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The Role of Language in Social Media During the European Migrant Crisis

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Right-wing, nationalist discourses are on the rise across the world (Leschzyk, 2017; Ott, 2017; Wodak, 2019). In Europe, right-wing, nationalist discourses are not, however, a new phenomenon (Wodak, 2015). Politicians such as Marine Le Pen of France or Geert Wilders of the Netherlands have long employed a nationalist, anti-immigrant rhetoric and their political parties have received significant numbers of votes during multiple elections in their countries. The increased popularity of right-wing discourses is also connected to the revitalization of nationalist ideologies in Europe. After decades of European countries strengthening their ties and increasingly delegating power to supranational institutions such as the European Union (EU), Europe has seen a rise in anti-EU sentiments, with member states striving to regain sovereignty and return to the nation-state. This movement was also

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fueled by the European migrant crisis, for example, because of attempts by the EU to distribute asylum seekers among member states, which was met with refusal by several. The effect of anti-EU sentiments can be seen most clearly in the Brexit. In recent years, right-wing political parties advocating for the revitalization and sovereignty claims of the nation-state have thus gained power throughout the European Union. This includes the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), Lega Nord in Italy, Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland, and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), among others. In Germany, the migrant crisis also led to the strengthening of a new far-right political party, the Alternative for Deutschland (AfD), which openly exhibits xenophobic positions and makes use of Nazi-diction. By 2019, the party had entered the German national parliament, as well as all 16 state parliaments.

Right-wing, nationalist discourses employ a variety of topoi. One common topos is the construction of the "dangerous other" and the threat of the other to national identity and security. The term "right-wing" has different connotations in different regions, but a common denominator is typically the preservation of the national identity and culture. Nationalist 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 (Wodak, 2015). In right-wing, nationalist discourses, the nation-state and its borders are threatened and need to be secured from foreigners in order to maintain the national identity and culture. 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, group membership may also be determined through language. Language requirements are often used as "gatekeepers" to keep immigrants out when they are required to show a certain level of proficiency in the official language of the state. Furthermore, immigrants may be required to take integration courses and expected to assimilate to the respective culture (see Gulliver,

Chapter 10 in this volume). Such policies legitimate the discursive constructions of migrants as others because language and language use determine group membership and legitimize inclusion and exclusion. Many European countries including Austria, Germany, Greece, the United Kingdom, and some East European countries have language policies for immigrants and foster the migrants' assimilation to the host country in order for the migrants to be welcome (Blackledge, 2005; Hansen-Thomas, 2007; Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2013; Michalowski, 2011; Piller, 2001; van Oers, Kostakopoulou, & Ersbøll, 2010; Wodak & Boukala, 2015).

Language played a crucial role in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when modern nation-states were formed. As Wright (2016) pointed out:

> […] language was at the heart of nationalism. In the struggle for independence, it could be enlisted to define the ethnicity of the group and, after independence, it could be fostered to provide the statewide community of communication that nationalism seemed to require. (p. 9)

A national language was thus central to the formation of the nation-state and reinforced by "the idea that each national group is unique and needs its own state to be truly authentic" (Wright, 2016, p. 39). The national language can also contribute to the uniqueness of a state, and "an early objective in the nationalist project was thus to achieve linguistic convergence within the group and to differentiate the national language from all allied dialects on the continuum" (Wright, 2016, p. 40). During German unification in the nineteenth century, for instance, the German language was a prerequisite. While linguistic diversity continued to exist, high German (*Hochdeutsch*) served as the literary standard and created linguistic cohesion in the written language (Wright, 2016).

The ideology that one nation equals one language has continued to exist since the nineteenth century in many countries (Langer & Davies, 2005; Mar-Molinero, 1994); however, internationalization and globalization have led to English becoming a dominant language in many domains such as academia, technology, politics, and entertainment (Oakes, 2005), thus loosening the ties between the nation-state

and its national language (Mar-Molinero, 1994). In the light of a nationalist revival, the one-nation-one-language ideology is therefore a useful tool for the construction of an imagined community (Oakes, 2005). Right-wing, nationalist discourses employ linguistic purism and promote protective language planning, aiming to preserve the national language. Langer and Davies (2005) argued that the national or dominant language is threatened and needs to be preserved. Any foreign or non-standard element in the language is devalued. Language is thus constructed as a homogeneous entity that plays an important role for the national identity.

As mentioned above, the English language is influential in many domains and is also a dominant language in digital media (Tagg, 2015). Even though other languages are becoming more visible, English is still frequently used to communicate online. Users may choose English as a lingua franca in order to reach a wider audience that they might not reach when using their native language (Bruns, Highfield, & Burgess, 2013). Social media users may also use English in order to claim group membership. Kytölä and Westinen's (2015) study on the tweets of a Finnish soccer player illustrated both aspects. While playing for a German club, the soccer player tweets predominately in English, combining both standard and non-standard English features. By using English as opposed to Finnish, the player reaches a wider audience, and by using non-standard English, he expresses his interest in and knowledge of (African American) hip hop culture (Kytölä & Westinen, 2015). Other studies have also shown how English as a second language is used as a performative act in digital communication (e.g., Barton & Lee, 2013; Lee & Barton, 2009) and how it has the "ability to bring local issues to national or global attention" (Tagg, 2015, p. 195).

Supporters of right-wing, nationalist discourses advocate the use of the national language, but the use of English in online platforms may facilitate the spread of their ideologies and help them to connect across geopolitical and linguistic boundaries. Baumgarten's study (2017), for instance, demonstrated that English is used as a lingua franca within the right-wing online community in order to connect on a global level. The author analyzed the extreme-right website, Stormfront, and 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. The analysis further demonstrated that English was used as a lingua franca to discuss local contexts and build a globally connected right-wing online community. While studies have shown how right-wing groups connect through and disseminate their ideology in participatory online communities (Baumgarten, 2017; Daniels, 2009), a publicly available platform like Twitter offers a much wider reach for right-wing discourses to be shared.

Right-Wing Discourses and Counter-Discourses in Social Media

Right-wing, nationalist discourses of the elites have been studied extensively, ranging from mass media texts such as newspapers to various forms of political discourse such as legislation, policy documents, and political party leaflets (Baker et al., 2008, Richardson & Colombo, 2014; Wodak & Boukala, 2015; Zaslove, 2004). These studies have examined the discursive construction of national identity (Wodak, 2015), negative representations of immigrants and refugees (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008), and right-wing discourses on nativism (Richardson & Wodak, 2009). Given that digital and social media have become part of many people's daily lives (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016), we also need to explore the role of new media in the (re)production of right-wing, nationalist discourses, as the "imagined" community is not only shaped by top-down discourses of the elites but also through social language-in-use. "Grassroots" activity plays a role in circulating right-wing, nationalist discourses bottom-up. Digital communication tools have contributed substantially to bottom-up activity, and right-wing, nationalist discourses have leveraged the affordances of digital and social media in order to spread their ideologies, reach larger audiences, or connect across geopolitical and linguistic boundaries (e.g., Baumgarten, 2017; Daniels, 2009; Doerr, 2017). Furthermore, right-wing populist politicians and political parties use social media to communicate directly with the people without

any gatekeepers (Ott, 2017), and social media have contributed to the rise of right-wing populist parties, for example, the AfD (Lohse, 2016).

Digital and social media play an important role in many people's lives because they are not only used to communicate, but also to get informed about the news. 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 they have become content "curators," "distributors," and "creators" (Tagg, 2015). Users share news with their social network and consume news shared by their network. Studies have analyzed the effect of this "prosumer" behavior on so-called filter bubbles (e.g., Ott, 2017). Filter bubbles are facilitated by algorithms that select and recommend web content based on the user's online behavior. Therefore, users keep seeing information with the same perspectives and ideologies, which may lead to the reproduction of discourses. Consequently, social media may contribute to the normalization of socially unacceptable, non-mainstream discourses when right-wing discourses are continuously repeated in these filter bubbles (O'Callaghan et al., 2013).

The focus of research has been on the analysis of right-wing discourses, but studies have also examined social media users' reactions to right-wing positions. For instance, Cisneros and Nakayama (2015) examined user reactions to racist comments on Twitter in the context of the victory of the first Indian American Miss America. Racist tweets generated a strong backlash on Twitter. Users expressed anger and attacked and shamed the authors of the racist tweets. Rasmussen's (2015) study analyzed Twitter users' reactions to discriminatory tweets in the context of a terror alert in Norway. The author found that "twice as many [users took] a stand against the blaming of minorities" (p. 208) and challenged the negative depiction and generalizations of Muslims. Pantti (2016) also investigated the Scandinavian context and 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. In her analysis of tweets and comments, Pantti found that disgust "worked as an

expression of severe moral judgment against the violence expressed in the comments posted on Twitter" (p. 370). In both Cisneros and Nakayama's (2015) and Pantti's (2016) studies, social media users constructed a negative image of right-wing supporters.

Neumayer and Valtysson (2013) focused on the German context and investigated how Twitter is used strategically by anti-fascist protesters in East Germany. The researchers described how groups protesting against nationalist rallies form alliances on Twitter by using specific hashtags. Twitter is not only used to express solidarity, to share information, and to challenge right-wing groups and mainstream news media coverage but also to "interact" with neo-Nazis, or rather, to "[spam] the hashtag of the opponents" (p. 11) in order to create a symbolic online blockage. These strategies demonstrate how Twitter-specific affordances can be used to engage in social resistance and how social media "can be appropriated for subversive action to challenge power and lead to political change" (p. 4).

While a lot of research has been conducted on right-wing discourses, few studies have explored both right-wing discourses and counter-discourses. Moreover, few have investigated counter-discourses in the context of the European migrant crisis. Therefore, the following study explores right-wing discourses and counter-discourses on Twitter to illustrate how social media users leverage technological and communicative affordances to construct and reproduce right-wing, nationalist ideologies as well as to challenge these ideologies. I specifically focus on the 2016 Berlin terrorist attack.

On December 19, 2016, a man hijacked a truck and drove into a Christmas market in Berlin. In the attack, 12 people were killed and 56 were injured. The perpetrator had entered Germany in the summer of 2015 to seek asylum which was not granted. However, this information was not known until days after the attack. Immediately after the attack, social media users made claims about the cause-effect relationship between Germany's refugee policy and the terror attack. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, was blamed for the attack; in fact, a German far-right politician tweeted that the victims died because of her by tweeting "They are Merkel's dead" (German: *Es sind Merkels Tote*).

The present study examines the following research questions: (1). What discursive strategies and semiotic resources are employed in right-wing discourses on Twitter? and (2). What discursive strategies and semiotic resources are employed in counter-discourses to right-wing positions?

Theoretical Framework, Data Collection and Analysis

The study is guided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multi-modal Discourse Analysis. CDA tools help to explore the "role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 249) and how social representations of the "other" are constructed through discourse. I adopt the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to 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). Specifically, I analyze discursive strategies to reveal how hidden values, assumptions, and ideologies contribute to the construction of a homogeneous community and national identity and to the legitimization of inclusion/exclusion and discrimination against the other. I draw on the following discursive strategies proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2009): referential/nomination (How is the other referred to?), predication (What qualities and characteristics are attributed to the other?), argumentation (What arguments are used to support these characterizations?), perspectivization (From whose perspectives are such descriptions and arguments expressed?), and intensification/mitigation (How are these utterances intensified or mitigated?).

Social media are "inherently and substantially multimodal" (Khos-raviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 211). When analyzing digital discourse, it is important to take into account multimodality and the platform-specific affordances of digital communication. The combination of modes as well as the organization of this ensemble are meaningful; they are constructed, shaped, and influenced by cultural, historical, social, and situational

contexts and conventions as well as technological affordances. Multi-modal discourse analysis "provides tools for analysing and describing the full repertoire of meaning-making resources which people use to communicate" (Jewitt, 2014, p. 15).

Twitter is one of the most popular social networking sites and has generated new forms of interaction with specific conventions and communication practices (Squires, 2015). Although tweets are subject to a character limit, users can employ various multimodal features and semiotic resources to create meaning. Tweets can include emojis, images, videos, and links. Moreover, users can address other users with the @-character and thus directly engage with other users.

Micro-blogging on Twitter is a semiotic activity. Hashtags are often used to make tweets searchable by other users. This activity estab-lishes a community with similar values. Zappavigna (2012) pointed out that "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). Therefore, hashtags are ideological resources and indicate identity, beliefs, and group membership. Furthermore, they allow users to connect with others based on shared values and to create "ambient affiliation" (Zappavigna, 2011, 2012). Ambient affiliation refers to the process of "bonding around evolving topics of interest" (Zappavigna, 2011, p. 800).

In order to analyze right-wing, nationalist discourses and counter-discourses after the 2016 Berlin terrorist attack, I collected publicly available tweets that contain #BerlinAttack and were tweeted within a limited time period, that is within the first 24 hours after the Berlin terrorist attack. #BerlinAttack was chosen because it was a trending hashtag at that time and thus seen and used by many Twitter users and because the hashtag itself does not contain an evaluative stance as opposed to other hashtags like #refugeesnotwelcome (Kreis, 2017). For this study, the first 150 tweets were collected and analyzed.

To analyze the data, I first 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

each tweet for linguistic features (e.g., use of pronouns, agency), discursive strategies (e.g., referential/nomination, argumentation), topics (e.g., burden, threat), and semiotic and multimodal resources (e.g., emojis, visuals). Lastly, I searched for relationships between tweets and connected the particular linguistic and semiotic choices to the social meanings in order to interpret the relationships between the discourse on Twitter and society (Page et al., 2014).

Findings

#BerlinAttack: Features of Right-Wing Discourses

The findings show that Twitter users describe refugees negatively as "Jihadists" and "Islamic terrorists." They are characterized as dangerous and as a threat to the safety of Europe and Germany. This threat is also insinuated by the blend *rapefugees* in Example 1. By blending "rape" and "refugees," the author of the tweet establishes a semantic connection between the two words and thus facilitates the construction of a negative image of refugees. In Example 2, the threat is further reinforced by calling refugees indirectly Muslim invaders (*#muslim #invasion*). References to invasion as well as to refugees as Muslims occur frequently in right-wing discourse. The threat of a Muslim invasion culminates in the claim that sharia law would be implemented in Germany. The tweets also illustrate how the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, is held responsible for the *#muslim #invasion* and the threat to the people. Refugees are frequently described as guest who were invited by Chancellor Merkel. For instance, refugees are referred to as "Merkel's guests, or her adoptive sons." Such references imply the prioritization of refugees over German nationals and draw on the perception that refugees are mostly young men. Example 2 also illustrates the frequent use of hashtags. The tweet contains 15 words out of which nine are hashtags. The hashtags are not additional labels added at the end of the tweet but are part of the

syntactic structure. This excessive use of hashtags could potentially make the tweet more visible.

Example 1:
Could you watch your country burn in a sea of **rapefugees** and still sleep at night? Merkel somehow can. The witch. #BerlinAttack.

Example 2:
#AngelaMerkel Welcomes the **#muslim #invasion** & will make **#ShariaLaw** legal in #Germany! #BerlinAttack #SyrianRefugees #Cologne #Hamburg.
A common theme in right-wing discourse is the negative reference to Islam. The religion is criticized for being reactionary and radical *(#Islamic propaganda)*, and Muslims are portrayed as dangerous to the Judeo-Christian values of Europe and Germany. Not only does this overgeneralize Muslims, but it also presupposes a homogeneous community in Germany and Europe. Additionally, the legitimacy of the migrants' status as refugees is questioned by using quotation marks in Example 3.

Example 3:
Ban immigration from #Muslim countries. Deport all "**refugees**". Scrub the Internet of all #**Islamic propaganda**. #BerlinAttack #Merkel.

As mentioned before, Chancellor Merkel is held responsible for the "Muslim invasion" and threat to the German people. She is called a "witch" and blamed for the terrorist attack and the victims.

Apart from using negative descriptions and associations, right-wing discourse also employs argumentative structures that imply that the nation, constructed as a homogeneous entity, is under attack. This serves the purpose of othering and legitimizes the exclusion of migrants and refugees. The following example shows how the Berlin attack is directly connected to Germany's refugee policy. The German government and particularly the Chancellor Merkel are blamed for a failed refugee policy and therefore for the victims of the attack. As a consequence, users

request Merkel's resignation, as in Example 4 (#MerkelGo!) and in Example 5 ("Angela Merkel should resign…").

Example 4:
#**BerlinAttack** ist **direkte Konsequenz der deutschen Flüchtlingspolitik**. Volle Verantwortung dafür trägt aktuelle Bundesregierung. #MerkelGeh!
English translation: #**BerlinAttack** is the **direct consequence of German refugee politics**. The current government is fully responsible for that. #MerkelGo!

Example 5:
#Berlinattack Angela Merkel **should resign after her open door policy has caused so many deaths #Bloodonherhands** pic.twitter.com/kpSJGyiAi4.

Her responsibility is made clear with the hashtag reference to her having blood on her hands (#*Bloodonherhands*), implying it would be the blood of the victims. In Example 5, this figurative concept is represented visually; the tweet includes an image that shows a portrait of Merkel with her face, upper body, and hands splattered with blood, which visually reinforces the perspective of her being responsible for the death of the victims. The actual depiction of Merkel with blood on her body conveys the figurative concept and is easily remembered. Moreover, it can be understood across languages. When we see someone with literal blood on their hands, it triggers the perception that this person may be guilty while being caught in the proverbial act.

Many tweets do not include a direct addressee of a tweet. Either someone is referred to in third person, as in "Angela Merkel should resign," or an author poses a rhetorical question as in "Could you watch your country burn …?" Even requests often do not have a direct addressee (with the exception of #MerkelGo!). For instance, it is unclear who is supposed to "ban immigration" and "scrub the Internet" (Example 3). But in the following example, the author formulates an

apology to the Polish people *for **our** #refugee policy* and asks them to *help **us** to get rid of #Merkel*.

Example 6:
I want to apologize to the Polish people for **our #**refugee policy Please help **us** to get rid of #Merkel ! #berlin #berlinAttack #Poland #cdu.

The Polish people are addressed in this apology because a Polish truck was hijacked and used for the attack after the Polish truck driver was shot. The user does not specify how the Polish people are supposed to help get rid of the Chancellor, but the use of the pronoun "us" points to the construction of an imagined homogeneous people.

Another common discursive strategy is the citing of experts and media sources because it may make statements and claims more credible. In the dataset, mainstream media, tabloids, and right-wing websites are referenced. The quality of a source may not always be transparent due to the abundance of media that are being circulated on social media and because of the fact that users often only read the headlines and not the entire article that was shared within their network. For this reason, the wording of the headlines and the users' framing of the articles are relevant for the portrayed position. For instance, in Example 7, the author 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." The headline starts with the word "expert," which makes the statement look more credible. The wording of the statement, however, illustrates a judgmental presumption.

Example 7:
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
   English translation: **Expert**: '**Merkel Has Been Importing Jihadists in Massive Numbers**' [Link to article]
   You are allowed to see it a different way! #BerlinAttack.
Apart from the headline and a link to the article, the author of the tweet also includes an implicit critique of mainstream media in Germany,

which suggests that German mainstream media impose a biased perspective of the attack. Various other users also claim that mainstream media are not reporting the truth and that they are used to cover up the connection between the government's refugee policies and the attack. One user even claims that the government is censoring media and hence implies that Germany were to be an authoritarian regime (Example 8).

Example 8:
Many people seem surprised at the **lack of new information** about the #BerlinAttack. Anyone familiar with Merkel's media **censorship** is not.

These examples illustrate that mainstream media are delegitimized as gatekeepers, while unmediated media platforms, as in the following example, are supported. The following example (Example 9) is a tweet that consists of a YouTube link to a video from Infowars.com, owned by U.S. conspiracy theorist, Alex Jones. The narrator spreads the idea that the German government and mainstream media are covering up the attack. Chancellor Merkel is held responsible for the victims because of her government's open-door refugee policy. In the video, she is depicted with blood on her hands, the same reference that was made in Example 5. The tweet also contains multiple hashtags, including the English and German word for Germany and #PrayForBerlin. It can be assumed that the excessive use of hashtags and the use of hashtags that are not inherently right-wing or nationalist is deliberate because it may increase the tweet's and thus the video's visibility.

Example 9:
https://youtu.be/WC2e70qRSdY #Politics of #terrorism #Germany releases #terror suspect #PrayForBerlin #BerlinAttack #merkel #Germany #deutschland.

Semiotic and Multimodal Resources

Tweets with #BerlinAttack include a variety of semiotic and multimodal resources such as emojis, images, letter capitalizations, and the use of multiple hashtags. As described above, images and videos contribute to the meaning-making processes. Furthermore, images may also be used to make intertextual references. For instance, in the summer of

2015, Hungary took harsh measures to deter refugees, including anti-refugee propaganda, the erection of fences and monitoring systems, and violence against refugees. Therefore, a positive reference to Hungary in the context of migrants points to a positive evaluation of Hungary's actions and is indicative of a right-wing, anti-refugee position (Kreis, 2017). In Example 9, we see how a positive reference to Hungary is still meaningful in December 2016. The tweet includes a collage of four images. The two top images show typical pictures of Christmas markets and captioned "HUNGARY BUILT A FENCE TO KEEP 'REFUGEES' OUT." The scare quotes again point to the questioning of the legitimacy of the migrants' status as refugees.

Example 10:
#BerlinAttack #MerkelMussWeg pic.twitter.com/YPlMoqQnrf.

The two bottom pictures are scenes from German Christmas markets. In the left picture, one can see four police officers standing in front of a Christmas market stall. The picture on the right shows the truck that drove into the Christmas market, identifiable by the damaged windshield and the label of the Polish logistics company. Those pictures are captioned *GERMANY WELCOMED THEM IN.* In between the top and bottom pictures, it says *SPOT THE DIFFERENCE.* The meme insinuates that Christmas markets in Hungary are peaceful while Christmas markets in Germany are threatened. The visual elements in combination with the textual elements imply that places that kept refugees out are safe, whereas places that welcomed refugees are under attack.

Apart from Hungary, there are other right-wing references. It is common to include hashtags with the name of right-wing political parties or politicians as in the following example that includes references to the mainstream political party, *CDU* and the far-right political party, *AfD*, as well as references to right-wing politicians: AfD politician Frauke Petry, FPÖ politician Norbert Hofer, and U.S. President Donald Trump. Additionally, the tweet contains an indirect request, that is, the removal of Merkel from office, *#MerkelMUSSweg* (*#MerkelMUSTgo*), and buzzword like *ISIS* and *Brexit*. *Pegida* is an acronym for "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident" (German: Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes) and stands

for a far-right movement in Germany with offshoots in Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK.

Example 11:
#MerkelMUSSweg #CDU #AfD #FraukePetry #Hofer #ISIS #Brexit #Trump #BerlinAttack #Berlin #Pegida pic.twitter.com/d3gD1LqKQJ.

The tweet also includes a photoshopped image. In the background of the image, one can see the truck that was used for the attack, the same as in Example 10. In front of the truck, there are three smiling young women holding a colorful "Refugees Welcome" banner. The image was clearly photoshopped because the attire of the women does not fit the weather conditions in Berlin on December 20, 2016, when the tweet was published. The organization of the image suggests a cause-effect relationship between welcoming refugees and the terror attack. At the time of the tweet, the police investigations had not been completed; therefore, any presumption that the attacker was a refugee was speculative.

Another common topic in right-wing discourse is the depiction of the downfall of the nation. Twitter users depict Germany and Europe powerless to stop economic and political decline. Right-wing, nationalist discourses criticize the loss of sovereignty to supranational institutions and promote the return to the nation-state. The national flag is an important symbol of the nation-state and commonly displayed in many countries without having negative connotations. However, in Germany the non-official display of its flag is not as widely accepted due to Germany's history. In fact, if the German flag is used privately outside of a sporting event, it is likely to be perceived as an expression of right-wing, nationalist positions. Example 12 illustrates the ambivalence of the relationship between Germans and their flag, as well as the importance of context. The author of the tweet criticizes Merkel's reaction when a fellow party member waves a small German flag on the stage of a political party event; she takes the flag away and slightly shakes her head. The Twitter user is upset about her reaction, which is indicated by three angry and two crying emojis. The clip was taken from a victory party in 2013, but it is now used to portray Merkel as anti-German and to

construct a connection between her pro-refugee position and the threat to the German people (Roßmann, 2016).

Example 12:
The #BerlinAttack occurs and all Merkel is worried about is not waving the German flag😡😡😡 #berlinchristmas 😢🎄🎄🎄😢
  #GermanChristmasMarket pic.twitter.com/f3vjBqF00Y.

It is unclear whether the user knew that the clip was from 2013; however, the fact that the user shared it suggests that the user is connected to users with right-wing, nationalist ideologies as such users were responsible for the sharing of this clip in December 2016 (Roßmann, 2016).

#BerlinAttack: Features of Counter-Discourses

In the aftermath of tragedies, social media are often used to express sympathy with those affected. In the following example, the author not only uses the phrase "prayers and thoughts w/the victims" to express sympathy but also promotes equality by adding #COEXIST at the end of the tweet. The word is often used to promote people from different backgrounds living together peacefully. The capitalization of coexist adds emphasis. While right-wing, nationalist discourses construct Islam as dangerous by equating it with threats and terror in order to legitimize the exclusion of Muslims, the author of this tweet seems to be promoting diversity and peaceful coexistence.

Example 13:
#BerlinAttack is heartbreaking - **prayers and thoughts w/the victims**.
We're dedicated to working towards peace & equality on earth #COEXIST.
The findings on right-wing discourse presented previously illustrated that Muslims and Islam are represented negatively. Users make references to a "Muslim invasion," "sharia law," and "Jihadists." The topic of religion is thus exploited to make negative generalizations about Muslims and to construct the imminent threat of Muslims as a homogeneous group. Conversely, counter-discourses reject this generalization and emphasize that Islam is a peaceful religion and that Muslims oppose

terror, as in Example 14. Some users even turn the tables; the author of Example 15 blames right-wing supporters for being the cause of violence and extremism. The user criticizes their discursive strategies, and calls them *cowards*.

Example 14:
Islam heißt Frieden #MuslimeGegenTerror #BerlinAttack

English translation: **Islam means peace #MuslimsAgainstTerror** #BerlinAttack.

Example 15:
Yeah here we go – **right wing cowards** start **blaming all muslims for the extremism they helped unleash in the first place.** #BerlinAttack.
In Example 15, the user generalizes about right-wing supporters, but does not directly address anyone. Other users address their criticism more directly by including an addressee such as the AfD. For instance, in Example 16, the political party is criticized for exploiting the attack to incite hatred against refugees and to criticize government and mainstream media. The tweet includes an article from the online news portal *Meedia.de*. The AfD and an AfD politician are directly addressed by username, @AfD_Bund and @MarcusPretzell, which makes the tweet visible to these accounts and their followers. Syntactically, the addressees are referred to in third person because of the demonstrative determiner *this* preceding @AfD_Bund, and the prepositional phrase *with his statements* following @MarcusPretzel, *his* being an anaphoric reference. The author of the tweet adds a negative evaluation of the addressees, *repulsive*, in order to distance him- or herself from the addressees and their positions and ideologies, which is further supported by the hyperlink to an article which criticizes the actions of the AfD.

Example 16:
Einfach nur **abstoßend**, **diese @AfD_Bund**, **insbesondere @Marcus-Pretzell** 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/.
English translation: Simply **repulsive this @AfD_Bund, especially @MarcusPretzell** with his statements about #BerlinAttack [Link to article].

Another Twitter user shared an article to provide a more differentiated view of the situation.

Example 17:
Wichtiger Kontrapunkt zu Kritik an #Merkel – #Flüchtlingspolitik nach #Breitscheidplatz [http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/berlin-mar](http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/berlin-market-attack-2016) [ket-attack-2016](http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/berlin-market-attack-2016) … #AfD #CSU #BerlinAttack

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

The tweet begins with an "important counterpoint to the criticism of #Merkel" and continues with the headline and link for an article by the British online version of the international monthly men's magazine, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*. The article criticizes the claims and premature conclusions of British and German far-right politicians that Merkel's refugee policy caused the attack and that she is to be held responsible.

As described above, many tweets criticize Chancellor Merkel and her refugee policies and seek to establish a cause-effect relationship between her refugee policies and the attack. However, there is also support for Chancellor Merkel and her refugee policies as shown in the following example. The tweet positively evaluates Merkel's immigration policy by calling it "enlightened," by claiming that Germany's immigration policy would "beat terrorism in the long run," and by establishing a connection between the immigration policy and humanity.

Example 18:
Angela Merkel's **enlightened** immigration policy will beat terrorism in the long run. Don't let one mad man defeat **humanity** #BerlinAttack.
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 shows support for this policy and rejects right-wing attempts to close borders and enforce stricter immigration laws. The attack is portrayed as an isolated event, as opposed to the widespread and unstoppable threat depicted in right-wing discourse.

Discussion and Conclusion

Right-wing supporters use Twitter to discursively construct refugees as dangerous and violent, posing an imminent threat to the safety of German citizens. Religion is commonly used to justify this threat as users draw on negative stereotypes of Islam and make references to "Muslim invasion" and "Jihadists." These findings align with previous research on right-wing discourses (e.g., Baumgarten, 2017; Doerr, 2017; Richardson & Wodak, 2009; Wodak, 2015). Refugees are also referred to as "Merkel's guests" and "adoptive sons," which implies the government's prioritization of refugees over citizens and also draws on the topoi of financial and social burden. Moreover, Germany's open-border refugee policy in 2015 is directly linked to—and portrayed as a cause of—the terrorist attack in 2016. The findings also show that Twitter users leverage the communicative and technological affordances of Twitter. The platform's character limitation promotes simple and informal language. Tweets are characterized by repetition and the use of buzzwords and multiple hashtags, which also contributes to the simple style and promotes the wider dissemination of the tweets. The excessive use of hashtags can be described as "inter-ideological mingling" (Graham, 2016) since the different hashtags that are used in right-wing tweets denote different and at times opposing stances. Another common strategy is the use of images to support the negative representation of refugees and of Chancellor Merkel.

The features of counter-discourses differ from right-wing discourses. In counter-discourses, the German refugee policy is evaluated positively, and right-wing supporters are criticized and blamed for their exploitation of the attack for their own purposes. Supporters of counter-discourses argue against generalizations of refugees and Muslims and provide counter-arguments supported by media sources. Counter-discourses thus 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.

This study has shown that users from both discourse communities use a variety of discursive strategies and semiotic resources to express their opinions, but right-wing tweets contain more hashtags and images.

Furthermore, the majority of the tweets in this dataset that represent right-wing discourses were written in English, despite the context being more relevant for German users. The number of English tweets suggests that the language is being used translocally to connect across geopolitical boundaries. It seems that English is also used by German nationals because of the pronouns in phrases such as ***our** #refugee policy* and *help **us** to get rid of #Merkel*. The use of English helps to bring international attention to German issues and allows more users to participate in conversations about these issues, which benefits the dissemination of right-wing, nationalist discourses. Therefore, right-wing supporters are not only able to bond and affiliate around their opinions and ideologies, but also to widen their audience and increase the number of followers by recontextualizing mainstream discourses. As Klein (2012) pointed out, far-right ideas and ideologies may turn into "information" because they are made available, shared, and taken up by mainstream users and mainstream media. Repetition and re-appropriation lead to normalization.

For this reason, it is important to continue to reveal the strategies used in right-wing, nationalist discourses and to react to these discourses by not reducing and simplifying complex contexts, but by providing different perspectives in a civil manner and creating more spaces for dialogue online and in society at large in order to prevent the naturalization of these discourses through repetition, downplaying, and misinformation. It is equally relevant 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).

The counter-discourses explored in this chapter illustrate some of the strategies that are used to challenge and condemn right-wing discourses. Examining both 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 minorities. Schools and universities, for example, 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 applied linguistics in particular should be encouraged to question ideologies and to critically examine language and its role for issues of power and (in)equality. Lastly, promoting the study of foreign languages plays an important role because the exposure and study of another language and culture can help students become more aware and understanding of different cultures and diverse perspectives, which can stifle the revitalization of nationalism.

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