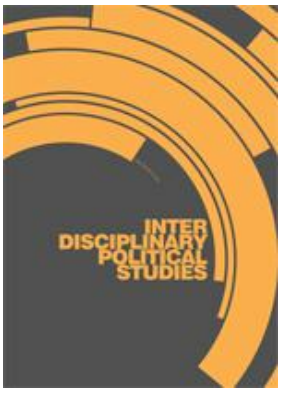

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mnemonic Insecurity: The German Struggle with New Trends of Radicalization

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ABSTRACT

The so-called refugee crisis of the last years has presented Germany with a massive inflow of refugees and migrants. The scale has disrupted Germany's self-narrative as open and tolerant state that has learned from its Nazi past. With local and national institutions not being prepared logistically, with media images portraying a nearly 'overrun' country, and with a significant upsurge in anti-migrant sentiments, a state of mnemonic insecurity has developed in Germany. Far-right political movements gathered strength and voter support, and right-wing extremist violence increased. On the other side, many people actively engaged in a 'welcome culture'. The contribution traces key developments in Germany's approach to the refugee crisis in the context of radicalization trends. It illustrates the dislocation of Germany's identity and self-narrative in an emotionalized discourse, and the following acts to defend memory. It closes with current attempts at memory's re-politicization to something larger than before.

KEYWORDS: Mnemonic insecurity; Identity; Emotions; Radicalization; Germany

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1. Introduction

How vulnerable is German identity? How has the drastic rise in refugee and migration flows and a following radicalization affected German identity and self-narrative? The article argues that German memory has become challenged and German identity dislocated, creating mnemonic insecurity.

The so-called refugee crisis of the last few years, with highest point around 2015–2016, has ruptured Germany's *self-narrative* of an open and tolerant state, one which has learned the lessons from its Nazi past. With local and national institutions seeming logistically ill prepared, with media showing images of a country nearly 'overrun', and with a significant rise in anti-migrant sentiments, Germany developed a state of mnemonic insecurity. Language and political demands became more polarized and extreme, and far-right political movements gathered strength. From 2014 to 2017, there was a new rise in violence by right-wing extremists (BMI 2019, p. 3), mainly against asylum seekers and migrants and those seen as helping them. Attacks on housing centers for asylum seekers rose by about 500% from before 2014 to the highest in 2016 (BMI 2019, p. 7). Anti-Semitic violence increased by 19.6% from 2017 to 2018 (BMI 2019, p. 5), with a first upsurge already in 2016 (Groll 2019). The instances of violence by Muslim asylum seekers against Germans, particularly Muslim men against German women, were heavily exploited in right-wing extremist and populist narratives (Fleischhauer 2015). At the same time, many people were helping refugees and migrants as part of the "welcome culture". German authorities reacted by both tightening laws to restrict migration and improving integration measures for those with (likely) asylum status. It took a few years, however, for a united and decided rejection of the incitement, polarization attempts and violence by populists and extremists.

In post-1945, the German *self-narrative* as open and tolerant state which has learned from its Nazi past has been frequently and repeatedly activated in acts of historical remembrance across society and politics. The need to learn from the horrors of National Socialism – and never to allow such horrors to occur again – are part of German discourse. Germany's special responsibility (*besondere Verantwortung*)

is a constant evocation. This self-narrative, however, always had tensions: parts of German society post-1945 continued to show anti-foreign sentiment, and even a continuing glorification of Nazism and desires for revindication. The *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) coming to Germany from the mid-1950s on, mainly from Greece, Italy, Spain and Turkey, often faced xenophobia (Der Spiegel 1973). Fears of "uncontrolled movement" were particularly pertinent already then (Vollmer & Karakayali 2018). Post-Cold War re-unified Germany experienced xenophobia, islamophobia, and racism, too (Ramm 2010; Boulila & Carri 2017; Vollmer & Karakayali 2018). While we should also note the different ways of dealing with the Nazi past in Eastern and Western Germany, the dominant official narrative on both sides was one of having become an open, tolerant, democratic and/or new society and state where there is no place for political extremism and violence. The great majority of public and political discourse has presented a German self-narrative and identity as cleansed from the horrors of National Socialism and as re-integrated into the community of liberal, democratic states. The refugee crisis has illustrated the continuing tensions in this self-narrative and identity.

The contribution traces the key developments of the radicalization of parts of German discourse during the refugee crisis.[1] It concentrates on how Germany has dealt and is dealing with the refugee crisis and grown migration, in light of increased radicalization and populism in Germany. It illustrates aspects of the societal-political struggle, the dislocation of Germany's identity and self-narrative, and the emotionalization in narratives. In closing, the contribution shows the steps taken up until now towards defending and re-politicizing memory for mnemonic security, and thereby strengthening ontological security.

2. Identity, Emotions, and Crises in the Context of Radicalization

Before presenting empirical insights regarding Germany's identity and self-narrative, this section introduces the important role of identity, emotions, and crises

[1] The article builds in part on results of the project VIDEOSTAR – Video-based Strategies against Radicalization, extending to the concept of mnemonic memory. The project is funded by the Internal Security Fund of the European Union.

in the context of radicalization, as well as mnemonic security and ontological security. Identity and, at the level of states, national identity, are constructed and socialized in experience with others. Scholars highlight the role of identity and of emotional needs, as well as how extremists attempt fulfill these with their narratives (Cottee & Hayward 2011, p. 963; Barrelle 2014; Neumann 2016, p. 64). It thus matters in the context of radicalization, how both Self and Other, and their relations, are represented and how such representations either confirm or reject particular aspects of identity and the emotional links (Mercer 2014, p. 522, 530). Self-other constructions and the elements of difference they contain are part of human understanding and interaction. Yet, self-other constructions can also come to include exaggerated difference, the purposeful enlargement of dichotomies, and the application of hierarchies with elements of superiority regarding the Self and of inferiority regarding the Other. Recent work discusses the interplay of identity and alterity, difference and othering practices in several case studies (Reinke de Buitrago & Resende 2019).

Without emotional appeal, extremists could not get their messages across. Emotions play a key role in radicalization narratives. Scholars highlight that emotions are part of our thinking, directly and indirectly shaping social behavior. Emotions are inseparable from cognition and action, for humans rely on and use emotions to understand the world and to act in it in relation to others (Bially Mattern 2014, p. 590-591; Mercer 2014). Extremist groups exploit emotional needs of belonging, and their narratives include up- and de-valuation, thereby creating cohesion towards the inside/Self, but difference and otherness towards the outside/Other(s). Extremists reject the identity of those they speak against and offer their own identity instead. Identity re-constructions can take place by rejecting the identity that connects an individual to mainstream society, and then offering the identity of the extremist group.

Times of crisis can also lead to identity re-construction. Crises often rupture held ideas, foster struggles among dominant, alternative and new ideas, and thereby unsettle current narratives. Such a socio-political struggle for meaning can then also

unsettle identity and create space for new links and constructions. According to Nabers (2016), crises can motivate social change and dislocate identity. When a dominant discourse loses its ability to explain, it produces a crisis in held meaning (Legro 2000, p. 424; Laclau 2005, p. 122). The dislocation of a discourse is always possible (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000, p. 15), because hegemonic articulations are contingent and precarious (Laclau 1993, p. 283). Political crises can thus create voids of meaning, which the dominant actors fill with new meaning (Nabers 2009). In fact, political actors compete to establish their particular interpretations and representations as dominant. When these new ideas have become identified with, normalized and institutionalized (Nabers 2015, p. 147), the new narratives can become dominant.

When a crisis dislocates identity, however, ontological security can be at risk. Ontological security describes a state of being where the Self feels secure in its surroundings, with some degree of order and continuity (Giddens 1991). Ontological security is part of identity construction and constantly challenged by elements of foreignness and difference, and resulting feelings of insecurity (Cash & Kinnvall 2017, p. 269-270). States too need ontological security, and national decision makers engage in efforts and practices to build and maintain a positive view of Self and national identity (see for example Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008; Croft 2012). For the state's Self to be "internally cohesive", also the "mnemonic vision of itself and its place in the world" must be coherent (Mälksoo 2015, p. 224). To maintain a stable and continuous sense of Self and of "the Self of a state", state agents engage in "collecting the history of a nation-state into a story that informs current actions" (Steele 2008, p. 20). These efforts aim at mnemonic security, which is linked to as well as enables ontological security. A secure self-narrative and memory allows for a secure sense of Self and identity; a secure sense of Self can in turn stabilize a coherent memory and constructive memory work.

Memory efforts though have their pitfalls, particularly when security needs gain too much weight. Mälksoo (2015, p. 222) points to significant consequences when states argue their ontological security. The security lens then covers questions

beyond those of physical survival; state identity becomes more fully linked with security, raising the importance of national memory; and the sovereign states' security dominates politics. Security then appears as most important value to pursue (Mälksoo 2015, p. 224). Memory thus is political. Collective memory then is a process of contestation, a struggle over memory by policy makers and other groups, and a struggle over which policies to pursue (Becker 2014). Acts, practices, rituals, and symbols serve to maintain a national memory, a process called mnemonic reconstruction (Vivian 2010). Political actors may also use such materialized representations to construct boundaries and to sharpen the sense of difference between Self and Other (Cash & Kinnvall 2017, p. 269). Political actors can furthermore foster adaptations of memory by introducing new ideas. National memory thus shapes a state's self-narrative (Mälksoo 2015, p. 222). However, when actors apply ontological security to memory, memory itself can become a question of a secure Self, and may then shape ensuing action to the detriment of other societal domains or other actors (Mälksoo 2015, p. 224). New security dilemmas and entanglements may result, including new demands to secure identity within a security frame (Mitzen 2006). Therefore, when a state's memory is (seen as) endangered and insecure – as mnemonic insecurity – the form of its re-stabilization can create new problems. As alternative, Mälksoo (2010) points to the potential gain from seeing identity as open-ended and constantly becoming, to avoid problematic consequences and entanglements.

Turning to Germany, we observe a country trying to find its role – and to adapt its identity – in response to a world with new challenges and demands. For Karp (2018, p. 59), the case of Germany illustrates well the "interaction between a national self-narrative and a rapidly changing environment", the "ontological anxiety" caused, and the strains and adaptation needs in order to secure identity. The growing calls for German leadership in the world strain German self-narrative and challenge the reluctance to lead. The German struggle to respond involves adaptations in discourse and behavior to satisfy both mnemonic security and ontological security needs in the context of new challenges and grown responsibilities. We thus

see "a determined effort by German leaders to position the country between a traditional culture of restraint that can no longer meet Germany's responsibilities and a position of hegemony that speaks of self-serving behavior and dominance" (Karp 2018, p. 59). In trying to maintain "cognitive order" (Mitzen 2006, p. 346), Germany adjusted its identity to fit the new conditions; this new identity was, however, what Mitzen (2006, p. 347) calls a "second best" identity, a compromise of its goals and self-narrative, and the new context. As of now, German leaders are still attempting to balance the response to ally demands with their public's reluctance to follow (Karp 2018, p. 75).

In German national memory, WWII and National Socialism with its horrors likely figure as the dominant events in the 20th century. Another defining event, though to a lesser degree, is WWI, and on the positive side the fall of the Berlin Wall and German re-unification in 1989 and 1990, respectively. As pointed out, significant events such as catastrophes and other events of broad impact weigh on memory and can motivate adaptations (see for example Zerubavel 2003). German memory work focuses mostly on the time of National Socialism, via continuing public and political debates, memorial sites, exhibitions, and other means. Scholars also point to a renewed strengthening of memory work after re-unification, but also certain normalization trends (see for example Wittlinger & Larose 2007; Langenbacher 2010). The question of how to remember German history remains a societal and political debate, highlighted again in recent years. New radicalization trends in the course of the so-called refugee crisis challenge German mnemonic security and, thus, ontological security. Rising populism, an enormous upsurge in online hatred, and the acts of violence against migrants and refugees, as well as against Jewish people, have unsettled the German sense of Self and self-narrative. The country that thought to have become an open and tolerant state and society had to face the still existing xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism, and the fact that those voices were growing louder and gaining broader support.

A few words on the phenomenon of radicalization serve as context here. Radicalization has many social and political facets, and no agreed definition. Some

have criticized this definitional plethora (Hoeft 2015; Ducol et al. 2018), as it hinders an effective management. For the purpose of guidance, this article understands radicalization as a process that can take various forms. It may be relatively quick or more long-term, and often involves multiple aspects such as instabilities in personal and social identity, certain personality types, lacking feelings of belonging, group pressure, social surrounding and family influence, and to a lesser part lack of education or economic means (Hussain 2018, p. 88-95). There may or may not be a perception of the need to defend one's own religion (Ahmed 2016). In radicalization processes, thinking and behavior become more limited and extreme and thus more removed from average views of a society; they then can also evolve to include violence (Neumann 2013c, p. 874; Neumann 2013b, p. 3).

To understand radicalization processes, we need to highlight the involved narratives, and the role of media. Narratives illustrate the self-image and the held ideas for how to fulfill one's aims; they "create coherence and order" by defining meaning (Steele 2008, p. 20, 58). A narrative is "a strategic story", "the telling of a story in a certain way for a certain purpose … [namely] influence" (Ricks 2015). In the spreading of extremist narratives, social media play a key role today. Extremists actively use social media, in open and closed channels, to convey their ideas and spread their ideologies, to connect and network, recruit followers, and mobilize, even though offline contact remains important. Some scholars see online media offering an entirely new dimension of propaganda: after actors have initiated debates, both excitement and interest can be kept on a high level (Neumann 2013a, p. 434). Communication in real-time and global space, and the offering of content according to user preferences, effectively draw attention to certain messages (Baaken & Schlegel 2017, p. 187-188). Extremists build and offer strategically crafted narratives that link up with existing tensions in a society, with people's concerns and their expressed views (Milton 2016; Neumann 2016, p. 84-85). Part of the framing and addressing is highly emotional. Extremists attempt to both evoke emotions and appeal to identity. The rejection of the Other is combined with offers of belonging to convince or create interest, and to strengthen both the internal cohesion and the differ-

entiation to the outside group and threatening Other. The emotionalization of Self and Other is a key tool to make one's own group appear superior, and the Other inferior and threatening (see also Reinke de Buitrago 2018), which is why speakers purposefully and strategically emotionalize narratives. The effect of online radicalization narratives is visible in actual violence (Laub 2019), illustrating the need to attend to these narratives and their dynamics.

3. Unsettling German Self-Narrative: Mnemonic Insecurity and Ontological Security

The refugee crisis motivated developments in Germany that culminated in a crisis of identity, self-narrative and memory. Populism rose significantly. Language and demands showed a polarization and more extreme elements, in turn resulting in actual violence. There was a new quality in the radicalization of the right-wing spectrum. Old and new groups voiced their hatred louder and engaged in violence against asylum seekers and migrants, but also against those who publicly supported migration and the assistance of refugees. In addition, articulations of sentiments against Jewish people in Germany grew significantly, and incidents and attacks against Jewish people and institutions increased – something that the German state and society collectively thought overcome.

On the political side, the awakening to the new, more radical reality in Germany was rather slow. At first, some local and state politicians spoke out against the hatred and violence. In particular, the violence against Jewish institutions garnered attention. Violence against migrants and refugees rose further and gained more media attention in the last years. Even in the thought-to-be tolerant midst of society, social media discussions heated up, too. Finally, the focus on right-wing extremist violence grew: politicians began to condemn the acts of violence strongly, but also the narratives of hate and polarization behind. Overall, it took several years until politicians positioned together broadly and clearly against the rising populism and right-wing extremist violence. We may place the clearer positioning in part also in the context and aftermath of the murder of the state politician Walter Lübcke by a

person afterwards discovered to be a right-wing fanatic in 2019. Significant as well was the unexpected strength of the right-wing nationalist/populist party AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) which gained support in state elections of three eastern *Bundesländer* within several months of each other in 2019. Furthermore, in October 2019, on the day of Yom Kippur, a right-wing fanatic attempted to shoot Jewish prayers in a synagogue in Halle, an act he had announced before on social media. These developments uncovered the depth of xenophobic, anti-migration, and anti-Semitic sentiments lingering within German society. They illustrated how easily those sentiments could be re-activated, and what could be the consequences. Contradictions to Germany self-narrative as tolerant society became more visible, challenging mnemonic security, and thereby ontological security. Accompanying the growing societal and political debate was the aftermath of the NSU (*National Socialist Underground/Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund*) crimes, namely of authorities having failed to act in time, and the legal proceedings against the last living NSU member that lasted from 2013 to 2018. The debate around this trial illustrated the difference in views and practices towards right-wing extremism in Germany. Civil society played an important role in stirring politicians to take a clear position against hatred and violence. Not only did many people in Germany organize against extremism and intolerance, they also engaged in assisting refugees and migrants. Civil society began to lobby strongly for refugee and migrant rights. In this, we may also see as a move towards defending or strengthening again mnemonic security.

3.1. The Radicalization of German Discourse

From the end of 2014 on, but particularly in the summer of 2015, the refugee crisis reached a scale that state authorities and the public alike could no longer ignore. The process of unsettling German self-narrative and memory began around this time. Although media had been actively reporting on a rising refugee crisis, where particularly the Italian state had demanded help from its European partners, there was not much more than some political statements on the general need to find a European solution. Most EU countries continued to rely on the Dublin Agree-

ment, outlining that refugees had to register and stay in the country of first arrival. The request of the German chancellor Merkel in 2015 for a European-wide migration policy did not lead to any truly joint or effective answers. Special meetings at the EU level took place; the European Council meeting in April 2015 led to an agreement on an overall strategy that included measures for improved rescue at sea, the fighting of human trafficking, and more cooperation with countries of origin and within the EU. The measure that found most agreement was the strengthening of border patrol at Europe's southern border, mainly via strengthening FRONTEX (*European Border and Coast Guard Agency*). However, with enormous numbers of refugees and migrants continuing to arrive, border patrol alone was insufficient. In addition, Italy had begun to let refugees and migrants transit to other countries; Austria did so as well, leading to unseen numbers of refugees and migrants entering Germany, many of them without being registered. To a significant extent, the German state had no knowledge about who had actually entered the country, and state officials and local communities were often overwhelmed by the logistic and financial needs of providing shelter and assistance. Perhaps of key impact were the often heart-breaking pictures of the plight of refugees and migrants presented in media, the daily reporting of drownings in the Mediterranean Sea, and the desperation at the borders of European states, along with refugees who had arrived and told their story. Not only was there an emotional framing by media or NGOs and other activists, the pictures and experiences of refugees themselves were highly emotional and they moved a great part of German society and policymakers alike. The key contradiction to German self-narrative and identity was how Germany could turn its face from such human plight, with own experiences of flight and human suffering and the experience of the Nazi horrors. In the light of German history, these images began to unsettle German memory and cause mnemonic insecurity, and people began to question if Germany was as tolerant and open as thought, pointing the finger in the lingering historical wounds.

As many Germans began to engage in the assistance of refugees and migrants, also anti-foreign sentiments began to rise. On the one side, a great part of

the population was helping to cover needs of hundreds of thousands incomers. Germans offered all kinds of assistance, including donating, the sorting of clothing and other goods, help with the filling out of forms or with visits to government and public offices, giving German lessons and even shelter in their own homes. The internationally highly applauded welcome culture was strong. These efforts also became part of media reporting. On the other side, however, many began to feel anxious regarding the number of refugees and migrants coming to Germany, and if Germany could really handle it, as Merkel had claimed in 2015. By mid-2016, a report showed that Germany had already taken in many more refugees than any other European country (Zeit Online 2016). With state and local institutions frequently being overwhelmed, these rising concerns and anxieties remained insufficiently addressed. The welcome culture significantly weakened already in 2016 (Zick & Preuß 2016). By then, most Germans still considered integration generally as positive but had strong reservations; most were also against further refugees and migrants entering the country. The above study also showed increases in the numbers of people fearing the loss of German values, and more frequent terror attacks, as well as those demanding the refugees' return after an improved situation in their home countries. At the European level, most thought that particularly Muslims do not want to integrate in their new home societies but remain distinct (Wike et al. 2016).

German mainstream political discourse had centered on the integration of refugees and migrants. The drowning of three-year old Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi, in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 caused so much criticism of the European refugee policy, also via media pressure, that the Dublin agreement was temporarily suspended. Many in Germany came to see the European migration policy as inhumane, and as not fitting with a German self-narrative of an open state and society. On the other side, incidents by refugees/migrants against German women, for example the events at Cologne central station at New Year's Eve 2015/2016, created resentment and increased the demands for security. For that night, more than 1000 incidents of mostly sexual assault against women by persons described as migrant/non-German were reported; police were unprepared. Questions of who was actually entering the

country became louder. In addition, a Europol report from July 2016 warned of hundreds of potential terrorists having entered Europe, as foreign fighters returning from Syria and Iraq. The Christmas market attack in Berlin in December 2016 by a Tunisian with potential links to the terror network ISIS/Daesh, killing 12 people and injuring 55, was another event that shaped views and discourse. Thus, mnemonic insecurity in Germany resulted in two ways. On the one hand, the contradiction between the German self-narrative as open and tolerant, and the perceived and argued lack to respond to such a humanitarian crisis became impossible to ignore. On the other hand, incidents of violence by migrants and/or refugees in Germany strengthened voices that were critical of migration, including extremist ones, which also contradicted the German self-narrative.

Main voices in the radicalization of German discourse are the German far-right movement PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*/Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident), and the AfD. PEGIDA, claiming a decline of European/Western civilization, culture and values, emerged in Germany in the fall of 2014. The name of the movement illustrates the misuse of the term of *Abendland* (occident) for political objectives; the term facilitates a dichotomy between *Abendland* and *Morgenland* (Orient). As some point out, this was already part of the illiberal ideology of Germany between WWI and WWII (Conze 2005). PEGIDA grew significantly and formed local offshoots.

The now quite strong, right-wing nationalist/populist party AfD actively played on and utilized rising anti-foreign sentiments and anxieties for its aims. Founded initially on an EU-critical and right-wing-liberal platform in 2013, it has turned into the key political force against further migration and against foreigners overall. Despite some diversity of views and continuing internal struggles over future direction, AfD discourse is strongly populist and in part extremist. Since early 2020, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*) is seeing a part of the AfD as case of observation (*Beobachtung*). A key practice of the AfD is to build and strengthen polarization, dichotomies, and resentment, and to play on anxieties. AfD representatives continuously misuse the

differences that people feel between themselves and foreigners, and the concerns of people over what the changes may bring. They represent refugees and migrants as people living off the German social system, never having contributed, and thus living off the work and achievements of Germans, in contrast to the German pensioners who are forced to go through trash to survive (Farle 2018, translated). The refugees and migrants in "this mass migration" are portrayed as "destroying Germany" and its future (Farle 2018, translated). It is of further significance that the AfD also denigrates the German state for allowing such 'danger' to develop.

AfD narratives paint and degrade chancellor Merkel's decision to keep the border to Austria open on 4 September 2015, as thousands of refugees marched to enter Germany, as enormous "breach of law" supported by most of the government. The government is said to "have allowed that terrorists […], that such IS fighters come into our country", and that parallel societies form that "threaten the people in our country" (Farle 2018, translated). Narratives criticize and denigrate the state and the media for pushing and assisting migration, for allowing "chaos" to occur at German borders, and for risking the German *Heimat* and culture. Germany is said to need sensible and patriotic politicians who love their country and the German *Volk*; "for this we stand here, and we will protest until that is reached" (Stürzenberger 2016, translated). AfD narratives not only reject refugees and migrants overall, but also the German authorities who have not prevented it; the German state and government thus become a target as well. The rising protests by AfD, PEGIDA and other groups illustrate that a growing number of people began to believe such narratives. The ease with which such feelings of insecurity and resentment could be activated for political aims contrary to the German self-narrative points to mnemonic insecurity growing.

The active pitting of the claimed-as-superior German culture against the "archaic culture" of Muslim refugees evoke identity and emotions. According to AfD speakers, "archaic" norms and behavior are threatening German identity as part of Western democratic civilization and culture (Farle 2018, translated). A number of AfD figures stand out in their phrasing of the supposed threat by refu-

gees/migrants to Germany and Germans. For example, Alice Weidel, co-chair of the AfD Bundestag parliamentary group, continues to paint a picture of "Burkas! Headscarf girls! Men with knifes who receive alimentation! And others who are good for nothing" (Weidel 2018, translated). In 2015, Björn Höcke, the ultra-right chair of the AfD parliamentary group of Thuringia spoke of Germany's thousand-year old past and of wanting a thousand-year old future for Germany (referring to the Nazi term *tausendjähriges Reich*) (Höcke 2015-2019, translated). He warns: "The Syrian who comes to us still has his Syria. The Afghan who comes to us still has his Afghanistan. And the Senegalese who comes to us still has his Senegal. When we will have lost our Germany, we will have no home anymore". He paints a picture of threat and urgency: "social peace is existentially threatened by the rising misuse and the giving up of the nationally limited solidarity community, as well as by the import of foreign peoples and the necessarily resulting conflicts" (Höcke 2015-2019, translated). He claims that in the large West German cities, Germans are already the minority and are losing their home (Höcke 2015-2019, translated). The theme is one of Germans becoming strangers in their own country, of the German state being overwhelmed, and Germany as country and culture threatened by outside foreigners and by refugees/migrants inside Germany. The dominant means, or practice, is, again, to build on and enlarge both the concerns in the midst of society and the anxieties of some, and to stoke fear, unease, and resentment. AfD representatives depict the refugee/migrant as threatening, archaic/non-modern and inferior, trying to appeal to superiority feelings and identity of the Self, and making the refugee/migrant the scapegoat for all problems. Part of how the AfD goes about this is to give topics an emotional framing and to emotionalize Self/Other.

Narratives of right-wing extremists/populists overall focus heavily on refugees and migration, the claimed threat from migration to Europe and Germany, and from an "Islamization". Populists and extremists alike take up the concerns expressed in media, as part of a strategy and practice to connect to the society's mainstream, to shift discourse and politics, and gain followers. They represent particularly the Muslim refugees and migrants as the threatening Other, and they use the

frame of a claimed Islamization to depict the danger to Western liberal societies and values. Narratives warn that Islamic values are already changing European societies, and that Europeans and Germans will soon feel as strangers in their own land. A linked theme is the claimed threat to German women from Muslim men. In this context, narratives repeatedly refer to the events at Cologne central station at New Year's Eve 2015/2016. Right-wing extremists/populists present this incident as key "evidence" of German authorities and government being unable and unwilling to protect German women. The German government receives further blame for supposedly pushing an experiment of *Multikulti* (multiculturalism), and for the resulting conflicts and violence from which Germans already suffer. The claim is that the German state acts against its own people.

In narratives, the practice is thus to distort issues and developments, to paint a growing threat and create a sense of urgency, and to try to capitalize on diffuse fears in society. Rhetorical/stylistic means serve to increase anxiety. For example, there is a distortion of words relating to scale and size in order to paint a growing threat, but also to support the claim of rising resistance of Germans. Framings are emotional; the aim is to evoke viewers emotionally and thereby mobilize them. Videos on YouTube often depict the Self as quite normal, sympathetic young people, to ease viewer identification, and the dangerous Other in stark contrast. The technique of building and increasing contrast, for example when depicting a calm and peaceful Germany against enormous treks of refugees arriving, serves viewer emotionalization and mobilization. We may argue that the AfD and others like it attempt to move society away from the previous consensus and self-narrative, and to affect respective political change. In painting a picture of threat and evoking security, they – in Mälksoo's view – contribute to mnemonic insecurity and destabilize the German self-understanding.

While there were also voices that reminded of the German experience of flight during and after WWII (Scholz 2016), the anti-refugee/migrant/foreigner narratives became more prominent. Accompanying this change, violence against refugees, asylum seekers and migrants rose, as stated above, and public figures suf-

fered attacks, too. The German self-narrative and identity as tolerant state that has learned its lessons had become challenged.

3.2. Creating Mnemonic Insecurity in Germany

The representation of refugees and migrants as threat to European and German societies, citizens, and cultures has created anxieties and unease in Germany, and facilitated counteractions. These include the significant strengthening of right-wing extremist/populist forces in Germany, but also violence against refugees and migrants and those publicly supporting migration, sentiments against refugees and migrants, and a higher public rejection of further asylum seekers and of migration. German self-narrative and identity as tolerant state was dislocated; mnemonic insecurity has, if not always existing in a small part post-1945, increased. For a significant number of people, memory is unsettled. Mnemonic insecurity though has come about in two ways. On the one side, the challenge to the German self-narrative as open and tolerant state came from the refugee crisis and the involved humanitarian need, and the lacking or insufficient response to this need. For some, the self-narrative was no longer sustainable. On the other side, rising right-wing populism and extremism, and their rejection of the refugee/migrant as the threatening Other would not fit into the German self-narrative and thus led to its questioning. German society and politics are currently facing an intense and emotional struggle over the meaning of German national memory past and present. Memory of National Socialism and its assessment up until now, and the resulting responsibility for the German state and society face a significant challenge. The practices of enlarging difference, playing on anxieties and fostering resentment by populists and extremists – part of a continuing struggle over memory, and how it should define political behavior – currently polarize society and politics.

One way in which mnemonic insecurity resulted was the refugee crisis and the response to it not fitting German self-narrative, in the eyes of many. Heavily criticized by right-wing populists/extremists, German media continued to present pictures of the long refugee treks in the daily news, as well as in-depth reports on

refugees and migrants. NGO lobbying increased further, as well as rescue at sea in the Mediterranean by NGOs or private persons. The often highly emotional pictures and reporting showed the plight of refugees on the one side and the rich, European countries claiming the protection of human rights but not acting enough on the other side. This sharp contrast was daily visualized and discussed in media and politics, highlighting the contradiction between the German self-narrative of tolerance and the lack of solid and effective aid. In light of the German history of National Socialism, of own experience of flight, and what this meant for today's Germany, mnemonic insecurity developed. This unsettling of memory began to scrape at the sense of Self, risking also ontological security.

The other way of creating mnemonic insecurity was more purposeful. Political discourse referring to Germany's thousand-year old past for a thousand-year old future, as stated above, illustrates the distorted glorification of Germany's Nazi past by some, but also how such views are somewhat normalized, in opposition to German self-narrative and memory. It was societal and political understanding that post-1945 Germany would never again go down such a path, but right-wing extremist/populist groups have actively questioned this dictum and moved their narratives towards the midst of society (*Mitte der Gesellschaft*). Part of the understanding was Germany's special responsibility towards other countries due to its history. However, this understanding has weakened in the last few years. Thus, the number of Germans agreeing with Germany's special responsibility towards Israel and Jewish people decreased since 2015. Germans are generally aware of the growing anti-Semitism and they link it to the political success of right-wing extremist/populist parties (Jeder 2019). The number of people agreeing with Germany's special responsibility to help other countries also decreased since 2015, whereas negative attitudes regarding migration, refugees and asylum seekers increased (Gersemann 2019; Zeit Online 2019). A majority in both the West and East of Germany sees it impossible to stem the task of integrating the refugees and migrants having come in the last years, in the East slightly more so (Infratest dimap 2019). Furthermore, 52% of the people see Islam having too much influence in Germany, and 48% fear their

way of life will change too much (Infratest dimap 2019). A study from 2019 finds a consolidation of right-wing populism in German society, both in the East and West: about 20% of the population have right-wing populist attitudes, and 42% exhibit such tendency (Zeit Online 2019). The AfD has gained significant support; many of its voters and supporters agree with its strongly "anti-democratic and misanthropic" views (Zeit Online 2019). With increases in the number of people supporting illiberal statements and questioning equal rights for all people, there is clearly a rupture and dislocation of Germany's self-narrative and identity as tolerant, open state. Right-wing populists/extremists have openly contested the meaning of tolerance in the context of migration. They were successful in shifting discourse and societal/political consensus; they did so via representing refugees/migrants as threatening Other and migration as dangerous development for Germany and Germans, via claiming the state's incapacity, and via appealing to the population to protect themselves. Many more Germans now question the dictum that Germany should act in solidarity with those in need, that Germany is tolerant and has learned from its past. The heated debates in the *Bundestag*, media or even among normal people on the street, and the growing polarization illustrate the unsettling of memory and the creation of mnemonic insecurity.

Another element in the creation of mnemonic insecurity by populists/extremist narratives is the reduced trust in media and politics. A growing number of people believe more the content of social media sites of particular groups rather than official government statements or journalistic media reporting. In the last years, right-wing extremists/populists have engaged in denouncing media as so-called mainstream media and *Lügenpresse* ("lying media") which collude with the state against peoples' interests, as above illustrated. The use of *Lügenpresse*, heavily used by Nazis during National Socialism (and conservatives before), particularly illustrates how right-wing populists/extremists question German self-narrative and memory. With their claims having gained tracked in public and political discourse, they have successfully anchored their narratives within broader society, too. When we consider how National Socialists in the 1930s/1940s defamed pluralist actors

and media, there are still – or again – lessons for today: the grown skepticism of media and politics today strengthens the dislocation of German self-narrative and identity as open and tolerant state that has learned its lessons from history.

In the course of events and reactions by society and politics, polarization has grown. In light of mnemonic insecurity, Germans are engaged in a struggle over the meaning of democracy and tolerance, over their national memory and how to live it, over what is taboo and what is possible, and, thus, over what kind of state and society they want to be, over their sense of Self.

4. Strengthening Mnemonic Security Again: The Fight of Extremism

From mid-2019 on, we are seeing political actors beginning to push back more broadly and clearly the narratives and demands of right-wing populists/extremists. Among the key events motivating this change, there are the murder of the politician Lübcke and the attack on a synagogue in Halle. These events were part of the developments forcing the need to take clear positions and respond to hatred and violence. The condemning of acts of violence against Jewish people, refugees, migrants, and those helping them is now more unified and louder. Citizens in many German cities have been organizing demonstrations for tolerance and against hatred, too. German politics and society has recognized the dangerous polarization, and public and political discourse evidences many more calls for societal cohesion and dialogue. We may see all these efforts as aiming for the stabilization of self-narrative and memory, and thus also for ontological security. The ongoing struggle over meaning illustrates that a secure sense of Self needs a coherent, secure memory.

German officials continue to search for workable solutions for the challenge of migration, seeking also joint European ones. Germany continues to take in a portion of refugees/migrants arriving. Regulations for asylum-seekers are stricter now, while integration measures for those with recognized asylum status were improved. Such steps continue as key topic in news reporting, as well as expert and political talks, and their contestation continues. However, there is a greater awareness now

that online hatred too can incite actual violence. The clearer rejection of hatred, violence and intolerance by political actors in recent months points to a beginning of rebuilding mnemonic security. Statements by high-ranking German politicians, such as Federal President Steinmeier and chancellor Merkel, who clearly re-affirm Germany's historical responsibility and reject the path of hatred are aimed to re-stabilize memory and self-narrative, and thereby the German sense of Self as democratic state in the world and as tolerant society. Steinmeier, speaking in Yad Vashem in January 2020 on Auschwitz, warned "the spirits of evil are emerging in a new guise", and re-affirmed Germany's responsibility for the horrors of Nazi Germany as well as for fighting anti-Semitism in Germany today (Halbfinger et al. 2020). His reference to spreading hatred, but also the increase of democracy-critical and anti-pluralist views, highlight what is at stake.

The last few years then saw the creation of new federal and national task forces and measures against extremist violence and the spreading of hatred online. Funding continues for initiatives that foster pluralism and inclusion, at the level of civil society, academia and politics. Recently, experts warned that German democracy could destabilize in the coming years, calling for more democracy education, efforts to reduce prejudices, and the recognition and naming of anti-democratic opinions for what they are (Zeit Online 2019). The clear naming of anti-democratic views would be a needed element in a successful re-affirming of German self-narrative as democratic state: clearly distinguishing democratic and anti-democratic views draws a clearer boundary towards populists and extremists, and forces to take position, thereby having the potential to re-establish mnemonic security and the Self as democratic state.

Measures for de-radicalization and tolerance include counter- or alternative narratives: depictions of corrected and alternative, democratic readings of developments, and of how Germany should deal with them. To this end, a vast array of initiatives, participatory projects, help centers, information, and teaching material by civil society and federal and national institutions exist (for example Radikal 2017; BfDT 2019; BpB 2019; Datteltäter; Jugendschutz.net 2019; ufuq.de). Both mne-

monic security and ontological security should benefit from the acknowledgment of existing problems and concerns, and their reading in a liberal-democratic frame, as well as when people are touched also at the identity and emotional level. Thus, the pluralistic perspectives of those arguing against populists/extremists now evoke a more open identity, the value of pluralism, tolerance and their benefit for all, and the importance of societal cohesion. They express the idea that all people in Germany can together shape the rules which they want to live by, which has the potential to re-establish both mnemonic security and ontological security, and to make German society and politics more resilient against extremist efforts.

The still ongoing struggle among political actors and within society over memory, self-narrative and identity in Germany is motivating a re-politicization of national memory. A stronger and more inclusive debate tries to re-stabilize national memory, clearly re-affirming Germany's special responsibility grounded in history, but including now a greater awareness of the strength of lingering racism and resentment. The re-stabilization of memory and the beginning renewal of self-narrative will re-establish also the sense of Self; ontological security is in the process of becoming restored. Having experienced that German democracy and a tolerant society need continuous work, the ongoing societal and political debate in Germany may result in a sense of Self with an identity that is more secure than in the years past. New challenges, however, will continue to test both mnemonic and ontological security in Germany.

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