkels Tote,” in a hashtag appeared four hours later, and within 24 hours, users had posted 43 tweets that included #MerkelsTote and expressed harsh criticism of Chancellor Merkel’s immigration policies. The other hashtag, #BerlinAttack, is relevant because it was trending after the terror attack and thus seen and used by many Twitter users.

I limited the data collection to up to 250 tweets per hashtag and the first four weeks following the event described above, that is, the press conference and the terror attack. The numbers of tweets collected for each event as well as the time frames differ because some hashtags are used more than others. For the first event, I collected 246 tweets with #wirschaffendas between August 31 and September 29, 2015. Twenty-nine of these tweets were not relevant for this study because they were written in a language other than German, English, French, and Spanish – the languages I am able to understand the meaning of the tweet – or dealt with a topic not related to the European migrant crisis, such as personal video game competitions or German soccer games. These tweets were discarded resulting in a sample of 217 tweets. The majority of the sample was written in German.

The second hashtag associated with the timeframe of August – September 2015 resulted in more tweets, as the context was not bound to the migrant crisis and Germany’s position. Tweets with #openborders not only referred to the European migrant crisis but also covered U.S.

American, Israeli, and Australian border politics; however, only tweets that were relevant for the European context were included in the data sample, resulting in 217 tweets between August 31 and September 18, 2015. The majority of the sample was written in English.

For the second timeframe, I collected 172 tweets with #MerkelsTote tweeted between December 19, 2016 and January 16, 2017. Twenty of these tweets were discarded and not included in the analysis because they were written in a language other than German, English, French, and Spanish, or the user account had been suspended, or finally the context was not related to the European migrant crisis. The majority of the 152-tweet sample was written in German. Additionally, I selected the first 152 tweets with #BerlinAttack tweeted on December 20, 2016. I only included tweets that were relevant for the purpose and context of this study. The majority of the sample was written in German or English. Table 4 shows a summary of the data collection.

Table 4

*Data collection – sample.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Hashtags</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Total</b>
August 31, 2015	Press conference	#wirschaffendas	217	434
		#openborders	217	
December 19, 2016	Terror attack	#MerkelsTote	152	304
		#BerlinAttack	152	
				738

Lastly, I used a screen-based approach, which means I collected “data [that] are produced by participants and collected online by the researcher” (Androutsopoulos, 2013, p. 500).

Consequently, I did not interact with the authors of the tweets. However, I collected and analyzed metadata of the tweets, which include user ID, profile photo, user location if applicable,

location from where the tweet was sent if enabled, time the tweet was sent, and users' total number of tweets. The metadata of a tweet are helpful for the analysis for various reasons: User IDs and profile pictures may provide interesting and useful information about the intentions of the tweeter and thus help me understand and analyze the tweets. The analysis of user IDs in previous studies (e.g., Daniels, 2009; Mc Laughlin, 2014; Vásquez, 2014) illustrated that pseudonyms may portray or point to a specific, contextually relevant identity (Vásquez, 2014) and even have intertextual and interdiscursive references (Daniels, 2009) to enact an identity. Twitter users are required to have a username, however, this user name may or may not reflect the users' offline identity, which enables users to deliberately choose an identity and how they want to be perceived by the Twitter community. The profile photo is optional. The location of the user as well as the time the tweet was sent are significant because they may help identify the context to which the author is referring. This is especially helpful when English is used as a lingua franca.

### **Data Management and Storage**

For this study, I collected publicly available data from Twitter. The nature of such data is dynamic and fast-changing (Page et al., 2014). Tweets can be deleted and new tweets are constantly added. Twitter offers an advanced search, where users can search for words, phrases, hashtags, content written in various languages, accounts, places, and time frames. This advanced search allowed me to collect data for the hashtags and time periods described above. The default search setting is set to hide sensitive content, but I unchecked this setting to obtain tweets that may be automatically filtered by Twitter.

To collect the data, I used the Google Chrome extension software, *Data Miner*, to scrape the tweets into an Excel spreadsheet. I then imported the spreadsheet into the qualitative data analysis software, *MaxQDA*. After I chose the sample described above, I took screenshots of each tweet in order to compare the screenshots with the imported data for accuracy, assigned each tweet a number, and labeled the tweet based on hashtag and number, for example *wirschaffendas 1*. In the screenshot I included the additional comments of the unfolding conversation, if applicable. The files were organized by hashtag and stored in a cloud-based storage location.

It was necessary to use a web scraper tool such as Data Miner to download the data because data analysis tools can only retrieve data from the past seven days due to Twitter's application programming interface (API), however I collected data older than seven days. I then used the qualitative data analysis software to assist with the analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

The first research question is “What are the features of nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses on Twitter?” and includes two parts, “What discursive strategies are used?” and “What semiotic and multimodal resources are employed?” In order to answer the question, I followed the steps of the discourse-historical approach to CDA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016) since they can also be applied to research in social media (Page et al., 2014). When applying CDA in social media, one seeks to examine “who is communicating with whom, under what conditions, how and to what end ... to account for both the ‘macro’ issues of institutional context and media ecologies, and the ‘micro’ dynamics of communicative affordances” (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 231).

I began by reading each tweet and taking notes on information about the immediate, text-internal linguistic context of the tweets. This step also included investigating the user-established intertextuality by accessing hyperlinks and taking notes on the type of source and information to which the user is referring. I then searched for relationships between tweets (e.g., tweets from the same user or referring to the same event), and gathered more information about the broader socio-political context of tweets (e.g., which specific event a user is referencing). After these steps that helped me familiarize myself with the data, I coded the data based on the strategies displayed in Table 5. As my data analysis is guided by the discourse-historical approach to CDA, I used the five discursive strategies proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2009) and van Dijk's (2011a) formal and semantic structures. During this step, I also coded emerging topics and themes that are employed in reference to the constructed "other." Lastly, I connected the particular linguistic choices to the social meanings in order to interpret the relationships between the discourse on Twitter and society (Page et al., 2014).

Table 5

*Summary of discursive strategies and formal and semantic structures.*

<b>Reisigl and Wodak (2009)</b>	<b>Van Dijk (2011a)</b>
Referential/nomination	Definite expressions, Demonstratives/Pronouns
Predication	Negative topics, Implications, Predication
Argumentation	Superstructures, Presuppositions
Perspectivization	Syntactic structures, Demonstratives/Pronouns, Agency
Intensification/Mitigation	Visual & sound structures, Rhetorical moves, Modality, Level of description and completeness

In order to address semiotic and multimodal resources, I followed the five steps suggested by Jancsary et al. (2016) when conducting critical multimodal discourse analysis. I

first characterized the genre-specific rules, characteristics, and affordances. Then, I coded the tweets that make use of multiple modes and semiotic resources such as emojis, repetition, letter capitalization, and other visual and typographical representations that carry meaning. I then reconstructed latent elements and analyzed the characterization of the social context and reality including the presences and absences found in the text or images. The examination of the roles and functions of verbal and visual components helped analyze the messages that are created through the composition of modes. Lastly, I showed how the analysis of multimodality and semiotic resources can inform our understanding of the broader socio-cultural context in which they are embedded and how power and domination are reinforced through the composition of the modes and use of semiotic resources.

The second research question is “What are features of counter-discourses to right-wing positions?” and also includes two parts, “What discursive strategies are used?” and “What semiotic and multimodal resources are employed?” In order to examine the question, I analyzed the strategies employed in tweets that express pro-refugee positions or react and respond with opposition to tweets that contain right-wing, nationalist-conservative positions. I began by identifying these tweets and gathering information about references to other tweets and about the broader socio-political context. In the analysis, I focused on strategies, practices, and resources employed to reinforce the support of migrants and refugees as well as to challenge and condemn xenophobic and discriminatory ideologies. The following illustrates a tweet that is opposing the right-wing, nationalist-conservative discourse: “I condemn #MerkelsTote of AfD-man @MarcusPretzell. But doesn’t help the victims either. Unfortunately. #Breitscheidplatz #Berlin” (German: *Für #MerkelsTote von AfD-Mann @MarcusPretzell habe ich nur Verachtung Hilft aber den Opfern auch nicht. Leider. #Breitscheidplatz #Berlin*).



The third research question is “To what extent do the technological and communicative affordances of Twitter lead to a potential for dialogic interaction between the opposing discourse communities?” In order to examine the question, I explored if and how the use of the same hashtag(s) and references to the same contexts lead to dialogic interactions between users who feed right-wing, nationalist-conservative discourses and users who challenge and condemn such discourses. I focused only on direct interaction via replies. As mentioned above, the data was retrieved via Data Miner, which generated an Excel spreadsheet. In the spreadsheet, only the tweets themselves were included. Replies to these tweets and tweets to which these tweets replied could not be included. Furthermore, the spreadsheet does not accurately show if a user is replying to another user’s tweet or if another user is only addressed. Therefore, the interaction via @username can be two-fold. If a tweet starts with @username, the user may have used the “reply” button or the user chose to start the tweet by addressing another user without directly replying to a tweet. If @username appears in the middle of the tweet, the user most likely included the other user in order to address them personally, but the tweet may not be a direct response to another tweet and there may not be a direct interaction between the two users. This may be the case when politicians, political parties, or media outlets are addressed. Due to the sampling strategy, not all interactions can be reconstructed. For this reason, only responses to tweets from the dataset are taken into consideration for the third research question.

### **Sample Analysis**

The following two sample analyses illustrate the application of the proposed data analysis procedures.

Example 1:  
Hungary I ♥ you #refugeesnotwelcome

The first example (Example 1) shows the emoji of a heart positioned between the first-person pronoun and the second-person pronoun, which is a conventionalized form of saying “I love you” since the heart emoji is a symbol of love, indicating that the author of this tweet loves “you,” which is used as an anaphor and points to Hungary (the precedent of the anaphor). This example can be interpreted as the author’s approval of anti-refugee policies and practices, referring to the Hungarian police’s use of tear gas, the government’s erection of wired fences, and the mayor of Ásotthalom (a small town in Hungary) closing the Serbian border, and creating a threatening anti-refugee video to deter refugees in the summer of 2015. Such an interpretation is only made possible because of the explicit message of the included hashtag, *refugeesnotwelcome*. Hungary’s actions are also supported by several other users who call Hungary brilliant or claim that Hungary does the right thing. In another example, a user writes “Love #Ásotthalom, Love #Hungary, Love #Europe This is our land, this is our home.” This user also refers to Ásotthalom and Hungary to point to the anti-refugee attitude portrayed in the anti-refugee video and indicates his/her approval with anti-refugee practices. Similarly to the first example, the user makes reference to notions of home and belonging, separating the others (refugees) from whoever belongs to the in-group in the perspective of the user.

The second example (Example 2) illustrates how Twitter users employ strategies to negatively depict migrants and refugees and demonstrates the importance of considering intertextual relations in processes of meaning-making in digital media.

Example 2:

Diese armen “Flüchtlinge”. Und diese ganzen Frauen und Kinder.... #IronieAus  
#RefugeesNotWelcome #Invasion

This author also retweets a previous tweet about unrest that arose between refugees and the police in mid-September 2015 in Rösztke, a Hungarian village close to the Serbian border. The

original tweet also included images of rioting men, thus establishing a connection between the migrants referred to in the text, and the men depicted in the images. The author not only retweets this particular account of violent (im)migrants, but also adds the comment: *These poor “refugees”*. *And all these women and children.... #IronyOff #RefugeesNotWelcome #Invasion*. By putting the term *refugees* in quotation marks and adding the adjective *poor*, the author constructs an ironic tone, both questioning the legitimacy of the term “refugee” and the notion of refugees requiring assistance. He further adds *all these women and children*, a group that is often considered as in need of special protection, further questioning the need to protect refugees. Indeed, many refugees arriving in Europe were young males and this argument was often used in anti-refugee discourse. Seeing only rioting men in the images (as also discussed by Gür-Şeker, 2015) further implies that *these refugees* are not in need, but rather causing trouble. By including *#IronyOff*, the author confirms he was being ironic, and after “switching off” the irony, the following hashtags, *#RefugeesNotWelcome* and *#Invasion*, reveal the author’s true perspective. Although he does not refer to refugees as “illegals” or “criminals” as many other Twitter users do, he delegitimizes the term “refugee” and questions the need to help refugees. Instead he views the migration movement as an invasion, and as a threat to his identity and territory.

### **Validity Criteria**

Page et al. (2014) state that research that is “critical” in its approach “is not ‘neutral’ or ‘objective,’ nor does it claim to be: rather, it is motivated by a desire for positive social change” (p. 98). I further acknowledge that the analysis relies on the researcher’s perspective and interpretation. My own academic and personal background has shaped my perspectives and thus also my interpretation of data. I am a German national but my family has a migration

background. Discussions about belonging and national identity have thus been part of my own experiences. Furthermore, I believe that language contributes to the construction of social reality and thus also the construction of belonging and identity. While I do not attempt to claim objectivity and generalizability, there are different ways to evaluate qualitative data.

I have previously conducted research on anti-refugee discourse and analyzed discursive strategies used in tweets that included that hashtag #refugeesnotwelcome (Kreis, 2017a). This prior experience contributes to my evolving expertise on this topic and my credibility as a researcher. Furthermore, although I have not participated actively on Twitter, I explored trending topics and accounts of right-wing actors for two years to get an idea for the kind of discourse that was present during the European migrant crisis in general and events like the Berlin terror attack in particular. This exploration also includes the consultation of mass and online media from and about Germany in relation to the migrant crisis. As a German national, I consider myself an insider to the context, because I am familiar with the historical, socio-cultural, and political contexts and developments. In addition, my knowledge as a political scientist provides additional information and expertise that will support my understanding and interpretation of context and data.

Although I focus on a particular context that is defined by its own history and development, the transparent description of research design, sampling strategy, and data analysis procedures provides the possibility for other researchers to transfer the insights gained through this project to other contexts and potentially replicate the study within a different context. The fact that the tweets are publicly available adds to the transparency of this study since everyone with or without a Twitter account can search for the tweets.

Wodak and Meyer (2016) state that

data collection is not considered to be a specific phase that must be completed before the analysis can be conducted: after the first data collection one should perform first pilot analyses, find indicators for particular concepts, expand concepts into categories and, on the basis of these first results, collect further data (*theoretical sampling*). In this procedure, data collection is never completely concluded nor excluded, and new questions may always arise that require new data or re-examination of earlier data (p. 21).

I followed their recommendation and treated the data collection process as dynamic, iterative, and evolving. This also means that I revisited the data and carried out additional rounds of coding until I reached data saturation. Although my position as an insider provides me with a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical meanings of the data, it is beneficial to obtain other possible perspectives through peer debriefing and discuss one's interpretation of the data. For this reason, I discussed data collection and data analysis procedures with peers who are knowledgeable in discourse analysis and familiar with the context (Grbich, 2012).

### **Ethical Considerations**

As pointed out by Bolander and Locher (2014), Squires (2015), and others, internet researchers need to be aware of and take into account ethical considerations. One aspect is related to differing notions of privacy online as opposed to offline. The conceptualization of "private" and "public" has shifted to embrace both access and content. Moreover, it is conceptualized "as gradable and not absolute" (Bolander & Locher, 2014, p. 17). The default setting of Twitter is public; unless a user changes this setting, his or her tweets are available for other Twitter users as well as visitors to the Twitter website. Both private and public content may

thus be accessed publicly, and users may not always be aware of the implications of sharing private content on social networking sites (Tagg, 2015). Furthermore, Tagg (2015) points out that

a user's audience can often be fairly large and diverse and what is intended for a particular individual or group can in fact be heard by everyone and interpreted in various ways in the context of different news feeds. This is what dana boyd and colleagues describe as 'context collapse' or 'social convergence' (p. 70).

The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) provides guidelines for conducting research in computer-mediated settings. These include considerations about vulnerability of community, author, or participant, minimization of harm, being aware that there is a human subject behind the screen, the distinction between author and research participant, and ethical issues about the research process and decision-making processes (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). With these guidelines in mind, I collected the metadata of the tweets (e.g., user ID, profile photo, user's location if applicable, time the tweet was sent) in order to interpret the contributions accurately, but my analysis focuses on the linguistic and semiotic content of the tweet and on the ideological position expressed in the tweet without trying to make generalizations and assumptions about the users' identity and beliefs. Moreover, I only collected publicly available data. For these reasons, I consider these issues minimal and believe that this research neither benefits nor harms individual Twitter users.

In following three chapters, I examine right-wing discourses and counter-discourses on Twitter during two different time frames during the European migrant crisis. The research questions are addressed sequentially in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

**CHAPTER FOUR:**  
**FINDINGS FOR RIGHT-WING DISCOURSES**

In this chapter I examine the first research question, “What are features of counter-discourses to right-wing positions?” The chapter is divided into four sections corresponding to the four hashtags that were used to collect the data. In order to analyze the data, I followed the steps of the discourse-historical approach to CDA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016) and critical multimodal discourse analysis (Jancsary et al., 2016). I read each tweet and took notes on the information about the immediate, text-internal linguistic context, the use of semiotic and multimodal resources, as well as the user-established intertextuality for example in the form of hyperlinks. Then I coded the tweets based on the discursive strategies and formal and semantic structures displayed in Table 5, the emerging topics that were employed in reference to the constructed “other,” and the use of multiple modes and semiotic resources. Additional codes emerged in the datasets of all hashtags. These will be described below in more detail. Table 6 shows the distribution of discursive strategies across hashtags.

Table 6

*Frequency of discursive strategies in right-wing discourses.*

Strategy	#wirschaffendas (n = 217)	#openborders (n = 217)	#MerkelsTote (n = 152)	#BerlinAttack (n = 152)
Referential/nomination	22 (10%)	1 (<1%)	25 (16%)	17 (11%)
Predication	29 (13%)	9 (4%)	26 (17%)	26 (17%)
Argumentation	92 (42%)	10 (5%)	91 (60%)	76 (50%)
Perspectivization	54 (25%)	7 (3%)	59 (39%)	43 (28%)

## #wirschaffendas

The #wirschaffendas dataset contains a variety of discursive strategies and topics associated with right-wing discourses which are described in the following sections.

### Referential/nomination

It is common for right-wing discourses to construct a negative image of the other. Previous research has shown that immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are often depicted negatively (e.g., Wodak, 2015b). This negative image can be constructed by naming and referring to people negatively.

As regards tweets with #wirschaffendas, the findings show that there are few negative references to migrants. In fact, only one tweet contains offensive words to describe migrants:

Example 1 (wirschaffendas 136)<sup>1</sup>:

“#Wirschaffendas” – “#AllahuAkbar” – die muslimische “#Kulturbereicherung” von #Paris <https://youtu.be/ULCrmGKft2U> **#Dreckspack #Abschaum**

“Wecandoit” – “#AllahuAkbar” – the Muslim “#culturalenrichment” of #Paris [Link to video] **#filthyvermin #scum**

Even though migrants are not directly addressed with these offensive words, the two hashtags, #Dreckspack and #Abschaum, function as anaphors because they refer back to “the Muslim ‘#culturalenrichment’ of #Paris.” The term *cultural enrichment* is in quotation marks to indicate that the user questions the veracity of the term. The user thus employs the rhetorical trope of a synecdoche to establish juxtaposition between the so-called cultural enrichment through Muslim immigrants in Paris and the reference to filthy vermin and scum.

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<sup>1</sup> The data examples are numbered consecutively based on the order of appearance in this text and include the original categorization in parentheses. In each example, the original tweet is followed by an English translation if the original is not in English. Bold is used for focal elements. Each tweet is assigned a code as explained in Chapter Three on page 68, for example *wirschaffendas 1*.



Apart from the previous example, users mostly employ the German or English words for refugees (German: *Flüchtlinge*) or asylum seekers (German: *Asylbewerber*). Only one tweet (Example 2) contains a word with an inherently negative meaning.

Example 2 (wirschaffendas 124):

#LIVE #Salzburg: #**Asylpresser** bringen #Infrastrukture zum kollabieren  
<http://www.salzburg.com/nachrichten/dossier/fluechtlinge/sn/artikel/live-mehr-als-2000-fluechtlinge-am-salzbürger-bahnhof-lage-prekaer-165966>] #wirschaffends  
#LandderVollidioten

#LIVE #Salzburg: #**Asylumpushers** make the #infrastructure collapse [Link to article]  
#wecandoit #landofcompleteidiots

The word *Asylpresser* denotes someone who presses for asylum. The use of this word suggests that asylum seekers are actively, and potentially forcefully, trying to receive asylum even before a thorough investigation of the individual case. Furthermore, the word is used in a tweet that places the asylum seekers as syntactic agents and thus responsible for the action, that is, the collapsing of the infrastructure in Salzburg, Austria. The tweet is further supported by a link that leads to an article describing the precarious situation at the Salzburg train station due to the large amount of refugees. The hashtag *LIVE* adds urgency to the situation and the hashtag *LandderVollidioten* (English: *land of complete idiots*) adds another negatively evaluative stance to the meaning of the tweet supporting the word choice *Asylpresser*.

Since most tweets with #wirschaffendas are written in German, the German word *Flüchtlinge* as opposed to English *refugees* occurs more often in the dataset, however, *refugees* is often used in combination with *welcome* in both English and German tweets, particularly as a hashtag. In tweets supporting right-wing discourses, #*refugeeswelcome* does not express approval of welcoming refugees, but it is used to criticize pro-refugee policies. The phrase *wirschaffen das* became the symbol of Germany's refugee policy and many critics used this phrase to challenge the position of welcoming refugees (Heißler, 2016). The following tweet illustrates

how *refugeeswelcome* is used syntactically in co-occurrence with *wirschaffendas* to criticize pro-refugee positions and policies:

Example 3 (wirschaffendas 247):

“#refugeeswelcome! #refugeeswelcome! ” – **hat dieser Wahnsinn etwa Methode??**  
#wirschaffendas sagt heute Frau #Merkel

“#refugeeswelcome! #refugeeswelcome! ” – **Is there any method to this madness??**  
#wecandoit says Mrs #Merkel today

The author quotes exclamations of *#refugeeswelcome* and refers to them as madness. The author further asks if this madness is deliberate and quotes the phrase *wir schaffen das* in the form of a hashtag. The structure of the tweet as well as the word choice *madness* enforced by the two question marks shows that the phrase *refugees welcome* is not used as a sign of approval but rather as a form of criticism of pro-refugee policies and practices.

Another example of this kind of use of *refugees welcome* and *wir schaffen das* is found in the following tweet:

Example 4 (wirschaffendas 64):

@\_Traeumerle Das ist die Zeit, wo man **die Suppe von #refugeeswelcome und #WirSchaffenDas auslöffeln** kann.

@\_Traeumerle This is the moment to **face the music of #refugeeswelcome and #WeCanDoIt.**

The tweet is a response to @\_Traeumerle who asks an ironic question about *Semesterferien* (term used at German universities to describe the winter and summer break between semesters, which students usually use to write term papers, do internships, work, or travel). The response is not related to the content of the question but uses the question to share skeptical views regarding pro-refugee positions and policies associated with *refugees welcome* and *wir schaffen das*. The German idiom *Suppe auslöffeln* is generally used when one makes a mistake and has to deal with the unpleasant consequences and negative repercussions.

In addition to instances where negative words are used to describe refugees, there are also examples of negative references to Chancellor Merkel, other politicians, or those who support refugees and pro-refugee policies. Merkel is ironically referred to as mommy (German: *Mutti*) and her political supporters are called puppets (German: *Vasallen*) as in the following example.

Example 5 (wirschaffendas 167):

#Merkel und ihre **Vasallen** des Amtes entheben! #wirschaffendas bestimmt!

Remove #Merkel and her **puppets** from office! #wecandoit for sure!

Some users also make use of pronouns to distinguish between those who belong to the community and the others who are not only represented by refugees and asylum seekers but also by politicians. The following two tweets show how users use the juxtaposition of pronouns to demonstrate the divide between the (German) people and the politicians.

Example 6 (wirschaffendas 100):

#wirschaffendas Wer ist wir? Ja, **wir** schaffen und **ihr** vergeudet die #Steuern !!

#wecandoit Who is we? Yes, **we** work and **you all** waste the #taxes !!

Example 7 (wirschaffendas 71):

Ich höre immer #wirschaffendas Die meinen wohl **uns** damit weil **von denen** schafft es keiner! #hartaberfair

I always hear #wecandoit They probably mean **us** because **of them** none will manage!  
#hartaberfair

In both examples, the phrase *wir schaffen das* is used as both a hashtag and as a syntactical element to juxtapose that *we*, the ordinary people, work while the politicians waste taxpayers' money or do not do their job properly. Users seem to exploit the ambiguity and polysemy of *we can do it*, as the referents of *we*, *do*, and *it* generate a range of new meanings in each new tweet.

## Predication

In addition to calling names and using value-laden references to refer to people, othering also occurs by describing the qualities and characteristics that are attributed to the constructed other. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are often described as dangerous, violent, and criminal in order to justify any harsh methods against them. These methods can be in the form of government policies, practices of the authorities, actions like protests, or even acts of violence committed by vigilantes who claim to protect themselves and other citizens. There are several references to violence, danger, and crime on the part of the refugees as illustrated in the following tweets.

Example 8 (wirschaffendas 20):

**#Gewalt in Unterkünften** – #Polizei will #Flüchtlinge nach #Religion trennen  
#Wirschaffendas <http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article146926095/Polizei-will-Fluechtlinge-nach-Religion-trennen.html>

**#violence in refugee housing** – #police want to separate #refugees based on #religion  
#Wecandoit [Link to article]

The author of the tweet uses the headline of an article by the German mainstream newspaper article, *Die Welt*, to suggest that belonging to different religions or denominations may lead to violence in refugee housing, and hence police intervention may be required. Religion is thus implicitly used as a form of othering and portrayed as a problem, which could, potentially, also be a risk factor outside of refugee homes. The claim is supported by a link to the article.

While the previous tweet does not contain an explicit evaluative stance in the form of approval or criticism, the following two tweets do.

Example 9 (wirschaffendas 84):

**Schlägerei in Flüchtlingsheim** <https://www.hna.de/lokales/hann-muenden/verletzter-nach-pruegelei-adelebser-fluechtlingsunterkunft-5542717.html> ... **#Wirschaffendas ;-)**

**brawl in refugee home** [Link to article] **#Wecandoit ;-)**

Example 10 (wirschaffendas 56):

<http://bit.ly/1WjpcxD> **bald wird es auch in deiner Nachbarschaft bunt.**

#wirschaffendas #refugeeswelcome #refugeecrisis

[Link to video] **Trouble is coming soon to your neighborhood too.** #wecandoit

#refugeeswelcome #refugeecrisis

The first tweet uses an emoticon to question the meaning of the statement *wir schaffen das*, as there are reports of fights and violence among refugees in refugee homes, particularly when refugees from different origins are involved. The second tweet begins with the link to a YouTube video from *Euronews*, a multilingual European news media service, about violence among refugees on the Greek island, Kos. The author of the tweet then forecasts the arrival of refugees in *your neighborhood* by directly addressing the audience with the second person informal personal pronoun, which creates an imminent, translocal threat. The arrival of refugees is not explicitly stated. Instead the author uses the word *bunt* (English: *colorful*), which usually has positive connotations; however, in this case it is used as a euphemism to describe the arrival of people of diverse backgrounds. Although *bunt* usually carries positive connotations, it is also used in the German idioms *zu bunt werden* and *es zu bunt treiben* which both mean *to go too far*. In combination with the violence depicted in the video, *bunt* therefore triggers negative connotations as it implies a threat to the imagined homogeneous community.

The risk of violence may not only occur in refugee homes or camps. According to some users, religious and cultural differences may also lead to violence toward European citizens in the form of terror attacks. The following tweet is a response to a tweet by user @Lars9596, who claims that *The #Hungarians checked details of a #refugee at the border & identified him as a known #terrorist. #Fluechtlinge*. The author of the response supports the implied terror threat by adding the sarcastic claim that refugees pose a risk as potential suicide bombers. The tweet also contains a stereotypical reference to Islam (*virgins in paradise*). The Quran contains references

and allusions to virgins (e.g., verse 56:36 and verse 55:56) who will be the companions of believers during afterlife, referred to as heaven or paradise (e.g., verse 2:29). Although there are multiple interpretations and teachings of the Quran, Muslims are often reduced to the depiction of martyrs who enter paradise where they get 72 virgins.

Example 11 (wirschaffendas 115):

@Lars9596 Not surprising Will not be the last one #wirschaffendas big surprise when the 1st suicide bomber **looks for virgins in paradise**

Not only the characteristics of refugees are described. As mentioned before, Chancellor Merkel is perceived as responsible for pro-refugee policies and consequently the influx of refugees. She is described as incompetent, dumb, and unacceptable and her policies as dangerous for the German nation, a security threat, and financial burden to be shouldered by the German citizens as shown in the following example. See also Example 6.

Example 12 (wirschaffendas 195):

#wirschaffendas. **bis zum nächsten anschlag**. #fluechtlinge

#wecandoit. **until the next attack**. #refugees

The influx of refugees triggered by pro-refugee policies is further associated with the downfall of Germany, increased crime, the implementation of sharia law in Europe, and censorship as shown in the following tweet.

Example 13 (wirschaffendas 113):

Deutschland **ruinieren**?

**Kriminalität** steigern?

**Scharia** in Europa?

**Zensur** überall?

Ja klar... #WirSchaffenDas

**Ruin** Germany?

Increase **crime**?

**Sharia** in Europe?

**Censorship** everywhere?

Yes of course... #WeCanDoIt

In tweets like this, users anticipate the destruction, downfall, and ruin of Germany and Europe. These negative consequences are also linked to religion (*sharia law*) and negative stereotypes about Muslim countries (*censorship*). As in the following example, the cause of the destruction or catastrophe is often not directly stated but merely alluded to. The sentence structure and word choice of the following tweet also suggest that the downfall is already in progress and, due to the policies and practices of the politicians, unstoppable. #WECANDOIT becomes part of an indirect referent for refugees and *and so* makes the connection between cause and effect.

Example 14 (wirschaffendas 144):

#WIRSCHAFFENDAS, so die Losung der Politiker aus deren goldenem Käfig, **also weiter in Richtung Katastrophe u Auflösung unserer Gesellschaft**

#WECANDOIT, that's the slogan of the politicians from their golden cage, **and so our society continues toward catastrophe and downfall**

The mentioning of terms associated with a religion demonstrates how religion is used as a reason to exclude. Muslims are depicted as violent – several tweets include references to violence among refugees in camps and allusions to violence toward German residents as stated before – and Islam as a religion is depicted as not suitable for Europe, which is based on Christian values and traditions. This is supported by references to previous terror attacks (Example 1: #AllahuAkbar – the Muslim ‘#culturalenrichment’ of #Paris ...) and other contexts as in Example 15.

Example 15 (wirschaffendas 241):

**Keinem westl. Land ist es bislang gelungen**, muslimische Araber nachhaltig zu integrieren, aber – klar @GoeringEckardt – #wirschaffendas .

**No Western country managed to integrate Muslim Arabs in the long term**, but – sure @GoeringEckardt – #wecandoit .

The authors claim that Muslims cannot be integrated in Western countries since no country has been successful integrating Muslims, according to the author of the tweet. The reason for this

claim is implied: integration is not possible due to cultural differences between Muslim Arabs and Christian Europeans. The author uses *but – sure* ironically to indicate that the government is setting Germany up to achieve the “unachievable” and addresses the former leader of *the Green Party*, Katrin Göring-Eckardt. *The Green Party* is known to promote integration of immigrants and a multicultural society; however, this position of a multicultural society is criticized and Muslim immigrants are depicted as a danger for Germany and Europe as evidenced by previous terror attacks (e.g., Example 11 and Example 12).

### **Argumentation**

In order to support the characterizations described above and hence justify the discrimination against the other, both explicit and implicit arguments are used. These arguments are often supported by news reports, various sources, and citing experts. Users strengthen their points and opinions for example by citing online sources from conservative mainstream media such as the German daily newspaper, *Die Welt*, the German monthly magazine, *Cicero*, and the German tabloid, *BILD*. There are also references to local online newspapers to draw attention to and share a local situation.

Example 16 (wirschaffendas 38):

**...es wird immer lustiger! :- ( #merkel #wirschaffendas**  
<http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article146825325/Fuer-Fluechtlinge-gekuendigt-Das-war-wie-ein-Tritt.html>

**...it's getting more and more hilarious! :- ( #merkel #wecandoit [Link to article]**

In the above tweet, the ironic statement *it's getting more and more hilarious* is followed by a sad emoticon which reverses the meaning of *hilarious*, the hashtags *merkel* and *wirschaffendas*, and the link to an article about the story of a woman whose apartment lease was canceled because the local authorities wanted to use the house as a home for asylum seekers. Although it is certainly



important to give voice to all people and point out existing or perceived inequalities and injustices, the framing of the tweet with the two hashtags suggests that Merkel and her open-door policy as regards refugees are to be blamed for this situation.

Twitter users also cite online articles from right-wing outlets such as the German weekly newspapers, *Junge Freiheit* (English: Young Freedom) and *Preussische Allgemeine Zeitung* (English: Prussian General Newspaper) as illustrated in the following example.

Example 17 (wirschaffendas 33):

‘Interner Bericht – Bundeswehr: **#Asylbewerber urinieren auf Flüchtlingsfrauen**  
<https://jungefreiheit.de/politik/deutschland/2015/bundeswehr-asylbewerber-urinieren-auf-fluechtlingsfrauen/> Tja, “#wirschaffendas”..

‘internal report – German military: **#asylumseekers urinate on refugee women**’ [Link to article] Well, “wecandoit” ..

In this tweet, an internal report from the German military about the inadequate situation in a migrant reception center in Erfurt, Germany is cited. Male asylum seekers are said to urinate on women and sexually harass women. At the end, the article states that local authorities denied any knowledge of the situation; however, some Twitter users may not open every hyperlink but rely on the headlines to build their opinions. Moreover, neither tweet nor article describes the situation from the perspective of the refugees and asylum seekers. They do not have a voice in this report and are depicted as uncivilized and not suitable for German society due to the implied lack of manners and values. Citing such a report thus contributes to the reinforcement of negative stereotypes of refugees and asylum seekers.

Apart from using news reports to contribute to the negative presentation of refugees and asylum seekers, users also reference numbers and experts to increase the credibility as well as urgency of their statements. The following tweet points out that more than a million refugees have already arrived and 70% of them are men who would get their families to join them. The

statement is followed by *#wirschaffendas* and the negation thereof. The user negates that *we* will manage the situation. The first person plural personal pronoun indicates that the author is writing in the name of the German state and nation. The user thus questions the state's and society's capacity and ability to accommodate such large numbers of refugees. It is further implied that the 1.2 million are just the beginning, as most men would bring their families, too. The tweet also contains the hashtag *hart aber fair* (English: *tough but fair*), which is the name of a weekly German political talk show. The user may have included the reference to *Hart aber Fair* because the show discussed the topic of refugees at that time.

Example 18 (*wirschaffendas* 70):

**Jetzt schon 1,2 Mio #Flüchtlinge Davon 70 % Männer die ihre Familien nachholen...**  
*#wirschaffendas* Nee, schaffen wir NICHT *#hartaberfair*

**Already 1.2 m #refugees 70% of them will bring their families...** *#wecandoit* Nope, we DON'T *#hartaberfair*

Numbers are not only used to invoke fear as regards the amount of people who are migrating to Germany but also to express the expected financial burden of Germany's refugee policy. In the following tweet, which begins ironically with the hashtag *no problem*, the well-known and influential German Institute for Economic Research, *ifo*, is cited, albeit without reference. According to the author of the tweet, the institute calculated that refugees would cost Germany more than €10 billion (approximately \$12 billion).

Example 19 (*wirschaffendas* 83):

**#noproblem, #refugees will cost Germany min. €10,000,000,000, according IFO Institute (Munich)** *#wirschaffendas*

Based on the tweet it is unclear how this number was calculated and what it stands for. While studies of economic research institutes often calculate the total expenses the state is likely to face, they may not consider state income generated by migrants in the form of income tax or value-added tax on goods and services (Diekmann, 2016).

Fear is also generated by sharing stories that are not always supported by references, links, or expert voices. Some tweets include made-up stories about the financial or societal consequences of the influx of refugees such as higher unemployment, higher taxes, and lower wages as in the following tweet:

Example 20 (wirschaffendas 242):

Hat #Merkel schon verkündet das der **#Mindestlohn jetzt auf 3€ gedrückt werden muss?** #wirschaffendas #fluechtlinge #lösung

Did #Merkel already announce that the **#minimumwage will now have to be lowered to €3** (approximately \$3.50)? #wecandoit #refugees #solution

The user employs sarcasm to point to the financial burden of the large amount of refugees arriving in Germany, potentially entering the work force, and thus lowering the wages for everyone through wage dumping.

Apart from citing or referring to sources, facts, and experts, the most commonly found feature was the criticism of politicians, particularly Chancellor Merkel as she is the head of government and vested with policy-making power according to article 65 of the German Constitution (“Das Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” 2012). Politicians of mainstream political parties in general and Chancellor Merkel in particular are criticized for their policies and blamed for the influx of refugees and the resulting negative consequences. The government’s position toward refugees is depicted as an invitation to billions of refugees. In the following tweet, the user further criticizes those who want to be politically correct (Fairclough, 2003) by referring to them with the pejorative term *Gutmenschen* (English: *someone who is politically hyper-correct*), and policies and practices that represent a welcoming culture. According to the author, these policies and practices are like invitations for refugees to come to Germany. The sarcastic tone expressed through the hashtags *rich country, we accept everyone,*

and *we can do it*, as well as the word choice of *Gutmenschen* and *großfressig* supports the tweet's negative stance toward pro-refugee policies and practices.

Example 21 (*wirschaffendas* 245):

#Gutmenschen, **großfressige Reden** wie #Willkommenskultur, #reichesLand  
#**wirnehmenjedenauf** #wirschaffendas – #**Einladungen an Mrd.** #Flüchtlinge

#thepoliticallyhypercorrect, **loud-mouth speeches** like #welcomingculture, #richcountry,  
#**weaccepteveryone** #wecandoit – #**invitations to billions** of #refugees

Furthermore, the politicians' general competency is questioned by tweets like the following:

Example 22 (*wirschaffendas* 126):

#WirSchaffenDas? #Obdachlosigkeit,#Arbeitslosigkeit,#Altersarmut.**Haben wir eines dieser Themen “geschafft”? Was soll diesmal anders sein?**

#WeCanDoIt? #homelessness,#unemployment,#oldagepoverty.**Have we “managed” one of these topics? What would be different this time?**

The user questions the government's ability to deal with the migrant crisis, expressed by *#wirschaffendas* followed by a question mark and a list of other political issues, such as unemployment or poverty among the elderly, as the government has not been able to tackle these other political issues. In this case, the referent for *we* in *wir schaffen das* is the government rather than the German population. This user thus interprets *we* as an “exclusive we” as opposed to other users who interpret it as an “inclusive we” and feel addressed by the statement and requested to contribute.

While the previous tweet represents an indirect criticism of the government, other tweets criticize Merkel and other politicians more directly by questioning their competency regarding the migrant crisis. The following tweet is written in four lines. The first two lines display a repetition of *#Wirschaffendas* and the contradiction *but not with* Merkel and the Minister of the Interior of the time, de Maizière, respectively. The third line is a question about the whereabouts

of competent and capable politicians, suggesting that the current government is not competent or capable, particularly when it comes to the migrant crisis. The last line consists of another hashtag that emerged during the time and denotes that Germany, or the media and people, are paying attention to the situation, *#Dschauthin*, which is a blend of *Deutschland* (English: *Germany*) and *schaut hin* (English: *is watching*).

Example 23 (wirschaffendas 239):  
**#Wirschaffendas – aber nicht mit #Merkel**  
**#Wirschaffendas – aber nicht mit #deMaiziére**  
**wo sind die fähigen kompetenten Politiker?**  
**#Dschauthin**

**#Wecandoit – but not with #Merkel**  
**# Wecandoit – but not with #deMaiziére**  
**where are the competent politicians?**  
**#Germanyiswatching**

In the following two examples, the authors do not criticize the competency of the federal government or Chancellor Merkel directly but point out the consequences faced by regional and local authorities. According to the author of the first example and the online newspaper article the user is citing, registered associations (German: *Vereine*) are required to provide their gymnasiums for refugees, which threatens the existence of these associations as regular activities and practices cannot be performed. Registered associations play an important part in German social life as many recreational activities take place in registered associations such as sports as well as charitable and political activities. These associations are governed by the German civil code and can be compared to voluntary non-profit organizations in the US.

Example 24 (wirschaffendas 21):  
**die zwangsbelegung von hallen bedroht existenz von vereinen**  
<http://www.derwesten.de/region/belegung-von-hallen-mit-fluechtlingen-bringt-vereine-in-not-id11125620.html> ... **#wirschaffendas**

**the compulsory use of gymnasiums threatens the existence of associations** [Link to article] ... **#wecandoit**

Another user cites an online newspaper article about local authorities in Southern Bavaria who complain that they have exceeded their capacities. The phrase *wir schaffen das* is followed by a question mark, which indicates that the user questions the statement and thus criticizes the federal government for not supporting the local governments appropriately. These local and regional governments are confronted with the arrival of refugees due to the proximity of Munich and Upper Bavaria (German: *Oberbayern*) to the Austrian border and thus to the two most popular migratory routes at the time, the Western Balkan route and the Eastern Mediterranean route (Frontex, 2016).

Example 25 (*wirschaffendas* 184):

#wirschaffendas? #**München und Oberbayern werden gerade im Stich gelassen:**  
<http://bit.ly/1VTzWm0> via @SZ #refugeeswelcome

#wecandoit? #**Munich and Upper Bavaria are currently being abandoned:** [Link to article] via @SZ #refugeeswelcome

The strongest form of criticism is the request for the removal of the Chancellor and her supporters. Example 26 (same as Example 5) is written in the form of a general command without a direct addressee. Additionally, *#wirschaffendas* is reappropriated to express encouragement for getting rid of Merkel rather than managing the migrant crisis. In this example, *we* is used to mean the opposition of Merkel.

Example 26 (*wirschaffendas* 167):

#Merkel und ihre Vasallen **des Amtes entheben!** #**wirschaffendas bestimmt!**

**Remove #Merkel and her puppets from office! #wecandoit for sure!**

Example 27 includes the link to a petition to start a *vote of no confidence in the Chancellor* with the purpose of removing the government from office. A constructive vote of no confidence represents the only constitutional tool for the parliament to remove the German Chancellor. The opposition is required to propose a new candidate for Chancellor on the same ballot. The tweet

represents an invitation to participate in the petition and bring forth a new government without Merkel. The use of *#wirschaffendas* at the end of the tweet not only serves the categorization of the tweet; in fact, the phrase is reappropriated because it is connected to getting rid of Merkel and thus can be read as an encouragement for other users to participate in the petition in order to remove Merkel from office. Her own words are thus juxtaposed with the sentiment of opposition.

Example 27 (*wirschaffendas* 47):

Im Übrigen bin ich der Meinung, das **#Merkelmussweg**

Don't hesitate, activate! <https://www.change.org/p/wir-fordern-das-misstrauensvotum-r%C3%BCcktritt-der-bundeskanzlerin-dr-a-merkel-und-sofortige-neuwahl-der-bundesregierung-resignation-of-the-german-chancellor-dr-a-merkel-and-immediate-reelection-of-the-german-government> **#Zukunft ohne Merkel** **#Wirschaffendas**

By the way, in my opinion, **#Merkelmustgo** Don't hesitate, activate! [Link to petition] **#Future without Merkel** **#Wecandoit**

### **Perspectivization**

Another common strategy found in right-wing tweets is perspectivization. Names, descriptions, and arguments are framed to support the negative presentation of the other and the positive self-presentation. Negative qualities and characteristics of the constructed other and positive qualities and characteristics of the in-group are emphasized, while positive actions of the other and negative actions of the in-group are downplayed. This can be achieved by the use of pronouns, demonstratives, syntactic structures, and agency.

Refugees are depicted as favored and prioritized as opposed to citizens who have to suffer the consequences of the politicians' pro-refugee policies and practices. In the following example, the user sarcastically claims that Merkel has become a motherly figure for refugees who do not need to follow the law in order to get to *mother Merkel*. The expression *mother Merkel* as well as the hyperbolic claim that *no laws and rules are in effect* serve as a contextualization cues for the sarcastic meaning of the tweet.

Example 28 (wirschaffendas 110):

**auf dem Weg zu #MutterMerkel gelten keine Gesetze&Regeln #Flüchtlinge lassen sich nicht aufhalten #wirschaffendas**

**on the way to #motherMerkel no laws&rules are in effect #refugees can't be held back #wecandoit**

The user probably refers to the Dublin procedures, which were suspended by the German government and allowed refugees to enter and seek asylum in Germany.

The authors of the following two examples juxtapose the phrase *wir schaffen das* with the burden that *we* as the citizens have to carry. In both cases, the users question the meaning of *we* and claim that *we* should be understood as only referring to the citizens. In the first example (same as Example 7), the author questions the ability of *them* to manage the situation. The German word *denen* (English: *them, those*) is used in this context as a demonstrative pronoun and thus as a deictic form to add emphasis. It is used not only to distinguish between *us* and *them* but also to create distance. Therefore, the user distinguishes between the ordinary citizens, who will have to carry out what is associated with *wir schaffen das*, and the politicians, or the establishment, who are unable to deal with the situation.

Example 29 (wirschaffendas 71):

Ich höre immer #wirschaffendas Die meinen wohl **uns** damit weil **von denen schafft es keiner!** #hartaberfair

I always hear #wecandoit They probably mean **us** because **of them none will manage!** #hartaberfair

In the second example (same as Example 6), there is also a distinction between *us* the people and *you all* the politicians who waste the taxpayers' money. Additionally, a different meaning of the word *schaffen* is used, that is, to work. After asking who *we* refers to, the user defines that *we* refers to the citizens who work, while the taxes are wasted by *you all* referring to



the politicians who support the pro-refugee policies and practices. Opposition is thus created through the two pronouns.

Example 30 (wirschaffendas 100):

#wirschaffendas Wer ist wir ? Ja, **wir schaffen und ihr vergeudet die #Steuern !!**

#wecandoit Who is we? Yes, **we work and you all waste the #taxes !!**

In the following tweet (same as Example 14), the distance between citizens and politicians is even more vividly described; the politicians sit in a golden cage where they are protected from any negative consequences, while society continues its path toward catastrophe and downfall as described above.

Example 31 (wirschaffendas 144):

#WIRSCHAFFENDAS, so die Losung der **Politiker aus deren goldenem Käfig**, also weiter in Richtung Katastrophe u Auflösung unserer Gesellschaft

#WECANDOIT, that's the slogan of the **politicians from their golden cage**, and so our society continues toward catastrophe and downfall

The previous examples already pointed to the perceived inability to act on the part of the citizens. Even though the tweets described *us* as the ones who need to face the consequences, *we* do not have a say in this matter as the politicians, particularly Chancellor Merkel, make the decisions. The perceived enforcement of pro-refugee policies by the federal government also affects local authorities, who are said to be left alone as illustrated in Example 24 and Example 25. Refugees, on the other hand, are described as more active, for example as actively pushing for asylum, making the infrastructure collapse, and represented as an unstoppable force as in Example 2 and Example 28.

The meaning of a tweet or statement is also influenced by the sentence structure or how a phrase like *wir schaffen das* is embedded in the sentence. The following examples show how the hashtag functions as a sentence element. In the first example the phrase is negated. German

negation allows for simply adding the negation word *nicht* (English: *not*) after subject, verb, and direct object (Literally: *we can do it not*). Therefore, the statement itself does not have to be modified in order to be negated.

Example 32 (wirschaffendas 179):

**#WirSchaffenDas nicht.**

**#WeCannotDoIt.**

In the second example (same as Example 12), the hashtag is followed by a period. In writing this would signal the end of a sentence, however, given the conversational style of Twitter, it can also signal a pause. After the period, the tweet continues with a prepositional phrase that may be syntactically connected to the previous phrase since the preposition is not capitalized.

Example 33 (wirschaffendas 195):

**#wirschaffendas. bis zum nächsten anschlag. #fluechtlinge**

**#wecandoit. until the next attack. #fluechtlinge**

In the third example (same as Example 22), the phrase is followed by a question mark, which indicates that the author questions that *we* will manage the migrant crisis. The verb *schaffen*, which in this context means *manage to do*, is also used in a second question in quotation marks to indicate that the author questions that the migrant crisis will be dealt with successfully.

Example 34 (wirschaffendas 126):

**#WirSchaffenDas? #Obdachlosigkeit,#Arbeitslosigkeit,#Altersarmut.Haben wir eines dieser Themen “geschafft”? Was soll diesmal anders sein?**

**#WeCanDoIt? #homelessness, #unemployment, #oldagepoverty. Have we “managed” one of these topics? What would be different this time?**

The last example uses another meaning of *schaffen*, more precisely the phrasal verb *abschaffen* (English: *to eliminate, to abolish*). The author uses the similarity of the words to perform a word play, in which the user implies the elimination of *us* because of positions like *refugees welcome* and *wir schaffen das* as indicated by the use of the hashtags.

Example 35 (wirschaffendas 204):

**Wir schaffen uns ab.** #refugeeswelcome #wirschaffendas

**We eliminate ourselves.** #refugeeswelcome #wecandoit

### **Intertextuality**

The findings also show that tweets contain intertextual references. There are three intertextual references to Barack Obama’s presidential campaign slogan *Yes we can*, which is similarly “adaptable” due to deixis and no fixed referents, two references to Merkel being from East Germany, and five references to Merkel as a mother figure. In the following section, I will explain and contextualize the references to Merkel as *Ossi* and *Mom*. *Ossi* is a pejorative term used to describe someone from East Germany, or more precisely the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Close to 30 years after the fall of the Berlin wall, preconceptions and negative stereotypes about East Germans still persist. Common negative stereotypes include being dumb and lazy and acting as an informer. Both derive from the economic and political system of the GDR.

Although not as present in this dataset as in the datasets collected in December 2016 (*#MerkelsTote, #BerlinAttack*), there are some references to Merkel’s origin. Even though she was born in Hamburg, West Germany, Merkel grew up and lived in East Germany, and since 1990 has been the representative of an electoral constituency located in Northern East Germany in the German Bundestag. Moreover, Merkel is the first German Chancellor from East Germany.

In the following tweet, the user compares the opening of the border between East and West Germany in 1989 and the opening of the borders during the European migrant crisis.

Example 36 (wirschaffendas 158):

Danke #Merkel für d Öffnung d Grenzen. **Wenn Ostdeutsche Weltpolitik machen.** Echo diesmal anders als b #schabowski #wirschaffendas

Thank you #Merkel for the opening of the borders. **When East Germans do world politics.** Echo this time different than with #schabowski #wecandoit

Schabowski was the spokesperson of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) (German: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands), the political party of the GDR, who announced at an evening press conference on November 9, 1989 that travel and migration between East and West Germany would be allowed, effective immediately. While the response to the opening of the Berlin Wall was positive, the user implies that the response to opening the borders during the migrant crisis would be different. The thanking at the beginning of the tweet can be understood as ironic and at the same time as holding Merkel responsible as it precedes the phrase *When East Germans do world politics*, which points to a generalization that East Germans are less competent in doing politics. This generalization is corroborated by the fact Schabowski's announcement was in fact a mistake as the new regulation allowing travel between East and West Germany was supposed to be released during the night and not during prime time.

Another code that emerged from the data was the depiction as Merkel as mother and mommy. While it can be interpreted as a reference to her role as protector and caregiver of the German nation, it could also point to her long-term chancellery (since 2005), and thus stability. Her demeanor is often described as calm and composed, and her political style is characterized by not taking many risks (dos Santos, 2013). However, in right-wing tweets, her role of protector and caregiver is connected to the prioritizing of refugees as represented in Example 37 (same as Example 28).

Example 37 (wirschaffendas 110):

auf dem Weg zu **#MutterMerkel** gelten keine Gesetze&Regeln #Flüchtlinge lassen sich nicht aufhalten #wirschaffendas

on the way to **#motherMerkel** there are no laws&rules #refugees cannot be stopped #wecandoit

The user suggests that the function of protector and caregiver applies to refugees. In fact, Merkel is presented as a mother figure for refugees who are not held back by the law in order to get to her. Even though the depiction of Merkel as mother is often used by her supporters, Twitter users seem to use this reference ironically when criticizing the position and practices of Merkel, which is evident in the following example.

Example 38 (wirschaffendas 244):

Wie Merkel mal wieder zur Mutti wird! #Titelseite #wirschaffendas

How Merkel is becoming mommy once again! #frontpage #wecandoit

The tweet implies that Merkel becomes the center of attention, which is often beneficial for politicians as it draws attention to them; she could thus use that for her own political purposes. It suggests that Merkel uses the refugees to improve her image as caring mother of the nation. References to Merkel as mother also make her gender relevant and exploit gender stereotypes of women as too “soft” on tough issues.

### **Semiotic and multimodal resources**

Hashtags are often used to categorize a tweet but hashtags can also have an evaluative stance. Many tweets that contain *#refugeesnotwelome*, for instance, express anti-refugee opinions or positions (Kreis, 2017a). Furthermore, hashtags are not only used as an additional marker to categorize the content and meaning of the tweet, but they can also function as sentence

elements. The following tweet (same as Example 22) shows how *#wirschaffendas* is used as a question.

Example 39 (*wirschaffendas* 126):

**#WirSchaffenDas? #Obdachlosigkeit,#Arbeitslosigkeit,#Altersarmut.**Haben wir eines dieser Themen “geschafft”? Was soll diesmal anders sein?

**#WeCanDoIt? #homelessness, #unemployment, #oldagepoverty.**Have we “managed” one of these topics? What would be different this time?

In addition to the first hashtag, *#WirSchaffenDas*, the user adds three more hashtags. All three hashtags denote the issues that have not been managed by the government according to the user. The use of hashtags, as opposed to just words, might be explained by the increasing convention of using hashtags creatively “as a simple means of emphasis” (Bruns & Burgess, 2015, p. 17). Around 36% of the *#wirschaffendas* tweets contained more than one hashtag. As in the following example (same as Example 21), the hashtag is also used for buzzwords such as *welcoming culture* or *refugees*.

Example 40 (*wirschaffendas* 245):

**#Gutmenschen**, großfressige Reden wie **#Willkommenskultur**, **#reichesLand**  
**#wirnehmenjedenauf #wirschaffendas – #Einladungen** an Mrd. **#Flüchtlinge**

**#thepoliticallyhypercorrect**, loud-mouth speeches **like #welcomingculture**,  
**#richcountry**, **#weaccepteveryone #wecandoit – #invitations** to billions of **#refugees**

The two hashtags that co-occur most with *#wirschaffendas* are *#Merkel* and *#refugeeswelcome*, which seems consistent; not only is Merkel the person who stated the phrase *wir schaffen das*, but also the phrase stands for pro-refugee policies and practices and hence welcomes refugees. Although, as shown in the analysis, her pro-refugee stance is often inverted with these same resources.

Another common feature in social media is the use of emoticons and emojis since users often cannot rely on paralinguistic cues such as intonation, gestures, or facial expressions in

order to convey the meaning of an utterance. Contextualization cues are particularly important when expressing irony or sarcasm. The following example (same as Example 9) shows a common emoticon that is used to express irony, that is, the emoticon of a winking face. In this particular example, the emoticon is placed after *#Wirschaffendas* and, therefore, it signals that the user questions that *we can do it* because of the occurrence of a fight in a refugee home. The reference to the report about the fight is used to ironically question the government's and society's ability to deal with the situation.

Example 41 (wirschaffendas 84):

Schlägerei in Flüchtlingsheim <https://www.hna.de/lokales/hann-muenden/verletzter-nach-pruegelei-adelebser-fluechtlingsunterkunft-5542717.html> ... **#Wirschaffendas ;-)**

brawl in refugee home [Link to article] **#Wecandoit ;-)**

In the following example (same as Example 16), the emoticon of a sad face contradicts the preceding utterance. Although the word *hilarious* appears in the tweet, the author does not actually think the situation referred to in the article is funny. In fact, the author uses sarcasm to criticize the situation described in the newspaper article. The emoticon of a sad face supports the evaluation of the situation.

Example 42 (wirschaffendas 38):

**...es wird immer lustiger! :-)** (#merkel #wirschaffendas  
<http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article146825325/Fuer-Fluechtlinge-gekuendigt-Das-war-wie-ein-Tritt.html> ...

**...it's getting more and more hilarious! :-)** (#merkel #wecandoit [Link to article])

Emoticons and emojis are not the only contextualization cues that appear. The capitalization of letters, for instance, may also signal emphasis. In the following tweet (same as Example 18), the user capitalizes *not* (German: *nicht*) to contradict the phrase *wir schaffen das*

not only by negating the sentence but also by adding emphasis on this negation through capitalization.

Example 43 (wirschaffendas 70):

Jetzt schon 1,2 Mio #Flüchtlinge Davon 70 % Männer die ihre Familien nachholen...  
#wirschaffendas Nee, schaffen wir **NICHT** #hartaberfair

Already 1.2 m #refugees 70% of them will bring their families... #wecandoit Nope, we **WON'T** #hartaberfair

Additionally, some users capitalize the first letters of the three parts of the phrase for readability as in #WirSchaffenDas (English: #WeCanDoIt) since the hashtag consists of three words.

Another feature that was found in the data is the use of a creative text format. The following two examples are written in the form of a stanza resembling a short poem. The first example (same as Example 13) contains four lines of brief questions, which marks parallel form, and ends in the ironic answer *ja klar...* (English: *yes of course...*).

Example 44 (wirschaffendas 113):

Deutschland ruinieren?  
Kriminalität steigern?  
Scharia in Europa?  
Zensur überall?  
Ja klar... #WirSchaffenDas

Ruin Germany?  
Increase crime?  
Sharia in Europe?  
Censorship everywhere?  
Yes of course... #WeCanDoIt

The second example (same as Example 23) also contains a parallelism. The first two lines are almost identical with the only difference being the name of the politician. The third line continues the content of the first two lines with a question about competent politicians. The last line only consists of a hashtag.

Example 45 (wirschaffendas 239):

#Wirschaffendas – aber nicht mit #Merkel  
#Wirschaffendas – aber nicht mit #deMaiziére



wo sind die fähigen kompetenten Politiker?  
#Dschauthin

#Wecandoit – but not with #Merkel  
# Wecandoit – but not with #deMaiziére  
where are the competent politicians?  
#Germanyiswatching

This text format draws further attention to the tweets because it makes them stand out, and it shows how users take advantage of the affordances provided by Twitter given the character limitation and express themselves creatively.

Apart from hashtags, letter capitalizations, and creative text formats, images can also be used to reinforce an argument or to explain the meaning of a tweet. Close to 15% of the tweets with *#wirschaffendas* included some kind of image, for example, a photograph or a meme. The following tweet contains two hashtags and an image that consists of four pictures, three captions, and two rage faces (Figure 1).

Example 46 (*wirschaffendas 75*):  
[#ragecomic #WirSchaffenDas pic.twitter.com/FHA9NHBz6Q](https://pic.twitter.com/FHA9NHBz6Q)



Figure 1. Tweet “wirschaffendas 75.”

The first hashtag identifies the image as a rage comic. Rage comics emerged on the image board website, *4Chan*, as “simple comics about life’s daily frustrations, ... [and] have grown into a format that includes a rich visual language of a huge number of MS paint faces” (Gulin, 2011). The top left image shows an overcrowded boat and is captioned *Das Boot ist voll!* (English: *The boat is full!*). The image is supposedly from June 2014 and appeared in a *Time* article about the migrant crisis from April 2015 (Walt, 2015). The top right image shows a freight train with people sitting on top of and hanging from a freight car. The bottom images show the portraits of what seem to be two German politicians, former German Minister of the Interior, Thomas de Maizière, on the left, and Chancellor, Angela Merkel, on the right. Both faces are covered by rage faces. De Maizière seems to be at a press conference as he is in front of a microphone. Merkel seems to be inside the *Bundestag* (German federal parliament) due to the shape and color of the chairs in the background. Both politicians are shown with their hand and index finger lifted or pointing at the audience. The image of de Maizière is captioned with the German word *NO* followed by a period and the image of Merkel is captioned with the phrase *WIR SCHAFFEN DAS* followed by an exclamation mark both in capital letters. The arrangement of the rage comic suggests that the utterance *the boat is full* is negated by the Minister of the Interior and contradicted by Merkel with the phrase *wir schaffen das*. For users who are familiar with rage comics, the arrangement of images and captions as well as the use of rage faces may be humorous. At the same time, the comic may represent a simplified version of the reaction of the government toward the migrant crisis, and can be interpreted as criticism.

While the previous example required some knowledge about rage comics to be fully understood, other images display the anticipated negative consequences of the migrant crisis more directly. The following tweet consists of four hashtags, *#Merkel*, *#Masseneinwanderung*

(English: *mass immigration*), #WirSchaffenDas, and #Deutschland (English: *Germany*), and an image (Figure 2).

Example 47 (wirschaffendas 214):

#Merkel #Masseneinwanderung #WirSchaffenDas #Deutschland  
pic.twitter.com/XybAIqb3TK



Figure 2. Tweet “wirschaffendas 214.”

The image shows a man wearing a t-shirt with the German flag and shoveling a grave. The inscription of the tombstone is the coat of arms of Germany, which displays the *Bundesadler* (English: *Federal Eagle*) in black and red on golden background. The image also shows a female with a blond bob haircut and purple blazer, which are cues that the person is intended to represent Merkel, standing in front of a grave and saying *WIR SCHAFFEN DAS* written in capitalized letters. The man, representing Germany, shovels his own grave, while the Chancellor stands in front of the grave cheering him on. The image illustrates the fear that Merkel’s pro-refugee policy leads to Germany’s downfall. The hashtags are used as buzz words. The hashtags do not inherently carry negative connotations unless they are further contextualized. Therefore,

although the text of the tweet is neutral, the image provides the contextualization cues that help convey the fear that Germany is facing its death due to pro-refugee policies.

The last example also includes four hashtags, *#refugeeswelcome*, *#wirschaffendas*, *#schreinachliebe*, and *#aktion arschloch*, and an image.

Example 48 (wirschaffendas 173):  
*#refugeeswelcome #wirschaffendas #schreinachliebe #aktion arschloch*  
[pic.twitter.com/eGhuOCe7J3](https://pic.twitter.com/eGhuOCe7J3)

*Schrei nach Liebe* (English: *scream for love*) is the name of an anti-fascist punk song by the German band, *Die Ärzte*, from 1993. Toward the end of the song, a Neo-Nazi is repeatedly called *Arschloch* (English: asshole). *Aktion Arschloch* is a social media initiative against xenophobia from August 2015. The name of the initiative picks up on the word of the song. The purpose of the initiative was “to bring [the song] ... back into the charts and into broadcast media” (Torges, 2015) in order to take a stand against xenophobia. If one only takes into account the hashtags, the tweet seems to express a pro-refugee, anti-discrimination position; however, the content of the image is not aligned with such a position. The image shows a blackboard and two sides. The left side reads *IN DEN HEIMEN VON FLÜCHTLINGEN VERGEWALTIGTE FLÜCHTLINGSFRAUEN* in capital letters, which translates to *female refugees raped by refugees in refugee homes*. The right side says *IN DEN HEIMEN VON “NAZIS” VERGEWALTIGTE FLÜCHTLINGSFRAUEN* in capital letters, which translates to *female refugees raped by “Nazis” in refugee homes*. The descriptor *Nazis* is in scare quotes, which indicates that the author questions the terminology. The left side has 215 lines and the right side does not have a single line, meaning refugees are said to rape female refugees very often, while there is no case of a so-called Nazi who raped a female refugee. It can be interpreted that the user questions the legitimacy of pro-refugee positions, since rape and potentially other crime is

committed by refugees themselves and not by so-called Nazis. The negative representation of the other, in this case the refugees, is emphasized, while the negative representation of *us* is downplayed. In fact, even the description of people as Nazis is questioned. The tweet thus criticizes not only pro-refugee policies as represented by the first two hashtags but also anti-fascist initiatives.

The data show that images or memes are used to invoke fear, threat, and burden, and to criticize politicians and pro-refugee actions. This criticism may be displayed in a humorous and thus less direct way, which could soften the criticism or make it more “sayable.” The description of the images illustrates that images can be used to express an opinion or reinforce an argument in a visual way without the need of many words and explanations or often with combinations of words that appear neutral or even representing a pro-immigrant stance. This not only suits Twitter’s character limitation, but it also enables users to visually reinforce their opinions.

## **#openborders**

In the *#openborders* dataset, the occurrence of discursive strategies and topics associated with right-wing discourses is significantly lower compared to the other three datasets, as shown in Table 6. Nonetheless, there are examples that employ negative presentation of migrants as described in the following sections.

### **Referential/nomination and predication**

Only one instance of negative references to migrants was found. Although expressions like *Neger*, which is roughly comparable to the English word *nigger*, and *genuine refugees* occur, the closer analysis of the context showed that the users of those tweets were involved in meta-discussions about the usage of these words. These tweets could thus not be identified as

supporting right-wing discourses. The one negative reference found in the dataset is also a religious reference. The user references a tweet and article by a U.S. American conservative news website claiming that the Islamic State smuggles Jihadi gunmen into Europe thanks to the migrant crisis. The use of the words *Jihadi* and *gunmen* invokes fear and suggests that Europe is under threat by Islamic fighters. The fallacy that Islam is under general suspicion is thus reinforced through the tweet.

Example 49 (openborders 62):

**4,000 Jihadi gunmen** means they must have **4,000 guns** at the ready. How could that happen in the EU? #openborders

Apart from being referred to with negative words, refugees can also be associated with negative characteristics and qualities. Refugees are described as *flooding into Europe* and *swarming across #Europe*. The depictions of refugees as natural disasters (flood) or a pestilence (insect swarms) are metaphors. Moreover, migration is depicted as an invasion (Example 50) and refugees are associated with terrorism (Example 51). The author of the following example claims, for instance, that the situation, referring to the immigration of refugees, should not be called *immigration* because, according to the author, it is an uncontrolled invasion. An invasion is generally considered an unwelcome intrusion and associated with a large number of people. Migrants are thus depicted as a threat to Europe. The tweet is supported by the additional hashtags, #Schengen (the name of the European treaty which regulates border control within the EU), #EU, #immigrationtoEurope, #exodus, and #openborders.

Example 50 (openborders 67):

It's not #immigration, it's an **uncontrolled #invasion**. #Schengen #EU  
#immigrationtoEurope #**exodus** #openborders

Another user concludes, supported by a story and a picture collage, that refugees pose a terror threat.

Example 51 (openborders 57):

**He came to Europe by boat. One month later slaughtered 21 people** in a Tunisian Museum #openborders pic.twitter.com/Aw41u56xDV

The author claims that one of the perpetrators responsible for the March 2015 terror attack in Tunisia had previously entered Europe by boat, which implies that he came as a refugee. This claim is supported by a collage of four images. The two top images show the upper body of a man with a hoodie making the victory sign and looking into the camera. The bottom left image shows a rubber raft filled with people of color, suggesting it is a boat with refugees. The bottom right image is a scene from a video recording showing three men, one of whom carrying a rifle or machine gun. The tweet suggests that the person on the top is one of the people on the boat and also one of the people shown in the recording; however, the collage does not align. In the top right image, the person's arm is resting on a gray ship's rail and the background suggests an overcast sky. No one on the orange rubber raft in the bottom left image resembles the man in the top images and the weather is sunny.

### **Argumentation and perspectivization**

Quoting sources is a common strategy used to support an argument. Tweets with #openborders quote right-wing sources such as the online right-wing political website *FrontPage Magazine* or the right-wing news and opinion website *Conservative Post*. The following example contains an appeal to the world and to America to wake up.

Example 52 (openborders 24):

<http://conservativepost.com/and-so-it-beginsisis-flag-among-refugees-in-germany-fighting-the-police-pictures/> #ISIS #Europe #OpenBorders #WakeUpWorld #WakeUpAmerica

In the tweet, open borders and pro-refugee policies are considered a threat to the national security since refugees in Germany are allegedly waving an ISIS flag and fighting the police, as reported by the website *Conservative Post*. Refugees are thus in general associated with ISIS, which also invokes fear and depicts refugees as a general threat. Users also include numbers or report about news stories to criticize the concept of open borders as in Example 49 and Example 51. Moreover, they are depicted as actively violent because within the sentence or clause they are the grammatical agents as in Example 51 (i.e., refugees fighting police).

The topic of threat is also evident in the following example.

Example 53 (openborders 14):

#multiculturalism #openborders **let's import the third world & their conflicts. kebabs vs kurds.** GRAPHIC <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=522108844605728>

The user sarcastically expresses the concern that open borders may lead to the import of local problems: *let's import the third world & their conflicts. Kebabs vs kurds* refers to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Turks are called *kebabs*, which is a pejorative expression as it reduces the Turkish population to a food item and thus contributes to the negative stereotype of the Turkish population. Moreover, through the use of the juxtaposition the author uses a generalization to describe two diverse ethnicities. The tweet also consists of a link to a video posted on Facebook prefaced by a warning in capital letters that the content is graphic. The video begins with people peacefully marching in a street waving flags with symbols of the *Kurdistan Workers' Party* (PKK), a Kurdish militant organization. The video then continues with a brief segment in which a car drives with fast speed into a group of people leaving many severely injured. The last and longest part of the video shows a wounded man lying on the street surrounded by people who are trying to stop his bleeding. In the last part, the people speak German. The location of the first and second part cannot be determined. The caption of the video suggests that PKK terrorists were



responsible for both the car attack and the injuries of the man. According of the structure of the tweet and the supporting video, the promoting of multiculturalism and open borders leads to more violence in Europe and thus constitutes a threat to the safety of the people. The tweet can therefore be understood as a criticism of open-border policies.

Even though the criticism of politicians is not a common feature in this dataset, there is one tweet that calls for the United Nations to be disbanded due to their inability to fight ISIS. The hashtag *Openborders* is used as the subject of the clause *coming to a country near you*. *Open borders* is thus used as a metonymy. Not the open borders themselves are coming but the consequences of open borders, that is, migrants who could potentially belong to ISIS.

Example 54 (openborders 160):

#UnitedNations should be disbanded, they have done nothing abt #Isis #**Openborders coming to a country near you** #ukpol #eupol #tcot #auspol

Criticism is not only addressed to politicians or intergovernmental organizations. The following tweet is addressing those who support open borders and requests that they remove their locks and open their doors to everyone. The user criticizes advocates of open borders for being hypocritical by making an analogy and assuming that they would not be willing to live without locks and welcome everyone to their houses. This tweet addresses the concern that open borders would lead to more migrants and thus foreigners who may pose a security risk to one's belongings and potentially even one's life.

Example 55 (openborders 63):

**All who believe in #openborders should first remove all locks and open their own doors to all.** Any less is hypocrisy.

## Semiotic and multimodal resources

As stated before, tweets may contain a variety of semiotic and multimodal resources that can contribute to meaning-making processes and establish intertextual or interdiscursive references. As in the following tweet, the use of multiple modes may help contextualize the text.

Example 56 (openborders 59):

Let's hope it's **not just your hearts bleeding, with our new found arrivals**  
#openborders #UKIP pic.twitter.com/CSjfGMZOyB

*Let's hope it's not just your hearts bleeding* is a play on pro-refugee positions that express empathy toward the difficult situation that refugees face when trying to reach the EU. The author uses the figurative expression *bleeding of hearts*, which likely derived from the conventional expression *bleeding heart liberal*, to allude to actual bleeding and thus injury and potentially death caused by *our new found arrivals*. While the inclusion of #*openborders* contributes to the construction of threat, #*UKIP* seems to represent a positioning and alignment of the author's political positions. UKIP stands for *UK Independence Party*, a right-wing populist political party in the UK with nationalist positions against immigration and multiculturalism. The attached meme reinforces the depiction of refugees posing a threat to Europe. The heading of the meme says in capital letters *WELCOME TO EUROPE*. The sub-heading claims *They are not refugees and not migrants They are TERRORISTS*. The headings are supported by four images. The arrangement of the images as well as the color combination and captions suggest that the two images on the left represent one person and the two images on the right represent another person. In both cases, the pictures of the men captioned *2015 Refugee in Europe* are juxtaposed with images of men carrying a machine gun or rifle. The caption of the left image says *2014 ISIS* and thus claims that the person who is holding the machine gun was an ISIS fighter in 2014 and came to Europe as a refugee in 2015. This is paralleled in the two images on the right. According to

the caption, the man in the image was part of the Al Nusra Front, a Salafist terrorist organization, and also came to Europe as a refugee in 2015. The meme in combination with the text invokes fear as it suggests that terrorist fighters come to Europe disguised as refugees, taking advantage of open borders, and pose a threat to Europeans. This threat may be perceived as a real one, in the light of previous terror attacks in Europe that were claimed by ISIS.

As described above, hashtags may be used for various reasons and purposes. The following example demonstrates an excessive use of hashtags.

Example 57 (openborders 32):

@zerohedge #Next #Step #Anyone #Opposing #New #World #Order #is #racist #for #denying #openborders #and #wanting #to #protect #sovereignty

The tweet is a response to a tweet by @zerohedge quoting a report by the BBC that Germany is reintroducing border control and sending riot police to support the local authorities handling the influx of refugees. In the response tweet, every single word is preceded by a hashtag. This unusual format may have been chosen to support the sarcastic tone of the tweet. The user sarcastically claims that the next step, referring to the tweet by @zerohedge, would be that anyone who opposes the so-called new world order would be called racist. By new world order the author probably means open borders and the nation-states' loss of sovereignty; criticizing these concepts, that is, denying open borders and wanting to protect state sovereignty, means being racist. Through this sarcastic exaggeration, the tweet can be understood as a sarcastic criticism of liberal positions.

## **#MerkelsTote**

After describing the datasets relevant to the first timeframe in the summer of 2015, the following sections focus on the second timeframe, that is, December 2016.

## Referential/nomination

In the #*MerkelsTote* dataset, the description of refugees is connected to their relationship to Chancellor Merkel. Refugees and asylum seekers are referred to as *ihre Asylanten* (English: *her asylum seekers*), *Merkels Gäste* (English: *Merkel's guests*) (Example 58), *Merkels neue Kinder* (English: *Merkel's new children*) (Example 59), and *Adoptivsöhne* (English: *adoptive sons*). The use of the possessive determiner *her* attributes ownership and thus responsibility to Merkel. The depiction of refugees as Merkel's guests implies that she invited them. Germany's suspension of the Dublin procedures in August 2015 was often portrayed as an invitation to the masses to come to Germany, although the suspension of the procedures was to be applied to Syrian refugees only (ZeitOnline, 2015). The expressions *adoptive sons* and *Merkel's new children* go even further as regards the relationship between Merkel and refugees; the users use the reference to Merkel as mother and caregiver. The fact that the user chooses adoptive sons instead of adoptive children also hints at the perception that refugees are mostly young males.

Example 58 (MerkelsTote 6):  
#**MerkelsGäste** ? #**Adoptivsöhne** von #Merkel !  
Alle auf den #Merkelmussweg !  
Zuviel #MerkelsTote !

#**Merkel'sguests** ? #**adoptivesons** of #Merkel !  
All to #Merkelmustgo !  
Too many #Merkel'sdead!

The references to refugees as Merkel's adopted or new children suggest, similarly to the #*wirschaffendas* dataset, prioritization of refugees over German citizens. Furthermore, Merkel is represented as the guardian and thus responsible for the actions of her *new children*. In the following example, the author claims that Merkel's new children are allowed to play war while the politically hypercorrect are worried about the rise in right-wing populism.

Example 59 (MerkelsTote 130):

**#MerkelsneueKinder** dürfen **hier** **#Krieg spielen**. Gutmenschen haben Angst vor mehr **#Rechtspopulismus**. **#krankeWelt** **#MerkelsTote** **#BerlinAttack**

**#MerkelsTote** **#BerlinAttack** / **#Merkel'snewchildren** are allowed to **play #war here**. The politically hypercorrect are afraid of more right-wing populism. **#sickworld** **#Merkel'sdead** **#BerlinAttack**

*Here* is a deictic expression and refers to Germany, given that the tweet is written in German and references the Berlin terrorist attack. The user employs irony to criticize the consequences of Merkel's pro-refugee policies as well as to criticize the do-gooders who are more concerned about right-wing populism than the violent actions of refugees. The ironic tone is supported by the description of refugees as children who play war as well as the hashtag *sick world*. Despite or maybe because of the ironic tone, the user also invokes fear. The statement implies that refugees engage in violent activities here, in Germany and Europe, and thus represent a danger for the German people and the country's safety. While the threat of right-wing populism is downplayed, the user stresses the danger posed by refugees, which reinforces the negative presentation of the other while deemphasizing any negative characteristics of right-wing discourses.

As in the *#wirschaffendas* dataset, a number of tweets contain pejorative references to Chancellor Merkel and other politicians. For instance, Merkel is called a career politician implying she is more interested in her re-election than the wellbeing of the people she represents. She is also ironically referred to as a *professional for uncontrolled mass migration*. The term *Fachkraft* (English: *professional, skilled employee*) is a reference to the often-discussed labor shortage of qualified professionals in Germany. Some politicians and economists argued that refugees may help fill the marketplace demands. The user of the tweet portrays Merkel as a professional for uncontrolled mass migration. The reference to Merkel is established through the

noun phrase, *the #professional for uncontrolled #massmigration in the #Chancellory*, because the Chancellory is the location of the German Chancellor's office.

Example 60 (MerkelsTote 82):

Wann kapiert die **#Fachkraft für unkontrollierte #Völkerwanderung im #Kanzleramt** dass Schluss ist? Mehr **#MerkelsGäste, mehr #MerkelsTote #AfD**

When will the **#professional for uncontrolled #massmigration in the #Chancellory** understand that it's enough? More **#Merkel'sguests, more #Merkel'sdead #AfD**

Additionally, the tweet contains the causal construction *more guests, more dead* to establish a cause-effect relation. The more migrants Merkel invites (*Merkel's guests*), the more people die because of Merkel. The hashtag *Merkel'sdead* thus also portrays the Chancellor as responsible for the victims of the attack.

Even though she is usually not explicitly called *murderer*, some tweets include *#mörderraute*. Mörderraute (English: *murderer rhombus*) is a word play on *Merkel-Raute* (English: *Merkel rhombus*), Merkel's signature hand gesture. By replacing Merkel with *murderer*, Merkel is implicitly called a murderer and hence to blame for the victims of the terrorist attack. Other politicians are also described as bootlickers and accomplices.

### **Predication**

Many refugees who arrived in Europe and Germany in 2015 came from Muslim-majority countries like Syria (Park, 2015), and even though some may not be (practicing) Muslims, refugees can be under general suspicion to belong to radical Islamic groups such as ISIS and thus to pose a threat to Europe's security. Tweets which claim *Islam is evil* support such stereotyping. Furthermore, values and traditions from the refugees' countries of origin are depicted negatively as in the following example.

Example 61 (MerkelsTote 26):

**Syrische Sitten** sind einfach nur **abartig**. Wie können #Grüne darin eine #Bereicherung sehen? #merkelstote

**Syrian customs** are just **abnormal**. How can #theGreens consider that #enrichment? #merkel'sdead

The user claims that Syrian customs are abnormal and disgusting, suggesting superiority of German customs, values, and traditions. It is unclear what exactly about Syrian customs leads the user to make this claim, but it can be assumed that the user refers to differences between German and Syrian traditions and values portrayed in various media outlets as regards the treatment of women or the state of law. The author further questions *the Green Party's* positive evaluation of multiculturalism. The denial of cultural enrichment through foreign customs not only serves to reinforce the notion of a threat to German customs; by adding *#merkel'sdead*, the user connects multiculturalism with a threat to the German people.

Apart from negative associations with refugees and migrants, Chancellor Merkel and the German government's refugee policies are the predominant targets. Government policies and practices are referred to as *gesetzeslose (sic) Grenzöffnung* (English: *unlawful opening of the borders*) (Example 75) and *irrsinnige Invasionspolitik* (English: *insane politics of invasion*) (Example 79). Users inaccurately claim that borders were opened against the law. Firstly, Germany only borders countries participating in the Schengen Agreement, which abolishes border controls and allows freedom of movement. Secondly, EU member states are allowed to suspend the Dublin Regulation by applying the "sovereignty clause" on humanitarian grounds. This means that a member state may examine an asylum application even if it is not its responsibility (EU, 2013). The portrayal of an unlawful opening of the borders simplifies the complexity of EU policies and contributes to the scare tactics of right-wing discourses. These tactics are also reflected in statements that portray migration as an invasion because it invokes

the image of intrusion and threat. By calling government practices concerning asylum seekers and refugees *insane politics of invasion*, the author suggests that the government is passively watching the invasion of Germany and Europe or even actively helping the so-called invaders.

As head of government, Chancellor Merkel is also directly addressed by criticism and insults and blamed for the victims of the terrorist attack in Berlin. She is called *incomprehensible and disgusting* (Example 63) and a *stupid, toothless, low energy career politician (sic)* (Example 62).

Example 62 (MerkelsTote 148):

#Merkel is prime example of **stupid, toothless, low energy career politician**.  
#prayforberlin #MerkelsTote #Berlin

Example 63 (MerkelsTote 143):

...**unfassbar und ekelhaft**,  
dass sind SIE MERKEL! sie haben überhaupt nichts kappiert! #MerkelsTote  
#Breitscheidplatz #BerlinAttack #merkel

..**incomprehensible and disgusting**,

that is YOU MERKEL! you don't understand anything! #Merkel'sDead

*Unfassbar und ekelhaft* was the response of a German politician of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), Ralf Stegner, to the original tweet of the far-right politician who called the victims of the attack *Merkels Tote*. The user takes up the words of the tweet intended to criticize the statement of the right-wing politician to criticize Merkel and thus establishes intertextuality. Although Merkel and Stegner are not in the same political party – Merkel is the leader of the liberal-conservative Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) – both of their political parties built a coalition to form the federal government between 2013 and 2017.



## Argumentation

In order to support the negative nomination and predication strategies employed in right-wing discourses, users quote a variety of online sources including mainstream newspapers, tabloids, and right-wing websites. In the following two tweets, reports from the conservative German daily newspaper, *Die Welt*, and the Swiss-German regional daily newspaper, *Basler Zeitung*, are referenced. Both can be considered mainstream media. In the first example, the author uses the report about a homeless person who was set on fire by a group of young refugees from Syria and Libya to reinforce the apparent danger that emanates from Syrians. The user not only refers to the young refugees as Merkel's children, but claims that it would be obvious that the crime was committed by Syrians by adding *who else?!*

Example 64 (MerkelsTote 28):

#Obdachloser in #Berlin von #Merkel s Kindern #angezündet – #Syrer – wer auch sonst?! – #MerkelsTote – WELT

<https://www.welt.de/vermishtes/article160619320/Polizei-verhoert-Tatverdaechtige-Ihr-Status-wird-geprueft.html>

#homelessperson in #Berlin #setonfire by #Merkel 's children – #Syrians – who else?! – #Merkel'sDead – WELT [Link to article]

Even though the content of the tweet is not related to the Berlin terrorist attack, the hashtags *#Berlin* and *#Merkel'sDead* put the crime into the context of the attack and contribute to the construction of a larger threat by Syrian refugees.

The second example quotes a Swiss journalist, the editor in chief of *Basler Zeitung*, who writes “It is true: They are Merkel's Dead,” arguing that the Chancellor generally carries responsibility for institutions like the police and intelligence services who failed greatly before and during the investigations of the Berlin terrorist attack.

Example 65 (MerkelsTote 51):

#MerkelsTote <http://bazonline.ch/21047209> und das schreibt nicht die #afd, sondern ein schweizer Journalist. #Amri #umdenken #tunesier #berlin

#Merkel'sDead [Link to article] **and that's not from the #afd, but from a Swiss journalist.** #Amri #rethink #tunesian #berlin

The main point of this polarizing and almost inflammatory article is a general critique of pro-EU politicians and EU policies such as the freedom of movement. It is important to note that Switzerland is not a member of the EU but participates in the Schengen agreement. The author of the tweet as well as several other Twitter users utilize the assumed credibility of the journalist to legitimize the blaming of Merkel as the culprit.

Apart from mainstream media, users quote tabloids like the British *Daily Mail*, the German *BILD*, and the Swiss-German *Blick*, all of them known for sensationalist and unreliable stories.

Example 66 (MerkelsTote 39):

Man dresses as **ISIS fighter** and walks straight across German border control  
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4064256/Stupid-dangerous-Masked-man-parading-SIS-flag-films-walking-straight-German-border-taunts-officials-non-existent-security-checks.html> #Germany #MerkelsTote #tcot #p2

The story from the *Daily Mail* about a person dressed as an ISIS fighter who crosses the Danish-German border without being checked supports the argument of lack of border control and, consequently, the potential security threat. The action portrayed in the article as well as the tweet create fear, since anyone, including potential criminals, can easily cross borders between European member states, provided one resides within or has entered the Schengen area. The freedom of movement is a founding principle of the EU and fundamental to the goals and purposes of the political and economic union. Even though the author of the tweet does not directly criticize the lack of border control, the author does quote the tabloid's story and wording (*ISIS fighter*), which clearly contributes to nationalist, anti-EU sentiments. Interestingly, the user also includes two hashtags that are generally associated with the US-American context, #tcot

(Top Conservatives on Twitter) and #p2 (Progressives 2.0). Both hashtags are frequently used on Twitter to promote conservative or progressive ideas. The inclusion of these “US-American” hashtags may be a common strategy employed by the user. Within the sample, two tweets were written by the author of Example 66 and both included the two hashtags along with a link to a newspaper article and additional hashtags pertinent to the content of the article. It could be that the author is a German expat living in the US or a US national who is interested in the European context.

The following tweet quotes an article published by the Swiss-German tabloid, *Blick*.

Example 67 (MerkelsTote 49):

**DIE Bestandsaufnahme schlechthin: <http://bit.ly/2itOgDq> #berlin #terror #staatsversagen #merkelstote #breitscheidplatz #Willkommenskultur**

Taking the **REAL** stock: [Link to *Blick* article] #berlin #terror #**governmentfailure** #**merkel'sdead** #**breitscheidplatz** #**Welcomingculture**

The article is entitled *Deutscher Winter 2016* (English: *German Winter 2016*), which is a reference to the phrase *Deutscher Herbst* (English: *German Autumn*). German Autumn refers to the fall of 1977, which was marked by a series of terrorist events carried out by the West-German terrorist group, *Red Army Faction* (RAF), leading to an undeclared state of emergency in West Germany (Kraushaar, 2007). The article thus indirectly compares the fall of 1977 with the winter of 2016, which magnifies the scope of the 2016 terrorist attack. Moreover, the article condemns how the terrorist attack is depicted in Germany and claims that politicians and media downplay the connections between the summer 2015 events and the 2016 terrorist attack. In the tweet, the link to the article is preceded by an expression of approval indicated by the capitalized definite article and the German adverb *schlechthin* which supports the emphasis of the definite article. The tweet also includes the buzzwords *Berlin*, *terror*, *government failure*, *Merkel's dead*, *Breitscheidplatz*, and *welcoming culture*, which function as key words, for example, for the

location (*Berlin, Breitscheidplatz*) and the evaluation stance (*government failure, Merkel's dead*).

Mainstream media and tabloids are consumed by a large number of people. Right-wing websites, on the other hand, may not reach the same amount of people, but through the dissemination of articles from right-wing outlets on social media, they may reach a wider audience, especially if their name cannot clearly be identified as far-right. Examples of seemingly neutral websites are *Die Achse des Guten* (English: *The Axis of the Good*) and *Politikstube* (English: *parlor of politics*). The website *Politikstube* has been classified as right-wing populist by the *Amadeu Antonion Foundation*, a German foundation against racism and far-right politics. The blog *Die Achse des Guten*, a reference to President Bush's phrase *Axis of Evil*, self-identifies as neoconservative but German linguist Schiffer (2010) identified it as anti-Islamist. When users quote websites like [achgut.com](http://achgut.com) and [politikstube.com](http://politikstube.com), they contribute to the dissemination of right-wing discourses and the construction of fear and danger, particularly when adopting pertinent vocabulary as in the following example.

Example 68 (MerkelsTote 25):

#MerkelsTote und der **Marathon des Elends**, den **ihre** Politik über die Welt bringt.  
[http://www.achgut.com/artikel/schaut\\_mal\\_was\\_mein\\_fluechtling\\_alles\\_kann](http://www.achgut.com/artikel/schaut_mal_was_mein_fluechtling_alles_kann)

#Merkel'sDead and the **marathon of misery**, which **her** politics bring to the world.  
[Link to article]

The user references an article that criticizes the destabilization of the German social security system, the lack of refugees' integration into German society, and the ideologization of political correctness. The tweet cites the article's phrase *marathon of misery* and claims that this misery is caused by Merkel's politics, indicated by the use of the possessive determiner *her*, and endangers Germany and the entire world.

As the hashtag *Merkel's Dead* suggests, most tweets contain some sort of criticism of Chancellor Merkel. She is portrayed as responsible for the attack and consequently the victims as illustrated in the following example.

Example 69 (MerkelsTote 50):

12 Todesopfer in Berlin #Merkelstote **Frau Kanzlerin Sie sind verantwortlich!**  
[pic.twitter.com/PGT3aVwNla](https://pic.twitter.com/PGT3aVwNla)

12 casualties in Berlin #Merkel'sdead **Mrs Chancellor you are responsible!**  
[pic.twitter.com/PGT3aVwNla](https://pic.twitter.com/PGT3aVwNla)

Merkel is directly addressed as *Frau Kanzlerin* and with the formal personal pronoun *Sie*. Most users refer to the Chancellor in third person singular and do not use politeness strategies such as honorifics or the official title *Bundeskanzlerin*, here abbreviated to *Kanzlerin*. These politeness strategies allow the user to directly address the criticism to the Chancellor. Additionally, the tweet is supported by an image that shows two concrete barriers in an empty pedestrian street at night. The words *DANKE* and *MERKEL* respectively are written in capital letters on the barriers. In the bottom right corner of the image, one can see the words *Identitäre Bewegung* (English: *Identitarian movement*), the name of a white nationalist movement. At first glance, the image is not directly related to the content of the tweet, however, after the attack some Christmas markets installed barriers for protection purposes. Even though the words on the barriers seem to align with the politeness strategies found in the tweet itself, they are examples of mock politeness and to be understood ironically; due to Merkel's policies, pedestrian areas now need to be protected from vehicles driving into groups of people.

Other users request that Chancellor Merkel assume responsibility without explicitly stating what that would mean as in Example 70, or they directly demand her resignation by using *#Merkelmussweg* (English: *Merkel must go*) as in Example 71. In both cases, the syntactical

structure of the tweet points to the reason of the request for resignation. The statement *They are #Merkel'sdead* is followed by the request and thus functions as the rationale.

Example 70 (MerkelsTote 47):

Es sind #MerkelsTote – **Sie muß jetzt politische Verantwortung für ihren verfehlten Kurs in der Flüchtlingspolitik übernehmen!**

They are #Merkel'sdead – **She must assume responsibility for her failed course of refugee policies!**

Example 71 (MerkelsTote 172):

Es sind #MerkelsTote **#Merkelmussweg**

They are #Merkel'sdead **#Merkelmustgo**

By tweeting, *They are #Merkel'sdead*, users also agree with the statement itself and thus with the AfD politician's original evaluation of the situation. Agreement can also be expressed by retweeting the original tweet or by quoting the Swiss-German article published in *Basler Zeitung* as described above.

Merkel is not the only politician who is criticized and considered responsible. Politicians of other mainstream political parties, particularly of The Green Party, which supports pro-refugee policies and embraces multiculturalism, are also held responsible as shown in the following tweet.

Example 72 (MerkelsTote 5):

Sind ned #MerkelsTote, **sond #SimonePetersTote**. #Amri wär längst wieder zuHause gewesn, **wenn @Die\_Gruenen es ned verhindert hätt**

They're not #Merkel'sDead, **but rather #SimonePeter'sDead**. #Amri would've been home already **if @Die\_Gruenen didn't prevent it**

The user claims that not Angela Merkel but Simone Peter is responsible for the victims, since her political party, The Green Party, opposes deportations to Tunisia in principle due to human right

violations. The attacker was in fact Tunisian. His asylum application had been denied and he was supposed to be deported to Tunisia, which never happened for a variety of reasons.

### **Perspectivization**

As described in the previous section, Chancellor Merkel is portrayed as the main culprit and blamed for the attack and the victims. Users depict her as the responsible actor who allowed migrants from Muslim-majority countries to enter Germany and who subsequently facilitated terrorist attacks. This portrayal of Merkel as being actively responsible is supported text-internally by grammatical structures and by references, for example, to Merkel having blood on her hands. These references are mostly expressed visually and will be discussed in the subsequent section. As regards the grammatical structures, users employ syntax, personal pronouns, and modality to express agency as in Example 73, Example 74, and Example 75.

Example 73 (MerkelsTote 50):

12 Todesopfer in Berlin #Merkelstote **Frau Kanzlerin Sie sind verantwortlich!**  
pic.twitter.com/PGT3aVwNla

12 casualties in Berlin #Merkel'sdead **Mrs Chancellor you are responsible!**  
pic.twitter.com/PGT3aVwNla

Example 74 (MerkelsTote 47):

**Es sind** #MerkelsTote – **Sie muß** jetzt politische Verantwortung für **ihren verfehlten Kurs** in der Flüchtlingspolitik übernehmen!

**They are** #Merkel'sDead – **She must** assume responsibility for **her failed** course of refugee policies!

Example 75 (MerkelsTote 63):

Und vergiss nicht, dass **sie noch lebten ohne Merkels gesetzeslose Grenzöffnung**  
#MerkelsTote

And don't forget that **they would still be alive without Merkel's illegal opening of the borders** #Merkel'sDead

In the first example, the Chancellor is directly addressed with the formal personal pronoun *Sie* (English: *you*, formal) and the form of address *Frau Kanzlerin* (English: *Mrs Chancellor*). She is thus the direct addressee of the criticism. In the second example, Merkel is referred to in third person. The use of the modal verb *must* expresses responsibility and urgency. The possessive determiner *her* in connection with *failed course of refugee policies* contributes to the construction of Merkel being responsible for refugee policies and hence the negative consequences. The third example uses the genitive construction *Merkel's illegal opening of the borders* to also support the construction of Merkel as the culprit as it suggests that she alone was responsible for opening the borders, which enabled the perpetrator to enter Germany and carry out his attack.

Refugees are also constructed as culprits. The syntactical constructions of Example 76 and Example 59 suggest agency on the part of refugees. Even though the first example contains a passive construction due to German headline conventions and the frequent use of passive constructions in the German language, the action itself attributes agency to the Syrian refugees.

Example 76 (MerkelsTote 28):

#Obdachloser in #Berlin von #Merkel s Kindern #angezündet – #Syrer – wer auch sonst?! – #MerkelsTote – WELT

<https://www.welt.de/vermischtes/article160619320/Polizei-verhoert-Tatverdaechtige-Ihr-Status-wird-geprueft.html> ...

#homelessperson in #Berlin #setonfire by #Merkel 's children – #Syrians – who else?! – #Merkel'sDead – WELT [Link to article]

In the next example, the use of the modal verb *to be allowed* expresses permission, which is granted by Merkel as she is portrayed as the refugees' mother and thus holds "parental authority" allowing *her new children* to play war. The statement is juxtaposed with the pro-refugee supporters' fear of right-wing populism. This ironic juxtaposition emphasizes the threat of refugees and de-emphasizes the threat of right-wing discourses.



Example 77 (MerkelsTote 130):

**#MerkelsneueKinder dürfen** hier #Krieg spielen. Gutmenschen haben Angst vor mehr  
#Rechtspopulismus. #krankeWelt  
#MerkelsTote #BerlinAttack

**#Merkel'snewchildren are allowed to** play #war here. The politically hypercorrect are  
afraid of more right-wing populism. #sickworld  
#Merkel'sdead #BerlinAttack

Another common feature found in the data is the reference to Christmas. The attack occurred few days before Christmas at a Christmas market. In Germany, Christmas is celebrated not only as a religious but also cultural holiday. More than 50% of the German population affiliates with either the Roman-Catholic or the Protestant church (fowid, 2017), however, many people who are not affiliated with Christianity also celebrate Christmas as a family holiday (Braunmüller, 2017). Moreover, it is common to visit one of approximately 1,500 Christmas markets, set up in many German cities during Advent with more than 80 million visitors yearly (Ift, 2013, as cited in Sakschewski & Paul, 2017). Several users include references to Christmas. While some only use the hashtag *Merkel Weihnachten* (English: *Merkel Christmas*), others include more religious references as in the following example. The tweet includes a line of a popular German hymn which is commonly used during Advent in both Catholic and Protestant churches (Fischer, 2007). The first line says *Macht hoch die Tür, die Tor macht weit* (English: *Make high the doors, the gates make even wider*).

Example 78 (MerkelsTote 129):

**#Merkel Christmas wünsche ich, macht hoch die Tür, das Tor mach noch weiter . . .**  
#BerlinAttack #MerkelsTote #breitscheitplatz

**#Merkel Christmas I wish, make high the door, the gate make even wider . . .**  
.#BerlinAttack #Merkel'sDead #breitscheitplatz

The user modifies the line by adding the comparative *noch weiter* (English: *even wider*). This example not only contains the reference to one of the most popular German Advent songs but

also an implicit critique of open-door policies as regards migration. This critique is evident because of the comparative *even wider* and the inclusion of the additional hashtags, *#BerlinAttack*, *#Merkel'sDead*, and *#breitscheidplatz*.

After a tragedy such as a terrorist attack, social media like Twitter are often utilized to express and share emotions. While some users express anger, many also voice empathy, for instance, with *#prayforBerlin*. In the following example, however, *#IprayforBerlin* is not meant as sign of sympathy with the victims and their families but instead it is used to criticize migration policies. The user does not pray for the victims but for the *insane politics of invasion* to end and thus exploits the expression of empathy in order to criticize pro-refugee policies.

Example 79 (MerkelsTote 133):

**#IprayforBerlin**, dass diese irrsinnige **Invasionspolitik jetzt endlich aufhört, dafür bete ich.** #breidscheidtplatz #BerlinAttack #MerkelsTote

**#IprayforBerlin** that these insane **politics of invasion finally stop, that's what I pray for** # breidscheidtplatz #BerlinAttack #Merkel'sDead

### **Semiotic and multimodal resources**

Twitter users can avail themselves of a variety of semiotic and multimodal resources to create meaning. In the *#MerkelsTote* dataset, two tweets include emojis and four tweets exhibit a creative format, for example, in the form of letter capitalization as illustrated in the following two examples. In both cases, capitalization is used as emphasis.

Example 80 (MerkelsTote 143):

...unfassbar und ekelhaft,  
dass sind **SIE MERKEL!** sie haben überhaupt nichts kappiert! #MerkelsTote  
#Breitscheidplatz #BerlinAttack #merkel

..incomprehensible and disgusting,  
that is **YOU MERKEL!** you don't understand anything! #Merkel'sDead  
#Breitscheidplatz #BerlinAttack #merkel

Example 81 (MerkelsTote 49):

**DIE** Bestandsaufnahme schlechthin: <http://bit.ly/2itOgDq> #berlin #terror #staatsversagen  
#merkelstote #breitscheidplatz #Willkommenskultur

Taking the **REAL** stock: [Link to Blick article] #berlin #terror #governmentfailure  
#merkel'sdead #breitscheidplatz #Welcomingculture

Another common resource for meaning-making is the use of images. Within the dataset, 26 tweets include an image. Several of these images contain a reference to Merkel having blood on her hands supporting the claim that she is to blame for the attack and hence responsible for the victims as shown in the following two examples. The first example contains two hashtags, *#merkelresignnow* and *#merkel'sdead*, and an image collage that consists of three images of Merkel using a black virtual reality device with googly eyes and one image of a hand covered in blood in front of black background. The constellation of the images creates a sequence from top left to bottom right. In the first image, Merkel holds the device with her left hand and her smiling face is directed to the right. In the second image, she holds the device in front of her eyes and seems to look through the device at her right hand. The third image shows a hand covered in blood and based on the sequence of the images, it is implied that she sees her own hand through the device. In the last image, she looks grim-faced slightly to the left as someone takes the device from her. While she expressed excitement in the first image, her facial expression seemed to have changed after looking through the device and seeing her own hand covered in blood, as implied by the image (Figure 3).

Example 82 (MerkelsTote 83):  
#merkelresignnow #merkelstote pic.twitter.com/ytNFr7ngpX



Figure 3. Tweet “MerkelsTote 83.”

The second example shows a portrait of Merkel and two hands, which are supposed to be hers based on the position in the image (Figure 4). Her face, upper body, and hands are splattered with blood. The image also contains two black ribbons which frame the text *#PrayForBerlin 19.12.2016. #PrayforBerlin* was commonly used after the terrorist attack as a sign of empathy. The ribbons and the text are on a background that shows the colors of the German flag, black, red, and gold, red being the dominant color covering the other two colors as if the color had spilled. The text of the tweet consists of nine hashtags denoting the location of the attack (*#BreitscheidPlatz*, *#BerlinAttack*, *#PrayBerlin*, and *#PrayforBerlin*), the terror attack itself (*#BerlinAttack* and *#Terror*), a critique of Merkel (*#MerkelMussWeg*, *#MerkelsTote*, and *#MerkelChristmas*), as well as an expression of empathy (*#PrayBerlin*, *#PrayforBerlin*). The

excessive use of hashtags enables the user to make the tweet and image widely visible because it could be seen by anyone who follows any of these hashtags.

Example 83 (MerkelsTote 80):

#BreitscheidPlatz #BerlinAttack #Terror #MerkelMussWeg #MerkelsTote #Merkel  
#MerkelChristmas #PrayBerlin #PrayForBerlin pic.twitter.com/HazpZppYt7



Figure 4. Tweet “MerkelsTote 80.”

As in the *#wirschaffendas* dataset, users also allude to Merkel being from East Germany as shown in the following example. The author claims that on Merkel’s nightstand there would be a book by Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the *Socialist Unity Party* (SED) and most powerful politician of the GDR. The book is entitled *My 100 best propaganda ploys*. The GDR was known for political propaganda. The connection between Honecker’s propaganda ploys and Merkel’s bedtime reading implies that Merkel also uses propaganda to manipulate the people. This form of criticism is reinforced by the inclusion of the hashtags, particularly *#governmentfailure* and *#merkelmustgo*.

Example 84 (MerkelsTote 31):

**Ein Blick auf #Merkels Nachttisch:** #merkel #staatsversagen #merkelmussweg #breitscheidplatz #merkelstote #berlin #amri pic.twitter.com/B25IiV3n7C

**A view of #Merkel's night table:** #merkel #governmentfailure #merkelmustgo #breitscheidplatz #merkel'sdead #berlin #amri pic.twitter.com/B25IiV3n7C

## **#BerlinAttack**

The last hashtag that is analyzed exhibits trends similar to the other datasets as regards how refugees and politicians are called and which characteristics are associated with them. The findings are described in the following sections.

### **Referential/nomination and predication**

Refugees are referred to as Jihadists and Islamic terrorists that are being imported by Merkel. Consequently, they are characterized as dangerous and threatening to the safety of Europe and Germany. Danger, particularly to women, is also invoked by the blend *rapefugees* that is used by some users to refer to refugees (Example 85). The blending of rape and refugees establishes a semantic connection between the two and thus invokes fear and contributes to the construction of a negative image of refugees, which is reinforced by the categorization of migrants as Muslim invaders. References to invasion as well as to refugees as Muslims occur frequently in the dataset. The threat of a Muslim invasion culminates in the implementation of sharia law (Example 86).

Example 85 (BerlinAttack 132):

Could you watch your country burn in a sea of **rapefugees** and still sleep at night? **Merkel** somehow can. **The witch.** #BerlinAttack

Example 86 (BerlinAttack 30):

**#AngelaMerkel Welcomes** the **#muslim #invasion** & will make **#ShariaLaw** legal in **#Germany!** #BerlinAttack #SyrianRefugees #Cologne #Hamburg

Islam as a religion is criticized for being reactionary, radical, and dangerous to the values of Europe and Germany. A common theme among right-wing Europeans is the identification of the so-called common Judeo-Christian traditions (Wodak, 2015b). Muslim migrants are perceived as a threat to these traditions. In fact, Arab refugees are described as anti-Semitic (Example 87). Additionally, the legitimacy of the migrants' status as refugees is questioned by using quotation marks as in *Deport all 'refugees'* (Example 88).

Example 87 (BerlinAttack 110):

Merkel's idea to fix Ger's embarrassing past is by acceptng **1mn+ME Arab refugees- perhaps d most antisemitic ppl** since d Nazis #BerlinAttack

Example 88 (BerlinAttack 104):

Ban immigration from #Muslim countries. Deport all “**refugees**”. Scrub the Internet of all #Islamic propaganda. #BerlinAttack #Merkel

As in the previous datasets, Chancellor Merkel is held responsible for the *Muslim invasion* and threat to the German people. She is called *witch*, *murderer*, and *Mörderin* (English: *murderer*) and considered guilty of the terrorist attack and the victims (Example 89). As in the #MerkelsTote dataset, users also claim that she has blood on her hands, which represents her responsibility for the terrorist attack (Example 90).

Example 89 (BerlinAttack 90):

my mind is made up. Merkel is **guilty of those deaths and she will be guilty of more**. This is just the start. #BerlinAttack

Example 90 (BerlinAttack 98):

#BerlinAttack the **blood of these innocent people are on Merkel's hands**.

However, she is not only portrayed as guilty of the Berlin terrorist attack but also of the downfall of Europe, which is illustrated in Exmple 91. The tweet contains references to Brexit and right-wing political parties and their leading politicians in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. Additionally, the tweet includes an image that shows a person resembling Merkel sitting over

and choking a person lying on the floor. *EUROPE* is written on the right arm of the person on the floor suggesting that Merkel is choking Europe. A speech bubble pointing to Merkel reads in big capital letters *WIR SCHAFFEN DAS!* and in smaller letters *Angela Merkel, Rebbekah Kasner Jentsch<sup>2</sup>, Assassin of Europe, and Madre Terrorista*. Merkel is thus called *assassin of Europe* and *madre terrorista* (English: *terrorist mother*). The author-less image also includes several anti-EU hashtags and a paragraph about the downfall of Europe.

Example 91 (BerlinAttack 111):  
Angela #Merkel is a **murderer**.  
Remove her from office NOW.  
#AfD #FraukePetry  
#FN #MarineLePen  
#PVV #GeertWilders  
#BREXIT  
#BerlinAttack pic.twitter.com/ptz5vQPgDd

### **Argumentation and perspectivization**

Nomination and predication strategies of right-wing discourses are often strengthened by argumentative structures that imply danger, threat, and burden. Moreover, arguments are reinforced by presenting the perspective that the country and people, constructed as a homogeneous entity, are under attack. This serves the purpose of othering and facilitates the exclusion of the other. These features of right-wing discourses can also be found in tweets with #BerlinAttack. In the following tweets, the Berlin attack is directly connected to Germany's refugee policy, for which the German government and especially the Chancellor are blamed and

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<sup>2</sup> This reference to Angela Merkel could be found on Spanish language websites propagating conspiracy theories and is implicitly antisemitic. Merkel's parents' last names are Kasner and Jentsch. If she was from a Spanish-speaking country, Merkel could have her father's and her mother's last name and she may not have taken her first husband's name, Merkel. These websites also claim that Merkel is actually Jewish, which would explain the Hebrew first name, Rebbekah.



which is described as failed. Consequently, Merkel is blamed for the victims, and users request her resignation.

Example 92 (BerlinAttack 92):

**#BerlinAttack ist direkte Konsequenz der deutschen Flüchtlingspolitik.** Volle Verantwortung dafür trägt aktuelle Bundesregierung. #MerkelGeh!

**#BerlinAttack is the direct consequence of German refugee politics.** The current government is fully responsible for that. #MerkelGo!

Example 93 (BerlinAttack 59):

chancellor Merkel **should resign her failed refugee policy** and not vetting refugees RIP to all the #BerlinAttack victims

Users also make references to Merkel having blood on her hands. This reference is made within the text of the tweet via hashtag and by adding the image that was also used in Example 83, that is, a portrait of Merkel with her face, upper body, and hands splattered with blood, which visually reinforces the perspective of her being guilty of the victims.

Example 94 (BerlinAttack 87):

**#Berlinattack Angela Merkel should resign after her open door policy has caused so many deaths #Bloodonherhands** pic.twitter.com/kpSJGyiAi4

Most of the time, there is no direct addressee of a tweet. Merkel is mostly referred to in third person, with the exception of Example 92 which includes a direct request addressed to Merkel with *#MerkelGo!* In the following example, however, the user addresses the Polish people by tweeting *I want to apologize to the Polish people ...*

Example 95 (BerlinAttack 14):

I want to apologize to the Polish people for our **#refugee policy** Please help us to get rid of #Merkel ! #berlin #berlinAttack #Poland #cdu

Moreover, the Polish people are asked to help *us* get rid of Merkel. The user apologizes to the Polish people because it was a Polish truck that was hijacked and used for the attack. The Polish truck driver was shot before the attack occurred. Even though it is unclear how *the Polish people*

are supposed to help *us to get rid of #Merkel*, the user claims to speak for the German people by using *us*. This points to the construction of an imagined homogeneous people.

In order to make their statements and claims more credible and thus support their positions, users also cite experts and media sources. As in the other datasets, mainstream media, tabloids, and right-wing websites are referenced. The difference between objective reporting and biased opinions may not always be evident to social media users due to the abundance of media that are being circulated on social media; adding a link to a source alone may seem to make a claim more credible. Furthermore, many users may not click on and read through all of the articles that their networks share. Nonetheless, the headlines as well as the users' framing of the articles may contribute to the shaping of one's opinion. In the following tweet, for instance, the user quotes the headline of an article from *Fox News Insider*, which is, according to their website's mission, "the official blog of Fox News Channel." *Fox News* is known for biased reporting. The quoting of a so-called expert makes the statement look more credible. The wording of the statement, however, illustrates the judgmental presumption.

Example 96 (BerlinAttack 64):

**Expert: 'Merkel Has Been Importing Jihadists in Massive Numbers'**

<http://insider.foxnews.com/2016/12/20/counterterrorism-expert-berlin-terror-attack-german-chancellor-angela-merkel>

**Man darf es auch anders sehen! #BerlinAttack**

**Expert: 'Merkel Has Been Importing Jihadists in Massive Numbers'** [Link to article]  
**You are allowed to see it a different way! #BerlinAttack**

The Twitter user includes not only the headline of and link to the article but also an implicit critique, possibly of mainstream media in Germany. The German part of the tweet suggests that German mainstream media portray a different perspective of the attack, and one is not allowed or not supposed to view it any other way.

Several users claim that mainstream media are not presenting the truth but rather are used by the government to cover up terrorism and any connection between the attack, Islam, and refugee policies. This is a common strategy of right-wing discourse. One user even calls it censorship and hence implies conditions under an authoritarian regime.

Example 97 (BerlinAttack 101):

Interessant, dass **nicht eine große Zeitung kritische Töne zu Merkel** bringt.  
#BerlinAttack #Merkel

Interesting that **not a single big newspaper criticizes Merkel**. #BerlinAttack #Merkel

Example 98 (BerlinAttack 33):

Many people seem surprised at the **lack of new information** about the #BerlinAttack. Anyone familiar with Merkel's media **censorship** is not.

Mainstream media are thus delegitimized as gatekeepers, while unmediated media platforms are supported. In the following two examples, YouTube videos are embedded. The first example is a video from *Infowars.com*, owned by US-American conspiracy theorist, Alex Jones. The narrator supports the theory that the German government and mainstream media are covering up the attack and Merkel has blood on her hands due to her open door refugee policy. The tweet also includes a variety of hashtags, which make the tweet more visible.

Example 99 (BerlinAttack 108):

<https://youtu.be/WC2e70qRSdY> #Politics of #terrorism #Germany releases #terror suspect #PrayForBerlin #BerlinAttack #merkel #Germany #deutschland

The second example is a video by a British YouTuber with more than 1.2 million subscribers who claims to tell the world “the truth about the Berlin Christmas Market Attack.” The Twitter user also claims that the majority of the German population does not support the Chancellor. The so-called propaganda is to be revealed by the YouTube video. The tweet also includes *#infowars*, which may be a reference to Alex Jones' websites.

Example 100 (BerlinAttack 141):

It is wrong, that the majority of Germans support A.Merkel. It is mere **propaganda** – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGsFGvLNEGA> ... #infowars #BerlinAttack

### **Semiotic and multimodal resources**

As in the other datasets, tweets with *#BerlinAttack* include a variety of semiotic and multimodal resources such as emojis, images, letter capitalizations, and multiple hashtags. Images are particularly impactful as they may convey a message without the need for long explanations. The meme of Merkel splattered with blood illustrates this quite well (Example 94). The figurative concept of Merkel having blood on her hands is represented visually. The actual depiction of Merkel with blood on her body conveys the figurative concept and easily sticks in one's mind. Moreover, it can be understood across languages. Seeing someone with blood on their hands in the context of fatalities triggers the perception that this person may be guilty while being caught in the proverbial act.

Images may also serve the purpose of establishing intertextual references. During the peak of the migrant crisis in 2015, Hungary took harsh measures to deter refugees, including anti-refugee propaganda, the erection of fences and monitoring systems, and violence against refugees. A positive reference to Hungary or Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, during that time points to a positive evaluation of Hungary's measures and is therefore indicative of a right-wing, anti-refugee position. The following tweet illustrates how this reference to Hungary is still meaningful in December 2016. The tweet includes a collage of four images (Figure 5). The two top images show typical pictures of Christmas markets and are entitled in capital letters *HUNGARY BUILT A FENCE TO KEEP 'REFUGEES' OUT*. The scare quotes point to the questioning of the legitimacy of the migrants' status as refugees.

Example 101 (BerlinAttack 81):  
#BerlinAttack #MerkelMussWeg pic.twitter.com/YPIMoqQnrf



Figure 5. Tweet “BerlinAttack 81.”

The two bottom pictures show two scenes from German Christmas markets. In the left picture, one can see four police officers in the foreground. The right picture shows the truck that was used for the Berlin attack, identifiable by the damaged windshield and the label of a Polish logistics company. The bottom pictures are captioned in capital letters *GERMANY WELCOMED THEM IN*. In between the top and bottom pictures, it says *SPOT THE DIFFERENCE*. The meme suggests that Christmas markets in Hungary, where a fence was built to keep so-called refugees out of Hungary and Europe, are peaceful, while Christmas markets in Germany, where refugees were welcomed, are attacked and need to be kept under surveillance.

Hungary is not the only right-wing reference that can be found in tweets with *#BerlinAttack*. Several users include hashtags with the name of right-wing political parties or politicians, as already mentioned above in Example 91. While Example 91 only included

references that denote right-wing populism in Europe, the following example also contains #CDU, the political party of Merkel, as well as #ISIS and #Trump. While the hashtags in Example 91 are organized in separate lines by country, the hashtags of this example are strung together. Additionally, all phrases and names are used with hashtags. The excessive use of hashtags may lead to more visibility.

Example 102 (BerlinAttack 85):

#MerkelMUSSweg #CDU #AfD #FraukePetry #Hofer #ISIS #Brexit #Trump  
#BerlinAttack #Berlin #Pegida pic.twitter.com/d3gD1LqKQJ

The tweet also includes an image that seems to have been photoshopped. The background of the image is the truck that was used for the attack, which is the same image that was used in Example 101. In the foreground, there are three smiling young women holding a colorful *Refugees Welcome* banner. At first sight the manipulation of the image is not recognizable, but the attire of the women does not fit the weather conditions in Berlin on December 20, 2016. Even though not explicitly stated, the positioning of the image components suggests a cause-effect relationship between welcoming refugees and the Berlin terror attack. It is important to note that the investigations had not been completed on December 20, 2016, and any presumption that the attacker was a refugee was speculative.

Another topic that came up in the data is the depiction of Germany being powerless and doomed to economic and political decline. Right-wing discourses generally advocate a strong and sovereign nation-state and thus criticize the delegation of power to international and supranational organizations, which limits national decision-making. The flag as a symbol of the nation-state also plays an important role. While in many countries, the waving or display of the national flag does not inherently carry negative connotations, in Germany it is not as widely accepted due to Germany's Nazi past. In fact, if the German flag is used privately outside of a

sports event, it may be perceived as an expression of right-wing, nationalist-conservative ideologies. In the following example, the user criticizes precisely this ambivalent relationship between Germans and their flag. The user seems to be upset, indicated by three angry-face emojis, about Merkel's reaction to a fellow party member who is waving a German flag; she takes the German flag away from him and slightly shakes her head. The clip is taken out of context as it occurred at an election victory party in 2013, but it is used to declare Merkel as anti-German and to construct a connection between her pro-refugee position and the threat to the German people (Roßmann, 2016).

Example 103 (BerlinAttack 1):

The #BerlinAttack occurs and all Merkel is worried about is not waving the German flag  
😡😡😡 #berlinchristmas 🙄🎄🎄🎄🙄  
#GermanChristmasMarket pic.twitter.com/f3vjBqF00Y

The user may or may not have known that the clip was taken out of context. It may have appeared on their social media feed, which would suggest that the user is connected to users with right-wing ideologies as such users were responsible for the December 2016 dissemination of this clip (Roßmann, 2016).

The German flag is a recurring topic in right-wing discourses and frequently used at right-wing rallies as a symbol of the imagined homogeneous people. According to another Twitter user, however, the German flag is no longer black, red, and gold but white, which symbolizes surrender and hence the loss of power and strength. Apart from the picture of a white flag, the tweet also includes a series of hashtags including #StopImportingJihadists, which reinforces the construction of Muslims being a threat to the German people.

Example 104 (BerlinAttack 40):

The official flag of #Germany !!!

...

#Merkel

#refugeeswelcome ? !

#Berlin  
#BerlinAttack  
#refugeberlin  
#StopImportingJihadists  
#TruckAttack  
[pic.twitter.com/UTJDpLqzLp](https://pic.twitter.com/UTJDpLqzLp)

## Summary

The findings to the first research question, “What are the features of nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses on Twitter?” show that during both time periods right-wing discourses employ negative presentation of migrants and refugees as well as the German Chancellor, and construct the image that the national security and culture are threatened and in danger due to the Government’s refugee policies. Othering is employed in the form of *us*, the people, versus *them*, the politicians and the migrants. The excessive use of hashtags allows users to reach a wider audience and make their tweets and thus their ideologies more visible. While there are many similarities between the two time frames, there are also differences. In 2015, users emphasize the financial and social burden that refugees would pose and employ general criticisms of mainstream and left-wing politicians. In 2016, users construct the attack as a direct consequence of Chancellor Merkel’s refugee policies. Hence, the Chancellor is the direct target of right-wing supporters’ criticism.



**CHAPTER FIVE:  
FINDINGS FOR COUNTER-DISCOURSES**

In order to examine the second research question, “What are the features of nationalist-conservative, right-wing, xenophobic discourses on Twitter?” I analyzed the features employed in tweets that were identified as pro-refugee or counter-discourse to right-wing discourse. The focus is on strategies, practices, and resources employed to reinforce the support of migrants and refugees as well as to challenge and condemn xenophobic and discriminatory ideologies. The chapter is organized by hashtags. As illustrated in Table 7, the distribution of main features varies across hashtags.

Table 7

*Frequency of features associated with pro-refugee positions and counter-discourses.*

Features	#wirschaffendas (n = 217)	#openborders (n = 217)	#MerkelsTote (n = 152)	#BerlinAttack (n = 152)
Support for refugees	19 (9%)	23 (11%)	-	6 (4%)
Welcoming refugees	16 (7%)	52 (24%)	-	-
Appeal to humanity	3 (1%)	44 (20%)	-	1 (<1%)
Difficulties refugees face	1 (<1%)	35 (16%)	-	-
Economic benefits of refugees	1 (<1%)	5 (2%)	-	-
Criticism of right-wing discourses	-	42 (19%)	11 (7%)	14 (9%)
Quoting sources	3 (1%)	43 (20%)	1 (<1%)	5 (3%)

## #wirschaffendas

### Praise and appreciation of support for refugees

In September 2015 during the peak of the European migrant crisis, many Germans and other Europeans demonstrated refugee-friendly positions. They volunteered to support refugees, gave donations, and welcomed refugees in their communities (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016). This pro-refugee tendency is also apparent in the datasets from August-September 2015. The majority of the tweets that could be identified as pro-refugee contain praise or appreciation for volunteers, donations, the willingness to help refugees, and the cooperation between citizens and authorities as shown in the following examples.

Example 105 (wirschaffendas 237):

Den Hunderten von Flüchtlingen am Hbf München rollt **eine Welle der Hilfsbereitschaft** entgegen. #Wirschaffendas pic.twitter.com/iQcNxWxuxx

The hundreds of refugees at Munich central station are welcomed with a **great amount of willingness to help** #Wecandoit pic.twitter.com/iQcNxWxuxx

Example 106 (wirschaffendas 238):

#wirschaffendas wirklich. **Super Unterstützung von Bürgern** für die ankommenden Flüchtlinge. **Bravo** ...

#wecandoit really. **Awesome support from citizens** for arriving refugees. **Well done** ...

Both tweets document people's willingness to help refugees. The first example is a metaphor and depicts this willingness to help as a *wave* (German: *Welle*) that rolls towards refugees, which represents the magnitude of help. Furthermore, the tweet is supported by an image of grocery bags symbolizing the donations given for refugees. The second example contains the evaluative words *super* and *bravo* to express appreciation. In addition, the pro-refugee position that "we will manage the situation," expressed by #wirschaffendas, is reinforced by the adverb *wirklich* (English: *really*). The hashtag is therefore not used to merely categorize the tweet, but rather as a sentence element to reinforce the content of the hashtag, that is, *we* welcome refugees and

together *wir* manage the situation. Both examples also demonstrate support for Chancellor Merkel's open-border position; *#wirschaffendas* is used to express agreement with Merkel's *Wir schaffen das* statement.

Some tweets not only report about the positive reactions toward refugees but also encourage others to contribute or to work together to manage the situation, as illustrated in the following examples.

Example 107 (*wirschaffendas* 236):

**Was #München kann, können alle in #Bayern und #Deutschland schaffen. Auf geht's!** #Flüchtlinge #wirschaffendas

**What #Munich can do, everyone in #Bavaria and #Germany can do. Let's go!** #Refugees #wecandoit

Example 108 (*wirschaffendas* 207):

#refugeeswelcome [https://www.change.org/p/für-ein-verbot-fremdenfeindlicher-demos-vor-flüchtlingsheimen-heimeohnhass/share?just\\_signed=true](https://www.change.org/p/für-ein-verbot-fremdenfeindlicher-demos-vor-flüchtlingsheimen-heimeohnhass/share?just_signed=true)

**Es fehlen nur noch 7189 Stimmen zu 75.000!!!** #wirschaffendas

#refugeeswelcome [Link to petition] **Only 7189 votes are missing to reach 75,000!!!** #wecandoit

Munich is located in the south of Germany, less than 100 miles from the Austrian border. As the biggest city in the south and state capital of Bavaria, it was the major point of arrival for refugees in Germany who came via the so-called Balkan route, particularly by train (hence also the reference to Munich central station in Example 105). The author of Example 107 encourages everyone in Bavaria and Germany to follow the example of Munich and show as much involvement as the people and authorities did in Munich. The phrase *wir schaffen das* is taken up syntactically in the first sentence. Munich serves as a good example for dealing with the arriving refugees and other communities can manage, too. The encouragement is supported by the motivational expression *Auf geht's!* (English: *Let's go!*).

While the first example's encouragement to do something is rather vague, the second example is more goal-driven. The tweet contains a link to a petition to prohibit xenophobic protests in front of refugee homes. The petition is a reaction to a series of partially violent protests against asylum seekers organized by extreme-right groups in a small town in the state of Saxony in East Germany. The user indirectly requests the audience to participate in the petition by pointing out that only few votes are missing to reach the goal of 75,000 votes. When the goal of a petition is met, the organizers may connect with political decision makers and request policy changes. In this example, *#wirschaffendas* not only functions as a form of agreement with pro-refugee policies but also to encourage the audience to support the petition and thus advocate for change, particularly to limit xenophobic activities.

The previous examples showed that *#wirschaffendas* is not only used to express right-wing, anti-refugee positions and to criticize Chancellor Merkel. Even though they are fewer in numbers, there are tweets with *#wirschaffendas* that display support for refugees and pro-refugee policies. As may be expected, these tweets exhibit different strategies and topics. Migrants and refugees are not depicted as the dangerous other that threatens the German people and the German nation-state. Moreover, the legitimacy of the refugees' status is not questioned. Instead, users emphasize the economic benefit of accepting refugees.

Example 109 (*wirschaffendas* 235):

Jeder, der kapiert hat, was **#Fachkräftemangel** in 10 Jahren hier bedeutet, muss die **#Flüchtlinge mit Handkuss empfangen** **#WirSchaffenDas**

Anyone who understands what **#lackofskilledworkers** in 10 years signifies has to **gladly welcome #Refugees** **#WeCanDoIt**

The example points out the lack of skilled workers and thus the often-discussed labor shortage of qualified professionals in Germany. Studies suggest that especially STEM fields and the healthcare system are affected by the labor shortage (Statista, 2018). Some politicians and

economists have argued that refugees could help fill the marketplace demands. This argument is taken up by Example 109. The migrant crisis is therefore framed differently in these tweets as opposed to tweets that reinforce right-wing discourses. Refugees are depicted as in need and thankful for donations and help. Instead of emphasizing negative consequences of the arrival of refugees, users focus on the economic benefits refugees may represent to a host country. Furthermore, many tweets express a welcoming stance toward refugees.

### **Reactions to right-wing positions**

While the majority of the pro-refugee tweets do not explicitly take up right-wing discourses, there are some tweets with right-wing references. In the first example the user quotes an article by the German liberal mainstream daily newspaper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which describes the citizens' and the authorities' welcoming and well-organized reception of refugees in Munich. The article contrasts candy with bombs because people in Munich provide candy to refugees and not bombs as in some other parts of Germany, for example the small town in Saxony, which was referenced in the petition described above (Example 108).

Example 110 (wirschaffendas 212):

**#wirschaffendas in action!** Flüchtlinge in München – **Bonbons statt Brandsätze** – München – Süddeutsche.de <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/fluechtlinge-in-muenchen-bonbons-statt-brandsaetze-1.2636088> ... #refugees

**#wecandoit in action!** Refugees in Munich – **candy instead of bombs** – Munich – [Link to article] ... #refugees

A positive reaction to refugees is not only documented in the south of Germany. The following tweet demonstrates that the people in the north of Germany are also welcoming refugees.

Example 111 (wirschaffendas 217):

#hhilft als #trainofhope in Harburg ankommt. **Heller, immer heller.** #WirSchaffenDas  
#marchofhope #**HellesDeutschland**

#hhelps when #trainofhope arrives in Harburg. **Brighter, and brighter still.**  
#WeCanDoIt #marchofhope #**BrightGermany**

Harburg is a neighborhood in Hamburg. #hhelps may be an abbreviation of *Hamburg helps* and is an example of textual and semiotic polysemy. The abbreviation visually creates a double-h which is a symbol of Hamburg as it represents the license plate code; it stands for *Hanseatic City of Hamburg* (German: *Hansestadt Hamburg*). The train with refugees that arrives in Hamburg-Harburg is described as *train of hope*, which is also the name of refugee relief organizations in Germany and Austria. *March of hope* is the name of a movie about the lives of refugees in Europe. The user expresses hope not only by referencing the train and march of hope but also by describing the situation as becoming more and more bright, which is a contrast to the term *dark Germany* (German: *Dunkeldeutschland*). *Dunkeldeutschland* is a pejorative term that was used to describe East Germany in the early 1990s (Ondreka, 2015), but the term regained popularity after former German President, Joachim Gauck, used the term during a speech in August 2015 as a reference to xenophobia, racism, and extreme nationalism, which is in fact more prevalent in East German states. The antonym *bright Germany* symbolizes hope and stands for welcoming refugees.

### **Semiotic and multimodal resources**

Tweets that support pro-refugee positions use fewer or no emojis and emoticons, letter capitalizations, creative formats, and memes than right-wing tweets. Only eight tweets include an image. The majority of the images show proof of donations or volunteers helping refugees.

Furthermore, only mainstream sources are quoted, and most of these sources can be described as

liberal as for example the daily newspaper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The articles that are quoted confirm the citizens' willingness to help and welcoming receptions of refugees.

The hashtag that occurs most commonly with *#wirschaffendas* is *#refugeeswelcome*, which is used to support a welcoming stance toward refugees. This is also evident in the following example.

Example 112 (*wirschaffendas* 129):

*#refugeeswelcome #wirschaffendas Local Heroes - Kim Cartoon!* <http://www.kim-cartoon.com/index.php/serien/local-heroes#.VfgvrzgYUgA.twitter>

The tweet contains two hashtags, *#refugeeswelcome* and *#wirschaffendas*, and a link to a website with cartoons, specifically the series *Local Heroes*. The cartoon is entitled *Moin*, which is a Northern German greeting. In the background, one can see flat, rural land, a wind turbine, a few cows, and a farm, further indicating that it is located in the North of Germany. In the foreground, there are two personified animals who are engaging in small talk, a man taking his dog for a walk and a farmer leaning on a gate. The former asks *What do you say to all these refugees here?* and the farmer responds *I say moin!* The question of the dog walker points to the perception that large amount of refugees (*all these refugees*) are present (*here*). The use of the deictic word *here* is ironic because there are no other people present in the cartoon. In fact, the land is wide and open and does not look densely populated. Conversely, the farmer's reaction shows that he does not perceive the refugees as a threat. Instead he would see them as ordinary human beings and politely greet them.

## #Openborders

### Support for refugees

The distribution of codes within the *#openborders* dataset (Table 7) shows that the majority of the tweets with *#openborders* can be classified as pro-refugee or counter-discourse. Pro-refugee positions can be expressed by sharing positive reports of acts of welcoming refugees as in the following two examples.

Example 113 (openborders 247):

**German football fans welcome refugees** and invite hundreds to watch match <http://www.independent.ie/sport/leftfield/german-football-fans-welcome-refugees-and-invite-hundreds-to-watch-match-31490232.html> ... #solidarity in #FortressEurope #openborders

The first example consists of the headline of and the link to an article by the Irish daily newspaper, *Irish Independent*, and three hashtags. The article is a report about German soccer fans who hold “Refugees Welcome” banners during *Bundesliga* soccer fixtures. Although racism and xenophobia are common issues in European soccer, especially among some ultra soccer fan groups (e.g., Kennedy, 2013; Lesny, 1995), in 2015 several German *Bundesliga* soccer clubs joined a campaign to welcome and support refugees. Moreover, some clubs invited refugees to attend soccer games. By sharing the article on Twitter, the user contributes to the construction of a positive image of Germany managing the migrant crisis. It depicts German soccer fans and clubs as welcoming and friendly toward refugees, hence setting an example for the treatment of refugees in Germany. The author of the tweet further includes *#solidarity in #FortressEurope #openborders*. The term *Fortress Europe* (German: *Festung Europa*) is an intertextual reference with shifting connotations as it was used as a propaganda term by the Nazis during World War II and resurfaced in the 1990s to criticize the EU’s restrictive immigration policies (Zandonella, 2009). During the migrant crisis, right-wing populists reframed the term with positive



connotations and used it to claim that Europe, particularly the external border of the EU, needed to be protected and secured from migrants. It is since used to express pro- and anti-refugee positions. Given the content of the example, one can assume that *#FortressEurope* is used to criticize restrictive closed-door policies. The author not only references an article that reports on acts of welcoming refugees but also includes hashtags that express solidarity and call for open borders.

Solidarity, open borders, and the end of fortress Europe are also addressed in the second example.

Example 114 (openborders 214):

**'Airbnb for refugees' group overwhelmed by offers of help** <http://gu.com/p/4c29e/stw>  
*#solidarity STOP #FortressEurope #openborders #oneworld*

Similarly to the previous example, this tweet also contains the headline of and the link to an article that reports on the positive reactions toward refugees as well as several hashtags that denote a pro-refugee position. According to the article, “a German group which matches citizens willing to share their homes with refugees is overwhelmed by offers of support” (Elgot, 2015). The so-called *Airbnb for refugees* facilitates the placement of refugees in private homes, which, according to the article, is met with a positive response. The tweet uses the article to attest to the positive reactions of Germans and thus the successful management of the arrival of refugees. As in the previous example, several hashtags contribute to the pro-refugee stances of the tweet. The sequence of the hashtags and the capitalized word *STOP* suggests that the user expresses solidarity, requests the end of fortress Europe, and calls for open borders and one world, that is, a united and not separated world.

While the previous examples displayed implicit requests expressed through the use of hashtags, many tweets include more explicit requests, for example to support refugees, to open

borders, and to legalize helping refugees. The addressees of these requests are not primarily fellow citizens, as in the *#wirschaffendas* dataset, but national and international authorities, since immigration policy is to a large extent the EU's area of responsibility.

The first example contains two requests, indicated by the sentence structure and the three exclamation points.

Example 115 (openborders 99):

**Keine Strafen für Fluchthelfer.innen!Lasst die Leute ziehen!#openborders  
#grenzenöffnen!**

**No punishment for escape helpers!Let the people go!#openborders #openborders!**

The author requests that people who help refugees should not be punished. The author uses the gender inclusive form of the plural noun indicated by the suffix *.innen*. Even though the male form of a noun may be used as a generic form to denote both genders, it is generally accepted in German formal writing to use a gender-inclusive or gender-neutral form. In fact, in some German states the use of gender-inclusive and gender-neutral language is required in school and government documents. Nonetheless, conservatives and right-wing populists reject the use of such forms. The tweet addresses the concern that people who help refugees cross a border illegally may be charged as smugglers. The Twitter user further requests that *they* should let the people go; it is unclear whether only refugees or also helpers are meant by *the people*. The command is written in second person plural (*Lasst*, English: *Let*). The user does not explicitly name the addressee of the command, but one can assume that it is directed to border police or government representatives. The tweet ends with *#openborders* and the German equivalent of the hashtag followed by an exclamation mark, thus representing a third request.

In the second example, the user also expresses three requests without direct addressee. Based on the content of the requests, the implied addressee is a government, which would usually be in control of ships, military airplanes, and borders.

Example 116 (openborders 208):

**Use our ships of war as ships of safety. Don't drop bombs drop bread. Turn borders into 'Welcome Points'** we are all human #openborders

The use of the possessive determiner *our* points to a democratic government, because, even though the government makes the political decisions, it is legitimized by the electorate. Moreover, equipment such as ships is usually bought with taxpayers' money. For these reasons, the author may claim the ships as *ours* and thus belonging to the people. In all three sentences, the author juxtaposes actions of war and exclusion (*ships of war*, *bombs*, and *borders*) with actions of safety, humanity, and inclusion (*ships of safety*, *bread*, *'welcome points'*). The rationale for the commands is provided subsequently by the words *we are all human*, which points to inclusion and equality.

The third example references *Fortress Europe*, which was described above (Example 113). The reference is preceded by a negative description thereof: *seas of death*, *walls of razor wire*, *hearts of stone*. The author further uses an expletive to criticize *Fortress Europe* and demands that the borders be opened.

Example 117 (openborders 219):

Seas of death, walls of razor wire, hearts of stone. **Fuck Fortress Europe. Open the borders.** #FortressEurope #openborders #oneworld

### **Economic benefit of refugees and difficulties refugees face**

While tweets that support right-wing discourses point out the economic burden of refugees, tweets that support counter-discourses focus on the economic benefit of refugees. As described above (Example 109), there is a shortage of qualified professionals in Germany in

certain fields and it has been argued that refugees could potentially fill the gap. The following example cites an article that addresses this issue. The tweet includes a quote by the weekly magazine, *The Economist*, about the positive reactions in Germany toward refugees. According to the article, corporate bosses would hire refugees if administrative barriers were lowered, which could decrease current and future labor shortages.

Example 118 (openborders 35):

“#Corporate bosses demand that rules be loosened to **hire #refugees as apprentices or workers**” #OpenBorders #Germany

By citing the article and thus economic elites, the author strengthens the image that accepting refugees and migrants could be beneficial for the German economy.

The topic of economy and business is also addressed by the following example.

Example 119 (openborders 6):

**If there is no border for capital, why there s for people?** Coca Cola is more free than refugees. #refugeescrisis #refugeeswelcome #openborders

The user criticizes the differences in treatment of capital and people; while there is no border for capital, people are held back by borders. The author also mentions the iconic symbol of Capitalism, Coca Cola, and thus criticizes that large companies like Coca Cola are treated preferentially and do not face the same barriers as migrants. Implicitly, the tweet addresses the double standard as regards the European Single Market, which entails the freedom of goods, capital, services, and persons. There are legal and practical differences between the four freedoms of the Single Market with differing rules for capital and people, but the author does point out existing inequalities when it comes to open borders.

Users also criticize the distinction that is made between economic migrants and refugees.

Example 120 (openborders 9):

If we **close borders for economic migrants** than we **shouldn't allow fellow citizens to seek better jobs abroad**. Would it be fair? #openborders

Not all migrants arriving in Europe at that time were classified as refugees according to the definitions of the German Constitution and the 1951 Refugee Convention as economic migrants are not covered under these definitions. Therefore, economic migrants are usually not granted asylum in Germany. The author of the tweet criticizes this distinction between refugee and economic migrant and points out the inequality when it comes to migration opportunities. While the EU closes its borders for economic migrants from poor countries, European citizens are able to migrate to other places within and outside of the EU for better jobs and thus also for economic reasons. The author points to the double standard as regards freedom of movement. While people in need are prevented by closed borders from seeking better opportunities, citizens of more privileged countries are able to migrate. Consequently, there is an existing inequality between people who already live in privileged and safe places and those who do not. Moreover, some Twitter users support freedom of movement for all, because they consider the distinction between refugees and economic migrants as arbitrary, as illustrated in Example 121, which is a response to @Umut\_Ozsu who finds the distinction troubling, and in Example 122, in which the author demands that all migrants and not just refugees should be welcomed. Example 122 is also supported by an article promoting open borders and advocating changes in the international refugee system.

Example 121 (openborders 215):

.@Umut\_Ozsu Yes, **distinction betw. refugees and economic migrants is arbitrary. Mvmt is a right.** #openborders for all <http://openborders.info/blog/junk-the-international-refugee-system-and-open-the-borders/>

Example 122 (openborders 18):

When we say ‘#RefugeesWelcome’ **let’s make sure we’re not welcoming ONLY refugees** – #OpenBorders #MigrationRights

Describing the economic benefit of refugees may strengthen the argument to welcome refugees. But while it may be economically beneficial to accept refugees, Twitter users stress

that it is also morally necessary to welcome refugees. Many tweets call for more humanity and highlight the difficulties refugees and migrants face in their war-torn home countries, on their dangerous way to Europe, or in refugee camps, as illustrated in the following examples.

The first tweet contains the quote *Drowned because we are all just watching*, a request to create legal escape routes, three hashtags, and a meme. The meme is a picture collage entitled *Aylan, 3 Jahre aus Rohava, Syrien. im Krieg geboren. vor Krieg geflüchtet. Ertrunken weil wir alle nur zuschauen.* (English: *Aylan, 3 years old from Rojava, Syria. born during war. escaped war. Drowned because we are all just watching.*). The top image shows a toddler washed ashore with his face in the sand. The image of the drowned toddler made headlines and went viral at the beginning of September 2015. His name was Aylan Kurdi, he had left Syria with his family, and drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. In the meme, the top image is juxtaposed with two images in the bottom, which both show a laughing boy, allegedly the same boy before he and his family left Syria.

Example 123 (openborders 216):

**“Ertrunken weil wir alle nur zuschauen”** Legale Fluchtwege schaffen #OpenBorders #Frontex #KiyiyaVuranInsanlik pic.twitter.com/sY6yNx4oDn

**“Drowned because we are all just watching”** Create legal escape routes #OpenBorders #Frontex #KiyiyaVuranInsanlik pic.twitter.com/sY6yNx4oDn

The hashtags used in this example include *#OpenBorders*, *#Frontex*, which is the name of the *European Border and Coast Guard Agency*, and the Turkish phrase *Kiyiya Vuran Insanlik*, which translates to *humanity washed ashore* and was often used at that time in combination with the image of the washed ashore toddler.

The following two examples report on the obstacles migrants face while already in Europe.

Example 124 (openborders 201):

**#SyrianRefugee try to protect his wife and kid from the #Hungarian police** today  
#refugeeswelcome #OpenBorders #Austria pic.twitter.com/4s8rVF10gl

The first example describes how refugees are treated by Hungarian police officers. The user suggests that a Syrian refugee needs to protect himself and his family from Hungarian police officers. The tweet is supported by an image of a man holding a woman with a headscarf and a baby and lying on train tracks. Two Hungarian police officers are standing around them reaching their arms toward the people lying on the ground. The image is framed by the tweet, which clearly identifies the situation as harmful to the refugees. Based on the image alone, it is unclear why the people are on the tracks and whether the police are there to help or harm them. However, at that time the British daily newspaper, *The Guardian*, published a video of the scene that showed riot police attempting to separate the family forcefully. According to an article by *The Guardian* from September 3, 2015, refugees were removed from a train bound for the Austrian border and feared that they would be sent to a refugee camp in Bicske, Hungary. Many refugees protested by laying on the train tracks, and “one family – a man, his wife and their toddler – had to be wrestled off the ground by a dozen riot police” (Nolan & Graham-Harrison, 2015). This family is depicted in the image.

The second example refers to a town in the Czech Republic, Břeclav, which is located close to the Austrian border.

Example 125 (openborders 230):

**#Breclav is a shame for #humanity.** #CzechRepublic #refugeeswelcome #openborders

At the beginning of September 2015, Břeclav made headlines because police officers wrote numbers on the hands of arriving migrants, which led to associations with Nazi practices during World War II when prisoners were tattooed with an identification number.

Despite the many accounts of difficulties refugees face on their way to Europe or within Europe, many users also spread hope as shown in the following two examples.

Example 126 (openborders 34):

Amid the #RefugeesCrisis horrors a **picture of hope: a Danish officer playing with a #refugee child**. #EU #OpenBorders pic.twitter.com/Zz9GiT8hqj

In the first example, the user shares an image of a police officer and a child sitting on a road across each other. The police officer is holding his hands in front of his face. The girl is smiling and her hands are stretched out toward the officer. Based on these cues, it looks like they are playing a game. In the background, one can see two more police officers standing and a group of people sitting next to the road. The scene seems to take place in Denmark because the officer's uniform shows the national coat of arms of Denmark. The tweet frames the image as a symbol of hope amid the horrors of the refugee crisis. This tweet also contrasts with the portrayal of the Hungarian and Czech police (Example 124 and Example 125).

In the second example, the user claims that refugees do not constitute a crisis, indicated by the negation *not* and the quotation marks around the word *crisis*. The author further claims that *they*, referring to the refugees, are future friends, customers, doctors, neighbors, and cooks, which is why one should welcome them. The user appeals to the inclusion of refugees in society and daily life, which humanizes refugees who are seen as equals rather than strangers who pose a threat.

Example 127 (openborders 68):

Refugees not “crisis.” They are **future friends, customers, doctors, neighbors, cooks**. Welcome them. #openborders

### **Use of personal pronouns and possessive determiners**

Personal pronouns and possessive determiners may serve as linguistic tools to establish belonging and exclusion. The personal pronoun *we*, for instance, can be used as an inclusive or



exclusive *we*. Right-wing discourses tend to use the exclusive *we* to distinguish *us*, the in-group, from *them*, the other. This construction of an in-group defined by ethnicity, religion, or citizenship (Wodak, 2015b) is not found in pro-refugee tweets. On the contrary, sentences like *we are all human* as in Example 116 illustrate how authors use pronouns to establish inclusion. The inclusive *we* is used in order to demonstrate that belonging is not defined by ethnicity, religion, or citizenship but by being human. The first person pronoun *we* is also used to address the pro-refugee community and to encourage others to show compassion to all migrants as in Example 122.

Example 128 (openborders 208):

Use **our** ships of war as ships of safety. Don't drop bombs drop bread. Turn borders into 'Welcome Points' **we are all human** #openborders

Example 129 (openborders 18):

**When we say** '#RefugeesWelcome' **let's** make sure **we're not welcoming ONLY refugees** – #OpenBorders #MigrationRights

Possessive determiners, on the other hand, signal belonging in a different way. In the following two examples, *my Europe* and *in my name* is used in combination with a negation by which the users position themselves in opposition to policies and practices of the EU. In the first example, the user opposes Europe as a gated community, and in the second example, the user opposes to be represented by a European Union that does not address human rights violations of member states. The tweet includes #Bicske, which is a reference to the scene described above in which Hungarian riot police were forcing refugees out of a train at the train station in Bicske.

Example 130 (openborders 93):

**My Europe** is **not a gated community** #refugeeswelcome #openborders

Example 131 (openborders 175):

Wie viele Menschenrechtsverletzungen braucht es noch, bis die EU endlich handelt & hilft? #**Bicske** #openborders #**notinmyname**

How many more human rights violations are needed until the EU finally acts and helps?  
#Bicske #openborders #notinmyname

The concept of representation is also present in Example 128, in which the possessive determiner points to democratic legitimization as described above.

In the following two examples, the author indirectly addresses the audience by using the possessive determiner. Example 132 is an appeal to the audience that refugees need *our* help. This appeal is justified by the preceding sentence, in which the dangerous situation for refugees is summarized as *death chases after refugees!* Example 133 appeals to the reader's moral understanding. Refugees should be welcomed and let in because their lives are in danger either in their home countries or on the dangerous migration routes toward the EU. Life is depicted as a privilege that should not only apply to those of *us* who are already in a safe place but also to refugees, according to the user.

Example 132 (openborders 46):  
Death chases after refugees! **They need our help.** #refugeeswelcome #refugeescrisis  
#openborders

Example 133 (openborders 47):  
#refugeeswelcome **life is not just our privilege** . #openborders for refugees

### **Citing sources**

Most tweets use emotions and moral arguments to express support for refugees or to encourage others to support refugees as described in the previous section. The second most frequent strategy is the reference to sources or experts to back up one's argument. This support strategy ranges from referencing *the feeds of Twitter* to citing newspaper articles. In Example 134, the user claims that the supporters of open borders are not a minority but that it *is a worldwide feeling*. This is justified by *the feeds of Twitter*, and thus probably based on the fact that *#openborders* was a trending hashtag at that time. The tweet portrays the image that there is

widespread support for open borders regardless of what governments or media may say. The tweet also refers to the UK as *striving to be history's loser*, which may be a reference to the UK's position during the migrant crisis, particularly concerning the refugee camp in Calais, France. Many refugees who attempted to reach the UK stayed in a refugee camp in Calais, from where they tried to cross the Channel to the UK. The UK, however, prevented refugees to enter.

Example 134 (openborders 168):

It is clear **by the feeds of Twitter** that **#OpenBorders is a worldwide feeling**, and the #UK is currently striving to be history's loser.

Most examples in this category cite newspaper articles, mainly from mainstream sources such as the German daily newspaper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the German publicly owned TV channel, *Das Erste*, the British daily newspaper, *The Guardian*, and the US-American daily newspaper, *The New York Times*. The tweets often use a similar format, that is, the headline and the link to the article followed by several hashtags that denote pro-refugee positions, as illustrated in the following three examples.

Example 135 (openborders 122):

**Flüchtlinge in München Applaus für die Ankommenden**

<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/fluechtlinge-willkommen-in-muenchen-1.2635848> **#DankeDeutschland #OpenBorders #RefugeesWelcome**

**Refugees in Munich Applause for those arriving** [Link to article]

**#ThankyouGermany #OpenBorders #RefugeesWelcome**

Example 136 (openborders 214):

**'Airbnb for refugees' group overwhelmed by offers of help** <http://gu.com/p/4c29e/stw>  
**#solidarity STOP #FortressEurope #openborders #oneworld**

Example 137 (openborders 170):

**Hungarian police and refugees in standoff after train returns to camp – #Hungary**  
**#Fascism #OpenBorders** <http://gu.com/p/4c4tp/stw>

The articles in the first two examples share stories about the positive reactions toward refugees, and thus portray a positive image as regards the reception of and dealing with refugees in

Germany. However, users do not only share positive experiences but also difficulties refugees have to face. In the third example, the user cites an article by *The Guardian*, which describes the situation in Bicske, which was referenced in previous examples. The article is supported by two videos illustrating the tense situation between refugees and Hungarian authorities. The user also includes *#Hungary*, *#Fascism*, and *#OpenBorders*. The use and sequence of these hashtags in combination with the citing of the article suggests that the user classifies Hungary's actions as fascist and demands open borders.

### **Criticism of right-wing discourses and the EU**

As already mentioned in previous examples, pro-refugee and counter-discourse tweets also contain forms of criticism. The targets of this criticism are the EU, national governments, and the supporters of right-wing discourses. When the EU is targeted, users often refer to concepts or legal documents such as *fortress Europe* and the Dublin agreement as shown in the following example.

Example 138 (openborders 50):

**#FestungEuropa** tötet Menschen und dient Schlepperbanden. **#FortressEurope**  
**#noborders #fuckdublin #openborders**

**#FortressEurope** kills people and serves gangs of smugglers. **#FortressEurope**  
**#noborders #fuckdublin #openborders**

The EU and the members of the EU can also be addressed more directly as demonstrated in the following two examples. Although the EU does have its own executive with the *European Commission*, the member states' heads of state or government form the *European Council*, which sets the EU's political direction. Additionally, the *Council of the European Union* is made up of the member states' government ministers and has legislative power. Consequently, the member states' governments play a crucial role in the EU's decision-making processes.

Therefore, a critique of the EU government as in Example 139 may be directed to both the EU and its member states. The content of Example 140 (same as Example 131) points more directly to the EU as human rights violations can fall within the scope of the *Court of Justice of the European Union*. The *European Commission*, for example, can sue member states if they do not comply with EU law, which includes human rights.

Example 139 (openborders 83):  
#Refugees volunteers networking themselves, because **#eu governments failing**.  
#TrainofHope #OpenBorders

Example 140 (openborders 175):  
Wie viele **Menschenrechtsverletzungen** braucht es noch, bis **die EU** endlich handelt & hilft? #Bicske #openborders #notinmyname

How many more **human rights violations** are needed until **the EU** finally acts and helps? # Bicske #openborders #notinmyname

As stated above, users also criticize the supporters of right-wing discourses. Right-wing discourses are characterized by invoking fear of the other. This fear can be created by implying the arrival of large numbers of foreigners, for example by referring to migration movements as invasions or floods of migrants. The user of the following tweet reverses the origin of fear by inverting the meaning of the same metaphors typically used to describe immigrants and immigration. The author uses the negative buzz words *swarms*, *waves*, and *floods* in combination with *racists*, *racism*, and *fascism* and thus constructs the image of an influx of racists that threatens the society. The topic of threat is also taken up by the second example. The author uses the tragedy of a drowned boy to illustrate the emotional numbness of *too many* for whom *he was just another migrant; a threat*.

Example 141 (openborders 52):  
**Swarms of racists. Waves of racism. Floods of fascism. That's what I'm afraid of.**  
No to #FortressEurope #RefugeesWelcome #openborders

Example 142 (openborders 213):

A little boy drowns. He was someone's son, someone's joy. **For too many, he was just another migrant; a threat.** #SyriaCrisis #openborders

### **Semiotic and multimodal resources**

52 tweets include images. Most images are pictures that display the difficulties refugees encounter en route or in refugee camps as described above and the support that migrants receive from Europeans. Pictures show pro-refugee rallies across Europe, indicated by hashtags like #Austria and #TrafalgarSquare, where people hold signs like *treating refugees as the problem is the problem*, #love refugees, and *all refugees welcome*. Images also demonstrate the refugees' gratefulness for being welcomed for example in the form of signs that say *thank you* in multiple languages. Another common image used in tweets is the washed ashore body of the Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi, who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea.

Example 143 (openborders 109):

#NoOneIsIllegal #OpenBorders #RefugeesWelcome pic.twitter.com/Kvm1u3Mhg6

The image consists of a drawing of a child, who resembles the picture of Aylan Kurdi because of his body position and the red t-shirt, and a French text which translates to *I tell myself that we could believe that he is sleeping, that he will wake up, that he's alive, that the sea cannot reject like that a child that young, I imagine my child in his place, my heart hurts, my stomach hurts, I cannot remove this image from my head. It's the image of shame, the one that tells us that it's time to stop CLOSING OUR EYES.*

The second example also displays a drawing of Aylan Kurdi. His body is placed on a map entitled *world new map*. The continents are separated from the ocean by a wall with razor wire. The body is behind the wall on top of the ocean. The image symbolizes fortress Europe and the consequences of building a wall to keep refugees out.

Example 144 (openborders 174):

No human is illegal! #openborders #refugeeswelcome pic.twitter.com/ha7fLlvGU9

Apart from images, some tweets also include letter capitalizations and the use of multiple exclamation points to reinforce the message of the tweet as in the following example.

Example 145 (openborders 118):

DANKESHÖN DEUTSCHLAND UND ÖSTERREICH!! #openborders

THANK YOU GERMANY AND AUSTRIA!! #openborders

Emoticons were not present in the dataset. As regards the use of additional hashtags, the two most frequently used hashtags were *#refugeeswelcome* (76 tweets) and *#FortressEurope* (29 tweets). As described above, *#refugeeswelcome* was used to support a welcoming stance toward refugees and *#FortressEurope* was used to criticize the EU's refugee policies and practices.

## **#MerkelsTote**

### **Criticism of right-wing discourse**

As might be expected, there is only a small number of tweets in the *#MerkelsTote* dataset that can be identified as pro-refugee or counter-discourse. The features that were found in these tweets include complaints about how right-wing politicians and supporters react to the attack and exploit the attack for their own purposes, using sarcasm and counter-arguments.

In the first example, the author claims that most Twitter users who include *#MerkelsTote* in their tweets remain anonymous. Anonymity in the context of Twitter may refer to not using one's offline name but a pseudonym instead. Consequently, the user may imply that these users hide behind their screens and do not stand up for their positions. The user ends the tweet with three noun phrases, which seem to represent the reason for or consequence of the anonymity. The second noun phrase is written as a direct object, indicated by the ending *-en* which is used

for determiners of masculine nouns in direct object position. Based on this grammatical structure, it can be assumed that the user claims that these users do not have morale and decency but only hatred. Furthermore, the hashtag is used metapragmatically, that is, referring to the hashtag itself (See also Example 148).

Example 146 (MerkelsTote 84):

**Die meisten, die unter #MerkelsTote twittern, tun dies anonym. Keine Haltung. Keinen Anstand. Nur Hass.**

**Most who tweet under #Merkel'sDead do so anonymously. No morale. No decency. Only hatred.**

The second example also points out hatred. The author claims that there is no compassion but plenty of hatred. In the first sentence, there is no explicit referent to whom this claim applies, but in the subsequent sentence fragment the user refers to *right-wing populists without a conscience* and thus implies that right-wing populists do not express compassion toward the victims of the terrorist attack. Instead they utilize hatred as it suits their purposes. The phrase *that is to be expected* suggests that this is typical for right-wing populists. The tweet ends with *#Merkel'sDead* and *#neverafd*, the former being used to categorize and contextualize the tweet and the latter being used to reject the extreme-right political party, Alternative for Germany.

Example 147 (MerkelsTote 111):

Mitleid gibt's keins, **Hass** dafür genug. Naja, **wie zu erwarten von gewissenlosen Rechtspopulisten**. #MerkelsTote #niemalsafd

**There is no compassion, but plenty of hatred. Oh well, that is to be expected from right-wing populists without a conscience.** #Merkel'sDead #neverafd

While the previous example only implicitly addressed that right-wing supporters exploit emotions and promote hatred, the following example directly addresses this right-wing strategy. The author states that *#MerkelsTote*, and thus the notion that Merkel is to blame for the victims, is used to instrumentalize the attack and distort the reality. As in the previous example, the tweet



negates that this hashtag expresses any form of empathy or solidarity.

Example 148 (MerkelsTote 85):

**#MerkelsTote ist der widerliche Hashtag, der mir seit langem unter die Augen kam. Null Solidarität, pure Instrumentalisierung und Verzerrung**

**#Merkel'sDead is the most disgusting hashtag which I've seen in a long time. Zero solidarity, pure instrumentalization and distortion**

The following example is a direct request with which the user implicitly addresses those who employ right-wing discourses by blaming others and invoking fear. The user not only criticizes right-wing strategies but also provides an explanation, namely feeling helpless.

However, the user argues that feeling helpless does not justify right-wing discourses.

Example 149 (MerkelsTote 112):

**Don't start blaming people and stirring up hatred just because you feel helpless. #BerlinAttack #Breitscheidplatz #Merkel #MerkelsTote**

Twitter users also employ sarcasm to criticize *#MerkelsTote* and thus also the users of this hashtag. As stated before, *#MerkelsTote* is often used when blaming Chancellor Merkel for the victims of the terrorist attack. The strategy of scapegoating is common in right-wing discourses as it provides an easily identifiable target that can be blamed for problems and concerns. The user of the following tweet uses a hyperbole and analogic reasoning to ridicule that Merkel is blamed for the attack by asking if Merkel is also to blame for the death of the user's goldfish. The tweet also directly responds to the Twitter account of the AfD on the federal level by including *@AfD\_Bund*.

Example 150 (MerkelsTote 159):

**Mein Goldfisch ist gestorben #MerkelsTote?? @AfD\_Bund**

**My goldfish died #Merkel'sDead?? @AfD\_Bund**

Another example of a sarcastic tweet is the following.

Example 151 (MerkelsTote 119):

**Wenn ich noch einmal #MerkelsTote lesen muss, kotz ich ins Auto von AfD-Politikern und anderen Vögeln**

**If I have to read #Merkel'sDead one more time, I'll puke into the cars of AfD-politicians and other morons**

The tweet is a predictive conditional sentence, which describes a condition and the resulting consequence. The condition is reading another tweet with *#Merkel'sDead* and the consequence is that the author of the tweet would vomit into the car of politicians of the extreme-right party, AfD, and others alike. The user refers to AfD politicians because it was a politician of that party who coined the phrase *Merkel's dead*. The user further extends the applicability to *other morons*, which may refer to those who support the AfD and right-wing discourses because of the negative associations with the word *Vogel* (English: *moron*, lit: *bird*) in this context. The word implies lack of reasonable behavior. The informal style and unlikely realization of the consequence indicate sarcasm.

**Argumentation**

Most tweets that can be classified as counter-discourse to right-wing discourses employ blaming and sarcasm, but there are also some examples that provide rational arguments in order to delegitimize the validity of right-wing discourses. The following two examples address the fallacy that refugees automatically represent a threat to the safety of people and state. The first example reminds the audience that refugees did not commit the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and a Syrian child did not commit the 2016 Berlin terrorist attack. The user probably chooses to specify the age and origin (*#Syrian child*) because the attacker did originally enter the EU as a refugee, however not in 2015 after Germany suspended the Dublin regulation but several years earlier. Therefore, the user questions the conclusion that Merkel is to blame for the victims since her government allowed Syrian refugees to apply for asylum in Germany starting in 2015.

The tweet thus reveals the fallacy used in right-wing supporters.

Example 152 (MerkelsTote 157):

**Those tweeting #MerkelsTote forget that none of 911 terrorists were #refugees & #Breitscheidplatz attacker was no #Syrian child #berlin**

Both Example 152 and Example 153 address right-wing populists and their supporters in third person. In Example 152 the user creates further distance by using the demonstrative determiner *those*. The author of Example 153 also chooses to address right-wing supporters in third person (@AfD\_Bund-voters), but additionally the Twitter account of the AfD is directly addressed via the feature @username. The author may have chosen this affordance in order to reach a wider audience since the tweet also appeared in the feed of @AfD\_Bund due to the use of @username.

Example 153 (MerkelsTote 27):

Wann verstehen @AfD\_Bund -Wähler, daß #Breitscheidplatz eher **DAMIT zu tun hat**, anstatt #refugeesNOTwelcome und #MerkelsTote zu skandieren? 🙄 [Link to tweet]

When will @AfD\_Bund -voters understand that #Breitscheidplatz has to do WITH THAT instead of chanting #refugeesNOTwelcome and #Merkel'sDead? 🙄 [Link to tweet]

The tweet also includes a tweet by the German-language news website, *Spiegel online*, which cites an article about German military missions against ISIS. This tweet by *Spiegel online* is the reference for the capitalized da-compound *DAMIT* (English: *with that*). The capitalization of the word expresses emphasis, which is necessary as the referent is not included in the text of the tweet itself but in the tweet that is attached to it. Based on the sentence structure, the author argues that terrorist attacks in Europe are caused by Western countries' military missions in the Middle East. These military missions provide reason and rationale for radical groups to fight back and take revenge. The tweet ends with an emoji that shows a face with rolling eyes, which is commonly used to show contempt.

Users react to right-wing discourses by criticizing them for inciting hatred and instrumentalizing for their own purposes, that is, the creation of fear with which discrimination and exclusion can be justified. Those who use *#Merkel'sDead* to reinforce right-wing discourses are accused of only stirring up hatred and not expressing compassion toward the victims of the attack. Furthermore, users present counter arguments in order to provide a rational argument with which right-wing discourses can be fought.

## **#BerlinAttack**

### **Expressing sympathy and prayers and references to religion**

In the aftermath of several tragedies of the last few years, social media platforms were used to express sympathy and to show compassion. After the Paris attacks in 2015, for instance, some Facebook users added solidarity filters to their profile pictures such as the *Je suis Charlie* logo or the French flag. Users also post messages and tweets expressing their thoughts and prayers. In this dataset, three tweets contain a sign of sympathy as illustrated in the following two examples. In the first example, *#IchBinEinBerliner* and an attached image express solidarity with the victims and their families.

Example 154 (BerlinAttack 13):

*#Breitscheidplatz #BerlinAttack #IchBinEinBerliner* [pic.twitter.com/1ohUAP0ked](https://pic.twitter.com/1ohUAP0ked)

The phrase *Ich bin ein Berliner* (English: *I am a Berliner*) is a quote by US President John F. Kennedy, who gave a speech in West Berlin in 1963 voicing the United States' support of West Germany and West Berlin. Syntactically and semantically, the phrase also resembles the slogan *Je suis Charlie* (English: *I am Charlie*), which emerged after the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting in Paris in January 2015 and which was varied after other tragedies including the Paris attacks in November 2015 and the Orlando shooting in 2016. Consequently, social media users may

recognize and use the phrase *Ich bin ein Berliner* as a sign of solidarity and compassion. The tweet is further supported by a picture which shows flowers and grave candles lying on the sidewalk, representing a symbol of sympathy.

The second example not only offers sympathy by using the phrase *prayers and thoughts with the victims* but also promotes peaceful coexistence and equality. *#coexist* is often used to demonstrate the ability of humans with different religions or ideologies living together peacefully. The capitalization of the hashtag adds emphasis. While right-wing discourses often use religion to distinguish between in-group and out-group and focus on the alleged danger that derives from Islam, the author of this tweet seems to embrace diversity and support peaceful coexistence.

Example 155 (BerlinAttack 17):

**#BerlinAttack is heartbreaking - prayers and thoughts w/ the victims. We're dedicated to working towards peace & equality on earth #COEXIST**

The topic of religion is also addressed in other tweets. As stated before, in right-wing discourses Islam and Muslims are often equalized with threat and terror. Conversely, tweets that support counter-discourses reject this generalization and state instead that Islam is a peaceful religion and that Muslims oppose terror, as in the following example. After the Berlin attack, *#MuslimeGegenTerror* (English: *#MuslimsAgainstTerror*) was a trending hashtag and used to demonstrate that German Muslims condemn terrorism and violence.

Example 156 (BerlinAttack19):

**Islam heißt Frieden #MuslimeGegenTerror #BerlinAttack**

**Islam means peace #MuslimsAgainstTerror #BerlinAttack**

The following tweet also addresses the generalizations to which Muslims are subjected. The author refers to right-wing supporters as cowards and declares them responsible for the extremism, which they blame on all Muslims. Therefore, the user directly criticizes right-wing

supporters and their discursive strategies.

Example 157 (BerlinAttack 42):

Yeah here we go – **right wing cowards** start **blaming all muslims for the extremism they helped unleash in the first place.** #BerlinAttack

### **Criticism and quoting sources**

While the previous example does not specify who is meant by *right wing cowards*, the following two examples have more specific addressees of their criticism. In both examples, the political party, AfD, is criticized for exploiting the Berlin attack for their own purposes, that is, agitation against migrants and refugees and critique of the government and mainstream media. Both tweets are supported by an article from *Meedia.de* and *DerWesten.de*, respectively, two online news portals, the latter catering primarily to North Rhine-Westphalia, a state in Western Germany. In the first example, the @username function is used to directly address @AfD\_Bund and @MarcusPretzell, however, syntactically they are referred to in third person. @AfD\_Bund is preceded by the demonstrative determiner *this* and @MarcusPretzell is followed by the prepositional phrase *with his statements*, *his* referring back to @MarcusPretzell. The author of the tweet thus distances him- or herself from the addressees, which is reinforced by the word choice *repulsive* to describe the political party and the politician who originated the phrase *Merkel's dead*.

Example 158 (BerlinAttack 43):

Einfach nur **abstoßend, diese @AfD\_Bund, insbesondere @MarcusPretzell** mit seinen Äußerungen zu #BerlinAttack <http://meedia.de/2016/12/20/merkels-tote-so-instrumentalisiert-die-afd-den-lkw-anschlag-in-berlin-in-den-sozialen-medien-fuer-ihre-zwecke/>

Simply **repulsive this @AfD\_Bund, especially @MarcusPretzell** with his statements about #BerlinAttack [Link to article]

In the second example, the @username function is not used, but the AfD is also referred to in third person. The author claims that the AfD exploits the attack, which is supported by an article, as in the previous example, and adds a further description of the political party. The user implicitly calls the AfD the wolf in sheep's clothing, which is a figurative expression to describe someone who disguises their true nature by looking innocent. The exploitation of the attack is implied as the party showing its true nature, that is, their proclivity to Nazi ideology, after disguising itself to appear mainstream and acceptable. Although the reference to Nazi ideology is not directly mentioned in the tweet, the article by *DerWesten.de* makes several connections between AfD politicians' word choice and Nazi jargon.

Example 159 (BerlinAttack 18):

**AfD instrumentalisiert #BerlinAttack**

<https://www.derwesten.de/209039125> **Hoffentlich erkennt der Bürger nun den Wolf, nachdem Schaafspelz abgelegt hat.**

**AfD exploits #BerlinAttack** [Link to article] **Hopefully, the citizen now recognizes the wolf after sheep's clothing is taken off.**

Twitter users add links to articles that support their position pointing out and criticizing the AfD's instrumentalization of the Berlin attack as well as articles that provide a more nuanced view of the situation as in the following example.

Example 160 (BerlinAttack 75):

**Wichtiger Kontrapunkt zu Kritik an #Merkel – #Flüchtlingspolitik nach #Breitscheidplatz** <http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/berlin-market-attack-2016> ...  
#AfD #CSU #BerlinAttack

**Important counterpoint to the criticism of #Merkel – #Refugeepolicies after #Breitscheidplatz** [Link to article]

The author introduces the tweet with the statement *important counterpoint to the criticism of #Merkel*. The counterpoint is provided in the article by the British online version of the international monthly men's magazine, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*. Specifically, the article criticizes

British extreme-right politician, Nigel Farage, for his premature conclusion that Merkel's refugee policy caused the attack. The article further argues that Islamist extremism is home-grown in Europe, that is, migrants do not come as extremists but are radicalized in Europe. Moreover, the article questions Merkel's responsibility, which is insinuated in Pretzel's claim *They are Merkel's dead*, since the only person to be held responsible for the attack is the attacker himself.

It is important to keep in mind that the sample of tweets with *#BerlinAttack* was posted within 24 hours after the attack and before the police identified and released the identity of the attacker. For this reason, other Twitter users also criticize the hasty judgments made by right-wing politicians and supporters. The following example specifically addresses the premature assumption that the attack was committed by a migrant or refugee, as the perpetrator could also be a person *born and raised in Berlin*.

Example 161 (BerlinAttack 29):

**How do you know that the perpetrator of the #berlinattack was not born and raised in Berlin? #berlinattack**

### **Support for Chancellor Merkel's position**

As stated above, many tweets criticize Chancellor Merkel and her refugee policies and even call for her resignation. However, there are also some Twitter users who express their support for Chancellor Merkel and her refugee policies as shown in the following two examples.

Example 162 (BerlinAttack 62):

**#BerlinAttack #merkel Sie sind die Richtige.** Weil Sie im Chaos die Ruhe bewahren und den Überblick behalten

**#BerlinAttack #merkel You are the right person.** Because you keep calm in the chaos and stay on top of things

In Example 162, Chancellor Merkel is addressed directly with the formal personal pronoun *Sie* (English: *you*, formal). Even though her name is used as a hashtag, not capitalized,



and not followed by a comma, the use of the personal pronoun clearly indicates that the user is addressing Merkel. The first part of the tweet is then followed by an explanation why Merkel is the right person. According to the user, she keeps her cool and stays abreast of the situation. The tweet can be understood as a form of approval of Merkel's general position and her reaction to the attack as the tweet begins with *#BerlinAttack*.

The second example uses the third person to refer to Merkel. In this example, the user positively evaluates Merkel's immigration policy by calling it *enlightened*.

Example 163 (BerlinAttack 134):

Angela Merkel's enlightened immigration policy will beat terrorism in the long run.  
Don't let one mad man defeat **humanity** #BerlinAttack

The author also claims that Germany's immigration policy would *beat terrorism in the long run*. Furthermore, the user does not distinguish between migrants and refugees but refers to immigration as a whole. In December 2016, Germany's government still supported the so-called open-door policy as regards refugees. With the statement *Don't let one mad man defeat humanity*, the user addresses and rejects the call of right-wing politicians and supporters for closed borders and stricter immigration laws. The user seems to consider *Angela Merkel's enlightened immigration policy* a form of humanity and thus evaluates it positively. Moreover, the tweet regards the attack as an isolated event, as opposed to a general tendency as depicted in right-wing discourse.

An appeal to values like freedom, unity, and open borders is also evident in the following tweet.

Example 164 (BerlinAttack 31):

A. Merkel: "...wir werden die Kraft finden für das Leben, wie wir es in Deutschland leben wollen: **FREI, MITEINANDER und OFFEN.**" #berlinattack

A.Merkel: "...we will find the strength for the life we want to live in Germany: **FREE, TOGETHER and OPEN.**" #berlinattack

The tweet includes a quote by Chancellor Merkel from a press conference on December 20, 2016. In her statement, she encourages the people to find strength to live in Germany like people wish to live, namely free, together, and open. She addresses all people in Germany by using the first person pronoun *we* and by not distinguishing who does or does not have the right to live in Germany. The Twitter user seems to support this statement because the three adjectives *free*, *together*, and *open* are capitalized and the tweet does not include any negative framing of this statement. By quoting the Chancellor and including *#berlinattack*, the user disseminates her message on Twitter and makes it thus visible to a greater audience.

## **Summary**

The findings to the second research question, “What are features of counter-discourses to right-wing positions?” show that counter-discourses focus on highlighting the humanitarian reasons for supporting refugees and migrants, on sharing examples of existing support for refugees, and on condemning right-wing discourses as regards refugees. Furthermore, counter-discourses provide positive presentations of the Chancellor and her refugee policies. However, as shown in Table 7, there are differences between the datasets. While the datasets that represent the summer of 2015 include more instances of supporting refugees and appealing to humanity, the datasets that represent the timeframe after the Berlin terrorist attack contain more sarcasm and mostly criticisms of right-wing discourses. Othering is also present in the data, however in contrast to right-wing discourses, the other is represented by right-wing supporters.

**CHAPTER SIX:**  
**FINDINGS FOR INTERACTION BETWEEN RIGHT-WING AND COUNTER**  
**PERSPECTIVES**

For the first and second research question, I mostly looked at individual tweets because the majority of the tweets were not part of an interaction between users. In some cases, another user may have been addressed directly because this function may increase the tweets' visibility, but the direct interaction could not always be reconstructed due to the sampling strategy.

For the third research question, "To what extent do the technological and communicative affordances of Twitter lead to a potential for dialogic interaction between the opposing discourse communities?" I focus on the interaction between users. I specifically focus on direct interactions via responses to tweets in order to analyze the potential for dialogic interactions between users who feed right-wing, nationalist-conservative discourses and users who challenge and condemn such discourses and reinforce pro-refugee discourses. In all four datasets, the majority of the sample are not replies to another tweet nor followed up by a direct response from another user. Nonetheless, there are some examples of user interaction in all four datasets. For the analysis of the third research question, only responses to tweets from the dataset are taken into consideration.

## #wirschaffendas

The findings show that the majority of interactions between users occur within the same type of discourse. Furthermore, the strategies and topics employed in the original tweet are often also used in the replies. For instance, when a tweet criticizes Merkel, the replies also contain a form of criticism of Merkel, or when the topic of financial burden is highlighted, the response echoes the financial burden of refugees, as in the following example.

The tweet by @ThomasGBauer (Figure 6, wirschaffendas 80) is a response to @WilliamsJon, who tweeted about the increasing numbers of refugees entering Austria. The user cites the Red Cross and includes the reference in the form of the link to an article by *the Guardian*. @ThomasGBauer's tweet is a sarcastic response to @WilliamsJon's tweet as it is a request to let them, that is, the refugees who entered Austria, proceed to Germany. Germany is capitalized and described as *the land of milk and honey*, which is a reference to the bible and thus to Judeo-Christian traditions. In contemporary English, the idiom is understood as a place with abundant resources where one can have an easy life. The two hashtags, #noproblem and #wirschaffendas, further point to the sarcastic tone of the tweet. The second user addressed by @ThomasGBauer directly replies with *G€RMONEY (for all)!* and also addressed the user of the first tweet, @WilliamsJon. @Lars9596 takes up the capitalized word *Germany*, albeit with altered spelling, and adds *for all* in parentheses as well as an exclamation point. The notion of (financial) abundance, to which @ThomasGBauer's tweet alludes with *the land of milk and honey*, is expressed by the alteration of the spelling. The first *e* is replaced by the Euro sign, €, and the second and third syllables are replaced by *money*. This word play is possible due to the phonemic similarities of *-many* (/məni/) and *money* (/mʌni/), which differ in only one phoneme.

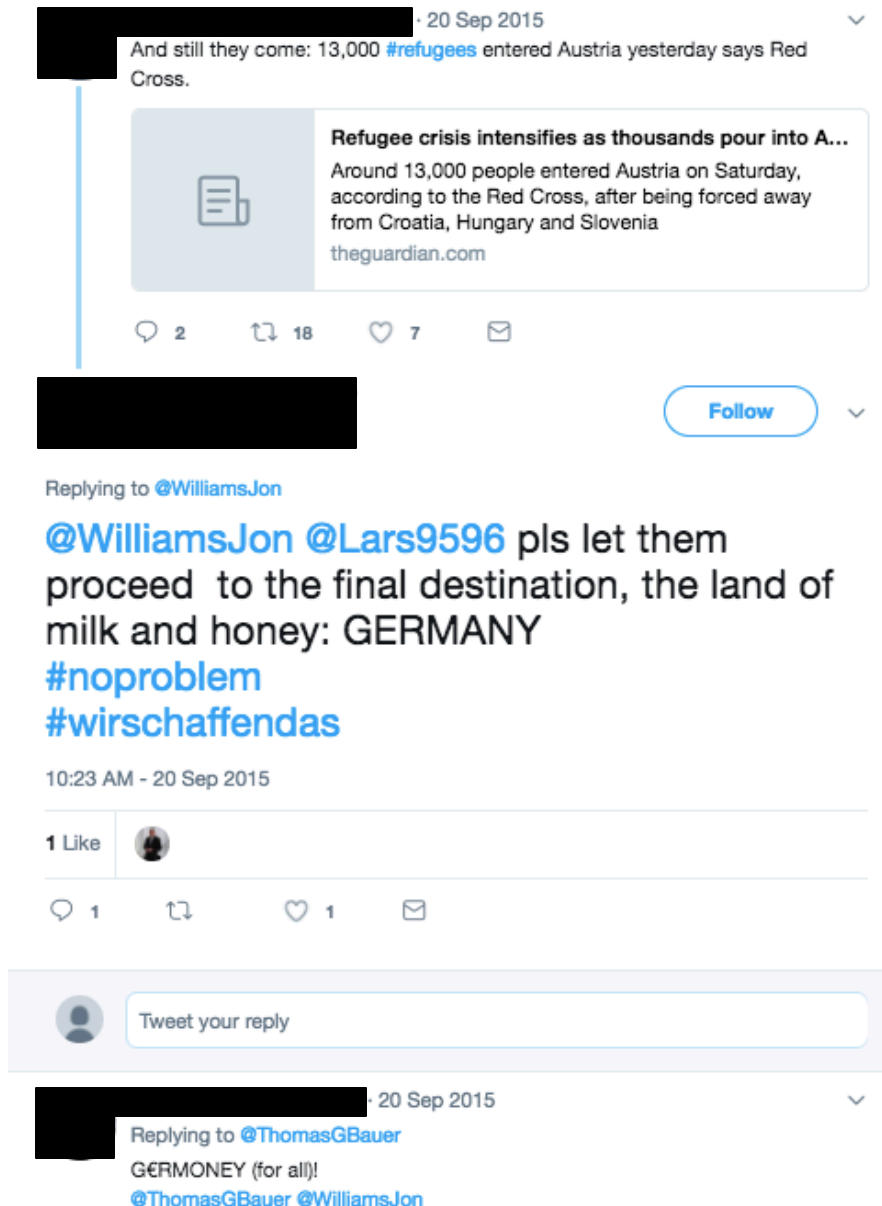


Figure 6. Tweet “wirschaffendas 80” with reply.

As already mentioned in the previous example, a connector between users is the use of humor and sarcasm. In the following example (Figure 7, wirschaffendas 115, same as Example 11), user @ThomasGBauer brings up the threat of terrorist attacks and includes negative stereotyping of Muslims. The same user then replies to his own tweet and includes the addressee of his previous tweet, @Lars9596. The response is a continuation of the previous tweet as the

user further exploits the concept of suicide bombers looking for virgins in paradise. The user ironically claims that the virgins would be at the Oktoberfest, which equals heaven, while the suicide bombers would end in hell. User @Lars9596 contradicts @ThomasGBauer by stating that they would in fact *go to 'heaven', but with 72 mothers in law*.

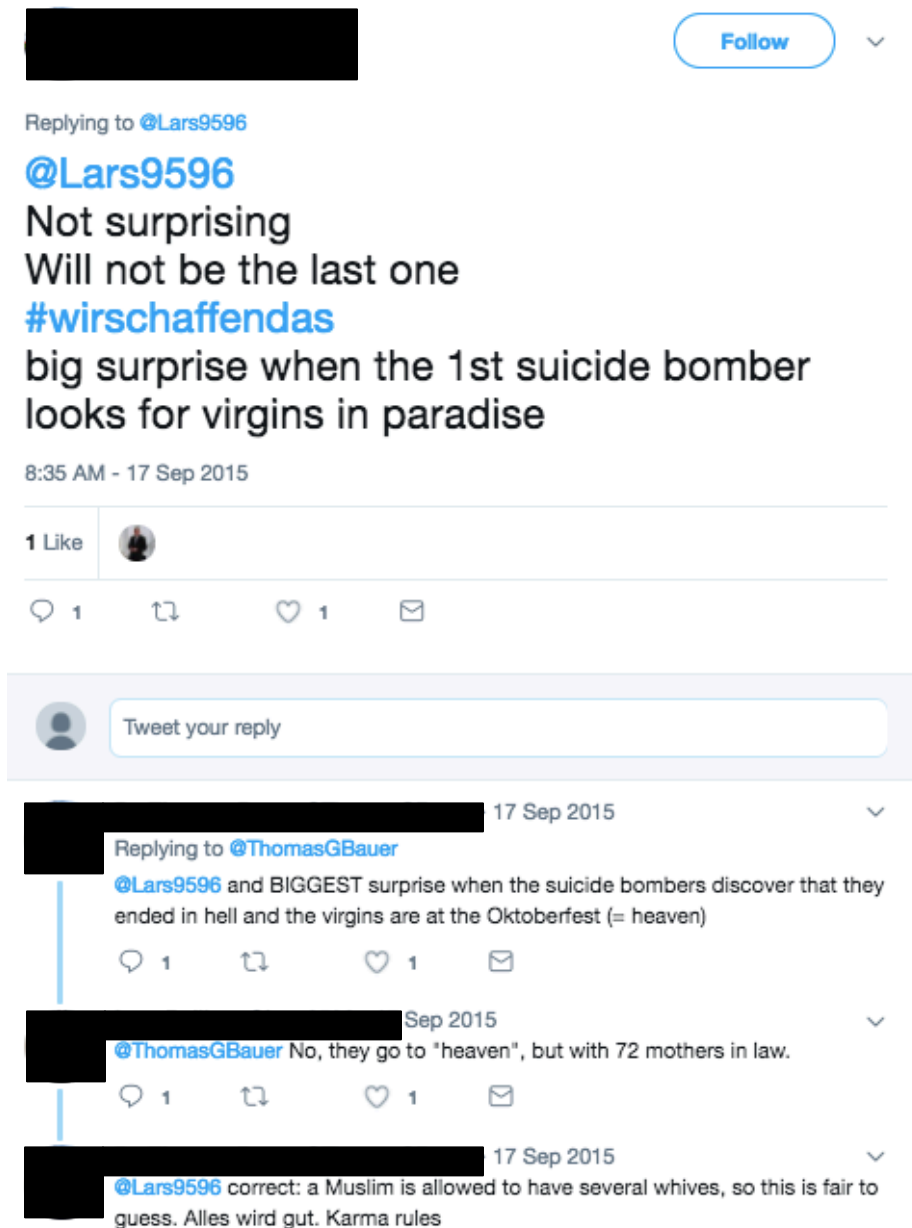


Figure 7. Tweet “wirschaffendas 115” with replies.

Heaven is placed in quotation marks because the user plays with the negative connotations of mothers-in-law. Therefore, the contradiction is used to confirm the previous tweet's sarcastic message that suicide bombers would be surprised when discovering that they did not end up in heaven. @ThomasGBauer affirms the response by @Lars9596 by using the word *correct* and by further elaborating on the mother-in-law joke (i.e., several wives) and stating *everything will be fine. Karma rules*. The overall stance constructed by the three users is one of alignment, that is, the critique of #wirschaffendas.

The previous two examples show that some users seem to interact more than once. It is possible that the users know each other offline, or they may belong to similar online networks. Twitter relationships are not primarily based on offline relationships as, for example, Facebook. If one's account is public and one did not restrict the privacy settings, any Twitter user can see and react to one's tweets and become a follower. It cannot be determined whether @ThomasGBauer and @Lars9596 followed each other at the time of the interaction, but it is likely the case because @ThomasGBauer addressed @Lars9596 twelve times within the #wirschaffendas dataset.

While the majority of the interaction occurs within the same discourse community, there is one example of interaction between a user who seems to support refugees and a user who seems to fear the burden of refugees. In the following example (Figure 8, wirschaffendas 116), @Holefleisch tweets *A thought: 70 years ago people ran away from us for their life. Now they run to us to protect their life. #wirschaffendas*. The user makes an implicit reference to refugees during World War II who escaped Nazi Germany, which is contrasted with the situation during the European migrant crisis and refugees seeking help in Germany. User @OrganicFUD responds by negating and clarifying the last part of @Holefleisch's tweet *to protect*. According

to @OrganicFUD, people do not come to be protected, *but to live from us*. The user further claims that *there was already protection in Turkey, Greece, ... Austria, ...* Therefore, the user argues that refugees, who are only implicitly referred to through the context of both tweets, come to Germany deliberately to exploit the social security system. The reply was tweeted six days after the original tweet and the author of the original tweet did not react to the reply.



Figure 8. Tweet “wirschaffendas 116” with reply.

## #openborders

As shown above, the majority of the tweets with #openborders supported pro-refugee positions or criticized right-wing positions. This trend can also be found in tweets with replies; the interaction between users is for the most part based on pro-refugee positions as illustrated in the following examples.



The first example (wirschaffendas 31) is part of an exchange of eight tweets between two users. User @LesvosW2eu shares that the mayor of Mytilene, the capitol of Lesbos, Greece, requests the federal government to declare a state of emergency. Lesbos is less than four miles away from the Turkish coast and en route the Western Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean routes, which were used by the majority of refugees in the summer of 2015. User @xoriskanape replies, wondering how a state of emergency would help with the issues, that is, the high number of new arrivals of refugees and the lack of care. @LesvosW2eu then suggests that the *only solution is #openborders, legal routes for Refugees without documents to enter Europe safely*, to which @xoriskanape agrees by starting the reply with *agreed*. Their exchange continues for three more tweets, in which the users not only agree with each other but also build on each other's ideas and suggestions to help refugees continue their way toward Athens.

The second example (same as Example 144, openborders 174) is an exchange of three tweets. In the initial tweet, user @michelmaietta states *No human is illegal!* and shares an image showing a toddler's body placed on a map entitled *world new map*. The continents are separated from the ocean by a wall with razor wire. The body is behind the wall on top of the ocean, and resembles the body of washed ashore Aylan Kurdi. Two other users reply to the tweet. Both responses can be considered agreements with the original tweet. While the first response corroborates the pro-refugee position by stating that *we need humanim (sic) and empathy in #Europe*, the second response quotes the author and text of the original tweet, including the image. Both responses support the position of the original tweet as they indirectly agree with @michelmaietta.

In the third example (Figure 9, openborders 211), the users also agree with each other by pointing out that refugees were not responsible for several financial crises or economic issues

within the EU. User @tinawirnsberger asks *Can you remember when refugees caused the Hypo-scandal? No? Me neither*, which represents a simulated dialogue. The question is in quotation marks, but it does not seem to be a quote from a different source. The user suggests that refugees are not responsible for a financial crisis caused by investment bankers. Hypo-scandal is a reference to the Austrian bank, Hypo Alpe Adria, which represents a symbol of bad investment banking and the 2008 European debt crisis.

The image shows a screenshot of a tweet and its replies. The main tweet is from a user whose profile picture is redacted with a black box. The tweet text is: "Können Sie sich erinnern, als Flüchtlinge den Hypo-Skandal verursacht haben? Nein? Ich auch nicht." #refugeeswelcome #openborders. Below the text, there is a "Follow" button and a dropdown arrow. The tweet is dated "12:48 PM - 12 Sep 2015 from Vienna, Austria" and has "12 Retweets" and "17 Likes". Below the tweet, there is a "Reply" section with a text input field containing "Tweet your reply". Two replies are visible: the first is from a user with a redacted profile picture, dated "2 Sep 2015", replying to @tinawirnsberger with the text ".@tinawirnsberger @misik "Die europäische Bankenkrise?" "Die Griechenlandkrise?" "Unterzeichnung von TTIP?" - Lässt sich beliebig fortsetzen"; the second is from a user with a redacted profile picture, dated "12 Sep 2015", replying to @tinawirnsberger and @BirgitMathon with the text "doch. Jene, die aus der Verantwortung flüchten".

Figure 9. Tweet “openborders 40” with replies.

The tweet is echoed by @HellSchu, who adds additional crises that have not been caused by refugees or the migrant crisis but by financial institutions (‘*The European bank crisis?*’ ‘*The Greece crisis?*’ ‘*The signing of TTIP?*’ – *Can easily be continued*). The second response seems to contradict the original tweet and the first response with *doch* (English: *on the contrary*). However, upon closer examination, it is evident that @burner\_vie supports the positions of the other tweets. The user employs a word play and uses the verb *flüchten* (English: to *escape*) with *Verantwortung* (English: *responsibility*) in order to claim that those who escape responsibility are responsible for the financial crises, which may be a reference to bankers who did not get prosecuted for their actions that led to the financial crisis (*on the contrary. Those who escaped responsibility*).

As the examples illustrate, most interactions occur between users who seem to share similar ideologies and positions. However, there are some examples that show that interaction also happens between users of opposing opinions. The following example (same as Example 56, openborders 59) shows the interaction between a user who claims with an image that some refugees belong to terrorist groups and a user who contradicts the claim by replying *guy on the left not ISIS not Nusra*. Since the tweet by user @PatrickHilsman is merely a sentence fragment, it is useful to explore the profile information of the user. The profile picture of @PatrickHilsman shows a gorilla punching Hitler, identified by mustache and swastika armband. In the profile description, the user also included *Freelance Journo + Semi-Pro Sleuth, ... Troll Hunter!* These profile cues help infer the meaning of the tweet as they position the user as anti-fascist and interested in detective work and discovering internet trolls.

## #MerkelsTote

The *#MerkelsTote* dataset is more diverse as regards interaction between users. The findings show interaction between users who criticize the use and meaning of *#MerkelsTote*, between users who support right-wing positions, and between users of opposing discourses.

The first two examples show how users who oppose the blaming of Chancellor Merkel for the victims and the scare tactics of right-wing populists interact with each other. In the first example (Figure 10, *MerkelsTote* 159, same as Example 150), user *@Dadgess* states that their goldfish died. The statement is followed by *#Merkel'sDead* with two quotation marks and the direct address of the right-wing populist party's Twitter account, *@AfD\_Bund*.



Figure 10. Tweet “MerkelsTote 159” with replies.

The structure of the tweet suggests that the user is asking whether Merkel is also responsible when one's goldfish died. This ironic exaggeration points to the user's critique of right-wing populists' scapegoating strategy. Two other users also respond to the tweet with ironic statements. @Noah3567\_ makes a reference to refugees by saying that the fish was certainly a refugee (*The fish was certainly a refugee*). The irony is supported by the letter repetition in the German words for *was*, *certainly*, and *a* and by multiple exclamation points. The number one between the exclamation points may have been a typing mistake. The response by @ReibyDE addresses media reporting. The user asks whether the media have already reported. The question is ironic and may point to sensationalist media reports after tragedies (*have the media reported yet?*).



Figure 11. Tweet “MerkelsTote 119” with replies.

In the second example (Figure 11, MerkelsTote 119, same as Example 151), the author complains about the use of #MerkelsTote by threatening to vomit in the car of right-wing politicians and others alike (*If I have to read #Merkel'sDead one more time, I will puke into the car of AFD-politicians and other morons*). User @Annixp1 takes up the threat by threatening to poop in the trunk (*And I poop into their trunk 😊*) and thus picks up the same “storyline” by using a variation of the same theme. The author of the initial tweet, @Laminatrice, shows approval with an emoticon expressing a big smile. By using sarcasm, these two users thus affiliate around the criticism of right-wing discourses.

While there are a few examples of user interaction between users criticizing right-wing discourses, users who support right-wing positions seem to react to each other more frequently. As the following examples illustrate, users build on each other’s right-wing discourses.

The first example (MerkelsTote 10) is an interaction between nine users. @FrischFritz96 shares an image of a Christmas Market entrance that is blocked by three concrete blocks with the purpose of preventing vehicles to enter the market. The user sarcastically claims that secure borders are not needed if nice concrete blocks can be placed in front of the Christmas Market. The tweet also includes #BerlinAttack and #MerkelsTote. Eight users respond to the tweet and take up the topics of border control and security threat. One user (@HaraldPetermann) also makes references to other events that require additional protection such as the Oktoberfest or the New Year’s Eve party in front of the Cologne Cathedral. This particular response also takes up the sentence structure of the original tweet by beginning the tweet with *or* and ending it with *and and...* (*or fences at the Oktoberfest, for ‘recapturing’ the cathedral square and and...*). The tweet is thus a continuation of the initial tweet.

In several interactions, the users support each other's critique of politicians and government. For instance, the author of the following example (Figure 12, MerkelsTote 5, same as Example 72) criticizes that The Green Party prevented the deportation of the attacker (*They're not #Merkel'sDead, but rather #SimonePeter'sDead. #Amri would've been home already if @Die\_Gruenen didn't prevent it*). The users who respond to that tweet reinforce that Merkel is to blame, too. User @eysvog31 claims that both, Chancellor Merkel and The Green Party are to blame, the former for letting refugees in and the latter for not letting them leave (*Both are guilty: #Merkel let them in – #TheGreenParty don't let them out*).



Figure 12. Tweet “MerkelsTote 5” with replies.

User @Synelly asserts that the attacker would not have been here, that is, in Germany, without Merkel (*Without Merkel he wouldn't have been here. @BonkeKolja @Die\_Gruenen*). Even though the three users do not fully agree on which politician is to blame for the victims, they support each other's perception that politicians are responsible for the attack because of the policies implemented or blocked by them.

As stated above, interaction within the #MerkelsTote dataset does not only occur between users who seem to share ideologies. The following tweets illustrate interactions between users supporting right-wing discourses and users challenging those discourses. In all examples, the initial tweet can be classified as right-wing, and in two of the four examples, the author of the initial tweet also replies to the response tweet.

In the first example, MerckelsTote 11, user @RegensburgWatch provides a lead for the police: *Here a new lead for #police: One, who hasn't been here long, is happy about a pile of unholy corpses*. User @RobertDittmar responds to the tweet by directly addressing the author with the personal pronoun *Sie* (English: *you*, formal) and accusing the author of defamation. @RobertDittmar also provides a reasoning for his accusation (*You vilify a man who smiles because he just found out that wife and child are safe.*) and ends his tweet with the exclamation *Shame on you!* @RegensburgWatch replies to this accusation by questioning @RobertDittmar's reasoning (*At the location of #terror at least 1 h after #attack, why would he wait that long to call wife&child? A confidant!*). While @RobertDittmar does not include any hashtags in his tweet, @RegensburgWatch includes hashtags both within the sentence and at the end of the tweets. In both tweets, the author includes #AfD, which may be a sign of approval of the party's positions and ideologies.



In the following example, MerckelsTote 45, user @MaxEricThiel affirms *They are #Merkel'sDead!* and claims that Amri is the second terrorist whose deportation was blocked (*They are #Merkel'sDead! She is drawing a trace of blood through the Republic. With Ansbach it is already the 2nd terrorist whose deportation was blocked!*). The tweet is supported by a campaign poster of the AfD's youth organization, *Junge Alternative* (English: *Young Alternative*). The poster shows Harald Weinberg, *Member of the Bundestag* from the political party, *Die Linke* (English: *The Left*), wearing an explosive belt. The poster claims that he was against the deportation of the perpetrator of a suicide bombing in Ansbach, Germany. User @de\_escalation responds to the tweet by addressing the members and supporters of the *Junge Alternative* (JA) with the personal pronoun *ihr* (English: *you all*, informal). The user claims that the people support Chancellor Merkel all the more, the more dumb and illogical the JA incites against her (*You JA don't even realize that the people supports Merkel all the more, the dumber and more illogical your agitation against her.*). This tweet is followed by a four-tweet exchange in which @MaxEricThiel and @de\_escalation address each other with the personal pronoun *du* (English: *you*, informal). While @MaxEricThiel uses sarcasm (*I argue against that, I believe you will first be shot down by the flying spaghetti monster.*) and does not directly react to the other user's arguments, @de\_escalation continues their line of argument and supports it with a reference to a program by the second channel of German television broadcasting (*ZDF*). The user claims that right-wing discourse is being exploited by ISIS (*They [ISIS] want the division of society & strengthening of the Nazis*) and Merkel counteracted with her policies (*#Merkel counteracted. Got it?*).

In the last example, MerckelsTote 140, user @Knuddelbacke shares an image of an obituary remembering the *isolated cases* who lost their lives because of *refugees*. The tweet also

includes a reference to Chancellor Merkel's New Year's address (*#NewYear'saddress no words !!!*) and the two hashtags *#newyear'seve2016* and *#Merkel'sDead*. Three users react to this tweet with the first two responses being the most critical. User *@ribachman* tweets two questions in response to the tweet by *@Knuddelbacke*. The user indirectly criticizes the obituary because it does not include people who suffer because of the politics of Western countries (*And where are the thoughts for all the people who had to leave their home thanks to the politics of the West? / And where are the thoughts for the thousands of dead for which Europe and also Germany are responsible?*). *@ribachman* therefore presents a counterargument to *@Knuddelbacke's* position. The other two users question *@Knuddelbacke's* purposeful lack of conceptual clarity and lack of coherence.

### **#BerlinAttack**

As in the *#MerkelsTote* dataset, the findings show that there is interaction between users who share similar ideologies and between those who do not share the same positions. The first example (Example 165, BerlinAttack 23) is a tweet by the Russian news network, RT, which includes a link to an article by the network and a picture of four politicians including Chancellor Merkel and Minister of the Interior de Maizière laying down flowers. The tweet by *@RT\_com* itself does not express a clearly identifiable position toward the attack, however, the six users who reply to the tweet express strong criticism of Merkel as shown in the exchange below. Two users, *@PaulaDuvall2* and *@Solar\_Wind*, address Merkel's political career and declare her *UNFIT to lead Germany* and her career as *dying*. One user (*@blackfishbird*) invokes the topic of security and the government's (*they*) lack of implementing security, which may be a reference to

border control. Another user (@EmperorShine1) addresses the consequences of the government's "open-door" policy as regards refugees and lack of integration measures.

Example 165 (BerlinAttack 23):

@RT\_com: #BerlinAttack: '#AngelaMerkel's #NightmareBeforeChristmas' (Op-Ed) on.rt.com/7y9r

@PaulaDuvall2: I hope this horror in Berlin seals her "political coffin", next year. She's **UNFIT to lead Germany!**

...

@blackfishbird: **Maybe now they'll try some security.** Probably not though.

@EmperorShine1: well that's the **price you pay for mass immigration and not trying to acclimate them** .#merkelsfault #nightmarebeforechristmas

@S0lar\_Wind: she should take these flowers and put in her ass, this fake sympathy wont save **her dying career** after all she did

The second example (same as Example 103, BerlinAttack 1) is a 24-tweet interaction about Chancellor Merkel's reaction toward the German flag shown in a video. User @MillennialCon\_ shares a short clip in which one can see CDU politicians celebrating, including Angela Merkel. One politician takes a small German flag and starts waving it. Merkel takes away the flag and slightly shakes her head with a facial expression of disapproval. The video is from a 2013 election victory party, which is not indicated by @millennialCon\_. In fact, the sentence structure of the tweet suggests that the terrorist attack occurred before the scene shown in the video. The time frame is further supported by #berlinchristmas and three Christmas tree emojis. Most users who respond to the tweet support the criticism of Merkel and disregard the fact that the video does not relate to the terrorist attack. In fact, the video is used as a justification for criticism. Users claim, for instance, that she is not patriotic and request that she should be voted out or removed from office. Merkel is also called incompetent and a traitor. One user even goes as far as suggesting killing her by tweeting *She Should Dangle From A Rope!* All of the responses were posted in English and many of the responses refer to Germans and German citizens in third person, meaning the users may not be Germans themselves or live outside of

Germany. The use of the term *impeachment* also signals an outsider perspective since the German Chancellor cannot be impeached. In Germany, only the President can be impeached. Furthermore, Merkel is compared to the US-American politicians, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. In both cases, the references are negative, which may point to the users' leaning toward right-wing, conservative ideologies. Two users also bring up the topic of downfall and claim that Merkel would contribute to the downfall of Germany. However, two users point out that the video is older and thus taken out of context, but these replies are not taken up by the other users.

Example 166 (BerlinAttack 1):

@MillennialCon\_: The #BerlinAttack occurs and all Merkel is worried about is not waving the German flag 🙄🙄🙄 #berlinchristmas 🙄🎄🎄🎄🙄  
#GermanChristmasMarket

...

@Bellajane127: That's so sad! A German leader **disgusted with her country's flag**. She must be voted out!

@johnmich44: She will be gone, **Germans are fed up** with their Obama like President!

...

@dernihelm75: She is afraid of triggering the terrorists with national pride! What an absolutely disgraceful act!

...

@ahikingtrail: when are **the proud German citizens** going to **refuse this witch**, reminds me of Hillary, we said no to her propaganda, they can too

@Thomas95631199: **She Should Dangle From A Rope!**

@Ted\_Cruz\_2018: **That stupid Communist!** She is either going to **destroy Deutschland** or cause a "Deutschland fur Deutsch" movement.

@SCRUB58: If I lived in Germany, I would do everything in my power to make sure **Angela Merkel would lose her job!** She's **incompetent**.

@Fastcars2016: She's a **traitor** to all Germans. She should be **removed from office**, impeached even asap or else **Germany will perish**.

@\_SimonBarnett: **Um. That clip is probably older that you are.**

@Snoss82: **video is way older. Get some dignity!**

...

@Incognnitto: give her the **isis flag ! She loves that one**

@waltjesseskylar: verrrry interesting - is she **anti-German?**

While the previous example showed that users who presented counter-arguments were ignored, in the following example (Example 167, BerlinAttack 21), the author of the initial tweet engages with the user who criticizes the tweet. User @KeepItRealist tweets about the media

covering up that *migrant crime is a growing national epidemic in Germany* and claims that *Germany is not a free society*. User @LeonTysen responds to this tweet questioning @KeepItRealist's credibility by asking if the user is from Germany, which is denied by @KeepItRealist, who continues the argument of media manipulation and suppression of information. @LeonTysen again questions the other user's credibility by arguing that one has to live in the country to judge the situation, which is again denied by @KeepItRealist, who claims that the reporting after the 2015 mass sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve was altered at the instruction of Chancellor Merkel. At this point another user steps in and accuses @KeepItRealist of not knowing the facts and being a racist. This user also addresses @LeonTysen in their tweet, which may be an acknowledgment that @LeonTysen tried to engage in a failed dialogic interaction.

Example 167 (BerlinAttack 21):

@KeepItRealist: Migrant crime is a growing national epidemic in Germany, yet it's covered up by the media. Germany is not a free society. #BerlinAttack

@LeonTysen: are you from Germany?

@KeepItRealist: I am not, but I pay attention to things going on there. Suppression of information in this case is nothing new.

@LeonTysen: information can be manipulated. You have to experience live here to tell

@KeepItRealist: No, you don't. German media bosses were forced to admit it after the Cologne attacks. They suppressed the story for Merkel.

@CatslaveCop: Ok, that proves that you don't have a clue. Oh, and your timeline shows you're a fucking racist. It's not working @LeonTysen

## Summary

The findings to the third research question, "To what extent do the technological and communicative affordances of Twitter lead to a potential for dialogic interaction between the opposing discourse communities?" show that there is little interaction between users. If users respond to each other, then they usually respond to people who share their own views. Users therefore affiliate around shared ideologies. In interactions between members of opposing

discourse communities, it is more common for users who employ counter-discourses to challenge users who share right-wing positions than vice versa.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I discuss the findings and implications of the study as well as limitations and directions for further research.

#### **Summary and Discussion**

Although there are few direct negative references to migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, they are often depicted as taking an active role in the form of pushing for asylum or invading Germany and Europe. This constructs a negative image of migration and its consequences and questions the legitimacy of their status as refugees. While the English term *refugee* may not inherently carry negative connotations, negative connotations associated with the German word for refugee, *Flüchtling*, have evolved as right-wing discourses have used the term when pointing out negative situations. By questioning the legitimacy of the term *refugee*, users also question the rightfulness of any financial aid for refugees and claim that refugees are prioritized over citizens and represent a financial burden for taxpayers.

Furthermore, migrants and refugees are depicted as a threat to German and European culture, traditions, and belief systems. Religion is often used to justify this threat because users draw on negative stereotypes of Islam. Refugees are discursively constructed as violent and dangerous, posing an imminent threat to the safety of German citizens. References to previous Islamist terrorist attacks corroborate this construction of threat and danger.

The major target of right-wing complaints is the German government. The slogan *wir schaffen das*, which became a symbol of the German government's refugee policy, is used sarcastically in juxtaposition with negative descriptions of refugees. This argumentation strategy ridicules the German government's position on refugees and constructs the distinction between citizens and politicians. The citizens have to deal with the consequences that result from the actions of politicians, particularly the members of the federal government<sup>3</sup>. Not only refugees and politicians but also those who support pro-refugee policies are the targets of othering; however, the main scapegoat is Chancellor Merkel as she uttered the symbolic phrase *wir schaffen das*. Refugees are depicted as her guests, implying that she invited them with her open-border refugee policy, and even children or adopted sons, implying that she would care for them as a mother. This sarcastic comparison to a mother criticizes the perceived prioritization of refugees over citizens and draws on the concepts of financial and social burden. Furthermore, users establish causation by directly linking the Chancellor's open-border refugee policy in the summer of 2015 to the terrorist attack in December 2016.

Both in August – September 2015 and in December – January 2016, right-wing discourses are thus characterized by negative presentations of migrants and refugees. Users construct the image that the national security is threatened and the national identity and culture are in danger. The discursive strategies employed in right-wing discourses establish a positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation used to justify the exclusion of others who do not belong to the constructed and imagined homogeneous community of white Germans and Europeans sharing Christian traditions. Several topics common to right-wing discourses are invoked and exploited such as financial burden, security threat, and the downfall of the nation.

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the term government is conceptualized differently in German. It refers only to the Chancellor and the Ministers.



These findings align with previous research on right-wing discourses both in mass media and political discourse as well as digital discourse (e.g. Baumgarten, 2017; Doerr, 2017; Wodak, 2015b; Richardson & Wodak, 2009). The data further show that the de-emphasis and downplaying of Nazi and extreme right positions is evident.

Users also leverage the technological affordances of Twitter. Twitter's character limitation facilitates simple and informal language that can be understood by a wide audience. Repetitions and buzzwords are common features of tweets. The character limitation may promote an impulsive and uncivil discourse as well as depersonalized communication because both the person criticizing and the person who is criticized are behind a screen (Ott, 2017). This may lead to a new form of political discourse (Terkourafi et al., 2018); users are able to circumvent mass media gatekeepers and share political opinions and news directly (Engesser et al., 2016). Consequently, social media may play a role in political agenda-setting and in constructing and maintaining the image of political actors and processes (Enli, 2017).

Another example of a technological affordance is the use of memes, which are frequently used to propagate right-wing discourses. Visuals contribute to the spread of right-wing discourses as they facilitate naturalization processes. Furthermore, right-wing tweets often contain multiple hashtags. The excessive use of hashtags makes tweets more visible and thus provides the potential to reach a larger audience. Not only hashtags that denote right-wing positions are used but also hashtags that do not carry negative or positive connotations such as *#refugees* or *#Merkel*, as well as hashtags that contain positive associations with refugees such as *#refugeeswelcome*. While *#refugeeswelcome* is often used to express a positive stance toward refugees, in combination with *#BerlinAttack*, the users make use of it to criticize pro-refugee positions. (e.g., *#AngelaMerkel welcomes the #Muslim #invasion ... / so not to tarnish her open*

*border #refugeewelcome policy*). In other instances, tweets simply consist of a variety of hashtags denoting various positions on refugees. This can be described as inter-ideological mingling (Graham, 2016) and facilitates the spread of right-wing ideologies, and is used to a lesser extent by those who counter these discourses. It is possible that the excessive use of hashtags is more common in right-wing tweets because of social bots which are used more frequently by right-wing political actors (Schäfer, Evert, & Heinrich, 2017) and “are no longer a marginal phenomenon on social media platforms” (Keller & Klinger, 2019, p. 172).

While there are many similarities as regards the discursive strategies, topics, and semiotic and multimodal resources employed in right-wing discourses during both time frames, there are also some differences between the first and second time frame. The most common topics in the August 2015 dataset include financial and social burden of migrants and refugees, while tweets in December 2016 focus on pointing out the consequences of the German government’s refugee policies. Furthermore, when users employed criticism in August 2015, it addressed politicians, mainstream media, and the elite in general. Users distinguished between *us*, the people, and *them*, the politicians and the elite. In December 2016, however, the criticism was directed toward specific politicians. Chancellor Merkel was the main target of right-wing criticism. As the head of the German government, she is directly associated with Germany’s refugee policies. Her gender as a female leader also plays into this. Her portrayal as *mother* aligns with metaphors used by liberals and conservatives in political discourse and the construction of family as a type of governance. While conservatives lean toward a strict father model, liberals lean toward the nurturant parent model, according to Lakoff (2002). By using references to Merkel as mother in negative contexts, right-wing supporters not only recontextualize the connotations of the reference to Merkel but also criticize liberal positions on migration policies and claim the

prioritization of refugees over citizens. Members of other political parties, especially The Green Party, were also blamed for the attack and the casualties, albeit in much lower numbers compared to Angela Merkel. It needs to be pointed out that users rarely used the @username function in this context. There were only two examples of @-mentions related to The Green Party, and users did not use @AngelaMerkelCDU, the official Twitter account of the Chancellor, to address Chancellor Merkel. Conversely, #Merkel was used very often.

While right-wing discourses aim at creating fear in order to justify harsh treatment, exclusion, and discrimination, counter-discourses use emotions differently. Sharing reports and images of migrants' hardship and existing inequalities aims at triggering empathy and compassion. Positive reports of refugee relief efforts undertaken by German and other European citizens aim at pointing out the support for refugees among the German and European population. Right-wing diction is reappropriated to serve the purpose of portraying the support as strong and widespread as well as to depict right-wing discourses and right-wing supporters as the actual problem that is threatening the country.

Users construct a positive image of refugees by pointing out the economic benefits for European countries as well as the cultural enrichment refugees represent. The phrase *wir schaffen das* is thus contextualized differently in counter-discourses, taking a positive stance. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the 2016 Berlin terrorist attack, Chancellor Merkel and her refugee policies are evaluated positively, whereas right-wing rhetoric is criticized and ridiculed. Moreover, users provide counter-arguments and caution against generalizations of migrants in general and Muslims in particular.

While right-wing supporters distinguish between *us* on the one hand and migrants, refugees, mainstream politicians, and refugee supporters on the other hand, supporters of

counter-discourses distinguish between *us*, which includes citizens and politicians, on one side and right-wing supporters on the other side. Similarly to right-wing discourses, there are few instances of @-mentions. The examples in which users address other Twitter users focus mostly on accounts related to the far-right political party, AfD. Counter-discourses employ discursive strategies to justify inclusion rather than exclusion and call out right-wing rhetoric by identifying and explaining the discursive strategies employed by right-wing supporters.

To conclude, the findings show that both right-wing and counter-discourses are represented on Twitter. Right-wing discourse thus only reflects one type of discourse. Counter-discourses provide different perspectives and evaluations of the European migrant crisis and do not construct migration as a threat to the nation but rather emphasize the economic and societal benefits. Furthermore, users of both discourse communities leverage the technological affordances of Twitter and employ a variety of semiotic and multimodal resources to create meaning. However, right-wing discourses contain more hashtags, more visuals, and more sarcasm than counter-discourses. Humor and sarcasm seems to be used to create affiliation. Especially in the case where controversial issues are being discussed, sarcasm also seems to serve as a mitigating device that allows users to hide behind opinions. Lastly, English seems to be used within both right-wing and counter-discourses to connect across geopolitical boundaries and to reach a wider audience. The use of English enables users to bring international attention to German issues and allows more users to participate in the discourse about these issues.

As regards interactions between users in general and specifically between users of opposing discourse communities, the findings show that most tweets are not part of an exchange between users. Furthermore, users who do engage with others usually chose to support each other's positions and thus stay within the same type of discourse, which may contribute to the

construction and maintenance of filter bubbles. Humor and sarcasm seem to be a connecting element in user interactions and serve to create affiliation and bonds of co-membership online. In fact, most interactions in the dataset include humor or sarcasm. Tweets that are part of an interaction also tend to contain similar discursive strategies and topics. The hashtag that provoked most interactions between users of opposing discourse communities was *#MerkelsTote*, which may be due to the hashtag's inherent provocation and the fact that it started based on the tweet of a far-right politician. The findings regarding user interaction align with the general lack of turn-taking expectations on Twitter. Although tweets of celebrities and public figures do receive attention in the form of likes, retweets, and replies, most tweets do not get a reaction. Since *#MerkelsTote* derived from a politician's account, it is thus not surprising that this hashtag yielded more interactions between users.

### **Implications and Contributions**

The European migrant crisis has contributed to the rise in right-wing, nationalist-conservative, and xenophobic discourses across Europe (Bennett, 2016; Doerr, 2017). Refugees and asylum seekers are portrayed as scapegoats and individual cases of negative encounters are exploited to generalize that refugees represent a threat for Germany and Europe and to justify closed borders and strict immigration policies (Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016). Consequently, it is important to react to these discourses by not reducing and simplifying complex contexts, by providing different perspectives in a civil manner, and by creating more spaces for dialogue online and in society at large. The counter-discourses explored in this study illustrate some of the strategies that are used to challenge and condemn right-wing discourses. Examining right-wing discourses and their counter-discourses may help raise awareness, contribute to the development of policy guidelines to educate users of all ages about social media usage and the dangers of

ideological manipulation and confirmation bias, and hopefully prevent the naturalization of these discourses and the discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers.

Throughout the European migrant crisis, the German government and particularly the German Chancellor were criticized for not presenting viable solutions to handle the migrant crisis and to counter right-wing discourses. The rise of the German far-right political party and its electoral success across Germany may thus be seen as a logical consequence due to the construction of fear and the perceived inability of mainstream political parties to provide solutions. It may thus be helpful to improve the government's communication strategies in order to prevent right-wing discourses from further spreading and becoming the norm. This may be achieved by a stronger presence in social media and through a critical examination of right-wing discourses. When political leaders critically evaluate and examine right-wing discourses and demonstrate interest in the concerns of citizens, they may facilitate a better connection to their constituency and prevent political apathy which is often exploited by far-right political parties in order to promote their own agenda and ideologies.

In the last few years, Twitter has gained importance as a platform where discourses are produced, reproduced, as well as challenged. Right-wing political actors in particular have taken advantage of the micro-blogging service to connect with followers directly without a gatekeeper and to spread their ideologies (Ott, 2017). When mainstream media outlets are called *the lying press* and when fake news spread across social networking sites, it is important to reveal and detect misleading and manipulative strategies in order to prevent the dissemination of fake news and simplified and distorted information. Increasing social media users' digital media competence is therefore pivotal. For this reason, colleges and universities should make efforts to foster students' digital media competence by providing guidelines on how to detect manipulative

strategies and make informed judgments about claims and fake news spread via Twitter and other social networking sites and by teaching positive norms online. Students in the field of linguistics in particular should be encouraged to critically examine language and its role for issues of power and (in)equality.

This multimodal critical discourse study has shown that Twitter is a platform where right-wing, nationalist-conservative ideologies are disseminated as well as challenged. The combination of critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis was able to reveal that right-wing supporters as well as supporters of counter-discourses use a variety of discursive and semiotic resources and leverage the technological affordances of Twitter. According to a 2018 study by the German forsa Institute for Social Research and Statistical Analysis (Forsa, 2018), most online users have encountered hate speech online. However, most comments, posts, and tweets that include inciting speech are often written by only a few very active accounts, which was also found in this study. While it shows that right-wing supporters are more actively using Twitter to disseminate their ideologies, it may also offer opportunities as regards the handling of these accounts. For instance, in Germany, the Federal Criminal Police Office (German: Bundeskriminalamt) has investigated several online users who disseminate hate speech on the basis of *Volksverhetzung*, incitement of the people, according to § 130 of the German penal code. In addition, this study has shown that there are many Twitter users who not only contribute to the production of counter-discourses but also criticize and challenge right-wing ideologies, which may also help prevent the naturalization of right-wing discourses.

## **Limitations**

This study also has limitations that need to be addressed. The main limitations are related to the data sample. Although the sampling strategy is appropriate for the purpose of this study and aligns with previous in-depth qualitative research studies that also analyzed 25-200 tweets (Bennett, 2016; Graham, 2016; Rasmussen, 2015; Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016), it is important to point out that sampling by theme may not fully account for “co-occurring discourse activities” (Androutsopoulos, 2013, p. 497). Moreover, it may be difficult to bind a group by tracking the use of hashtags because not all hashtags are used to interact with others and to build a community (Marwick, 2013). The limitation of sampling by time is that the analysis only covers a small piece of a possibly larger phenomenon. Furthermore, since I conducted a multimodal critical discourse analysis and needed to examine each tweet for relevance as well as linguistic, semiotic, and multimodal features, I was not able to analyze larger amounts of data. I hope to reduce the significance of these limitations by having provided a fine-grained, contextualized analysis connected to the broader socio-political phenomenon. I believe that the discourse-historical approach to CDA facilitated these connections. By closely examining the particular contexts chosen for this study, I was hopefully able to contribute to the understanding of nationalist-conservative, rightwing, and xenophobic discourses on Twitter in the context of the rise of the right-wing populists in Europe and specifically in the relatively understudied context, Germany. Germany plays a significant role in this context not only because of its current leading political role within the European Union but also because of its historical baggage.

I am aware that even though the online and offline worlds are not strictly separated, there are differences between online and offline discourse. These differences are due to technological affordances but also related to the population who engages in online discourse. As I included but



did not focus on demographic data since they may not represent the users' offline identity, I cannot draw firm conclusions about the population that engages in these types of discourses. I also cannot deny the "digital divide" (Tagg, 2015) that most likely also exists in Germany. I am however not interested in representing German or European society as a whole but rather in the reaction of Twitter users to specific events and how these reactions resonate with the current rise in xenophobia in Europe.

KhosraviNik and Unger (2016) further point to the "problem of a-historicity of the web, because sites and texts are subject to continuous change" (p. 209). This makes replicability and transparency of the data collection and analysis more difficult. In fact, conducting searches of the same hashtag one month after the initial data collection showed that some tweets were no longer available, for example because they were deleted or because the account was suspended. I hope to minimize this issue by disclosing the data collection procedures.

A further point of consideration is non-standard orthography. Some users may accidentally misspell a word or deliberately use non-standard orthography. Consequently, I may have missed some tweets that were significant for the data sample. While this would mean that the tweet is not part of the community because it does not appear under the trending topic and is thus not visible to the common user, it is visible to the users' followers and thus significant. For this reason, I explored some possible misspellings, for example, "wirschafendas," or "MerkelTote," however I did not find a significant amount of tweets to which this applied.

Lastly, I need to address the language of the tweets. Since most tweets were written in German, I had to translate them into English. Translations rarely establish the exact same connotations and associations. Therefore, I embedded each translation in a rich description and explanation of the historical and socio-cultural context whenever necessary.

## Directions for Future Research

With this study I attempted to explore right-wing discourses and counter-discourses as well as interactions between them during the European migrant crisis. The dataset was limited to four hashtags and two timeframes. In order to get a more detailed picture of these discourses and interactions, the analysis of additional hashtags and contexts is needed. For this reason, I will expand the findings of this study by collecting and analyzing other hashtags that were trending during the course of the European migrant crisis and hashtags that co-occurred with the hashtags of the dataset. In my future research, I will also analyze specific user accounts such as the user account of the far-right political party, Alternative for Germany, in order to investigate how the party's diction evolved over time. This is important since members of this political party take an active role in the production and dissemination of right-wing discourses. Although Germany played a crucial role during the European migrant crisis, the discourses present in other countries are equally important. For this reason, I will also include additional geographical contexts both within Europe as well as the US in my future research. In order to further explore the interaction between users of opposing discourse communities, future research will focus not only on direct interaction via replies but also on interactions via addressing users by username, retweets, as well as indirect interaction via references to and addressing of constructed groups, for example, by using relative clause constructions like *those who ...* or group denominations such as *AfD sympathizers*. Lastly, I believe it is also important to investigate migrant narratives. Studies on right-wing discourses mostly analyze the discourse about migrants, however, we also need to draw attention to the voices of migrants and refugees themselves and analyze their own representation on Twitter in order to get information about how refugees process and experience discourse about them and how they create their own narratives.

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## **APPENDIX**

# INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: Ramona Kreis Date: 5/4/19

Class or Project: Dissertation

Title of Copyrighted Work: Right-wing, nationalist discourses and counter-discourses on Twitter during the European migrant crisis  
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LeEtta Schmidt, [lmschmidt@usf.edu](mailto:lmschmidt@usf.edu) and Drew Smith [dsmith@usf.edu](mailto:dsmith@usf.edu)  
 Reviewed by [USF General Counsel](#) 08/11/2015

Overall, the amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole  supports fair use or  does not support fair use.

EFFECT ON THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
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Overall, the effect on the market for the original  supports fair use or  does not support fair use.

CONCLUSION

The combined purpose and character of the use, nature of the copyrighted material, amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole and the effect on the market for the original  likely supports fair use or  likely does not support fair use.

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Crews, Kenneth D. (2008) Fair use Checklist. Columbia University Libraries Copyright Advisory Office. <http://copyright.columbia.edu/copyright/files/2009/10/fairusechecklist.pdf>

Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from: <https://d396gusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf>

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