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A Bridge with Three Pillars. Soldierly Masculinity and Violence in Media Representation in Germany¹

ABSTRACT

The paper reflects on the externalisation of violence in media discourses about migration in Germany. I discuss in how far news media build discursive bridges to masculinist and far-right groups. To this end, I draw on some of the findings of my research project ‘Genderism’ in *Media Debate. Thematic cycles from 2006 to 2016*. Soldierly masculinity is seen as hegemonic in the far right. By means of an alleged crisis of masculinity and victimisation of men, this is linked to masculinist concepts. The far right as well as masculinists accuse women, especially feminists, of being to blame for the effeminacy of men. This crisis of masculinity is considered a problem, to which soldierly masculinity is offered as a solution. The findings of the mentioned genderism-project show that news media discuss the crisis of masculinity, as well as the blaming of feminists. Yet, they do not take up far-right concepts directly. Masculinist views can be regarded as the central pillar of a discursive bridge between news media and far-right concepts of masculinity. I argue that the notion of a discursive bridge only works with masculinist views as intermediary between news media and the far right. Thus, masculinism is a crucial ideology to link far-right views regarding discourses in society.

Keywords: soldierly masculinity; far right; masculinism; crisis of masculinity; male reversioning; externalisation of violence; discursive bridge; media discourse

The sexual assaults on New Year’s Eve in Cologne in 2015 have predominantly been ascribed to migrant men from Muslim, Arab or North African countries. The debate in German media was characterised by one main discursive figure: the statement that ‘our’ (white, autochthonous) women had to be defended against hypersexualised, criminal migrants with archaic views of gender relations. This figure constructed a racist and sexist dichotomy: on the one hand, a liberal and gender-equal society as a collective ‘we’, in which all doors are open to women, giving them the possibility

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to live as they please without any offense or threat. On the other hand, young men emerging from backward cultures, who take certain female attire, such as a mini skirt, as an invitation for sexual assault, who do not see women as equals, who are unwilling to integrate themselves into the receiving society, and thus serve as the 'others' to a liberal democracy and society.²

Yet, there is a second discursive figure, linked to the first one, but with a different focus and impact. According to this second figure, white autochthonous men have lost the ability and willingness to protect 'our' women against threats coming from abroad, namely from male Muslim migrants. In the first figure, 'our' society is imagined as gender equal. And it is this equality that must be defended (for the sake of 'our' women). Such a logic can be linked to postfeminist positions.³ The second figure rather addresses the traditional gender hierarchy: men in their role as active protectors, women (and families) as passive objects to be protected against violent invaders from abroad. This figure, therefore, aims at *male resovereigning*.⁴ Thus, it is open to interconnection with masculinist and far-right concepts of masculinity and gender relations.⁵

There are several studies of right-wing groups' attempts to build thematic bridges to other parts of society.⁶ Regarding gender, there have been different focuses on the idea of thematic bridges. Juliane Lang describes a 'hinge function' to topics which are relevant in gender or family policies. These policies link different positions from the

- 2 Denise Bergold-Caldwell/Barbara Grubner: Effekte der diskursiven Verknüpfung von Antifeminismus und Rassismus. Eine Fallstudie zu Orientierungskursen für neu Zugewanderte, in: Annette Henninger/Ursula Birsil (eds.): Antifeminismen. ‚Krisen‘-Diskurse mit gesellschaftsspaltendem Potenzial?, Bielefeld 2020, pp. 149–192; Gabriele Dietze: Das ‚Reignis Köln‘, in: *femina politica* 25:1 (2016), pp. 93–102.
- 3 Critical: Elisabeth Klaus: Anti-Feminismus und konservativer Feminismus – eine Intervention, in: *feministische studien* 26:2 (2008), pp. 176–186; Angela McRobbie: *Top Girls: Feminismus und der Aufstieg des neoliberalen Geschlechterregimes*, 2nd ed., Wiesbaden 2016.
- 4 Edgar Forster: Männliche Resouveränisierungen, in: *feministische studien* 24:2 (2006), pp. 193–207. By the term 'male resovereigning' Edgar Forster describes processes of (re-)producing different modes of patriarchal structures.
- 5 Hinrich Rosenbrock: Die anti-feministische Männerrechtsbewegung: Denkweisen, Netzwerke und Online-Mobilisierung, Berlin 2012, URL: https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/antifeministische_maennerrechtsbewegung.pdf (accessed on 4 March 2021); Birgit Sauer: Gesellschaftstheoretische Überlegungen zum europäischen Rechtspopulismus. Zum Erklärungspotenzial der Kategorie Geschlecht, in: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 58:1 (2017), pp. 1–20, at: <https://doi.org/10.5771/0032-3470-2017-1-3> (accessed on 4 March 2021); Idem.: Authoritarian Right-Wing Populism as Masculinist Identity Politics. The Role of Affects, in: Gabriele Dietze/Julia Roth (eds.): *Right-Wing Populism and Gender. European Perspectives and Beyond*, Bielefeld 2020, pp. 23–40.
- 6 Overview: Fabian Virchow: ‚Rechtsextremismus‘: Begriffe – Forschungsfelder – Kontroversen, in: Fabian Virchow/Martin Langebach/Alexander Häusler (eds.): *Handbuch Rechts- extremismus*, Wiesbaden 2017, p. 7.

far-right, the conservative or religious right to the civic mainstream.⁷ Eszter Kováts and Maari Pöim discuss gender as a ‘symbolic glue’ unifying different rightist traditions like anti-EU (European Union), anti-liberal, anti-communist, anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant and homophobic attitudes.⁸ My paper focusses on the role of the print media in this phenomenon: how do those media represent certain topics to interconnect different societal or political groups? This is to understand in which respect taboos are being broken in societal debates to popularise and reinforce far-right narratives. To stress this aspect, I use the term ‘discursive bridge’.

In the project ‘*Genderism in Media Debate. Thematic Cycles from 2006 to 2016*’, a small set of articles mostly referring to the Cologne incidents was framed by the discursive figure of soldierly masculinity.⁹ In the present paper, these articles are analysed to discuss male resovereigning. While one side of this discursive bridge—namely the function of anti-gender discourse in the far-right—has already been researched intensively, the aim of my paper is to analyse liberal and conservative news media that serve as the other bridgehead of this discourse.

To elaborate on my argument, I first provide key definitions of basic terms. I then summarise the construction of masculinities, which are dominant in the far-right as well as in masculist groups, focusing on their interconnections and tensions. In this context, I reflect on the relevance of violence. This comprises the use of violence, the threat of violence and the externalisation of violence.¹⁰ Subsequently, I discuss selected findings of the research project ‘*Genderism in Media Debate*’. The focus is on gender images of the man as protector, as well as on enemy images and the legitimacy of using violence. The last section reflects on the analytical benefits of using the notion of a *discursive bridge* to understand how media link with far-right concepts of masculinities.

- 7 Juliane Lang: Familie und Vaterland in der Krise. Der extrem rechte Diskurs um Gender, in: Sabine Hark/Paula-Irene Villa (eds.): *Anti-Genderismus: Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen*, Bielefeld 2015, p. 174.
- 8 Eszter Kováts/Maari Pöim (eds.): *Gender as symbolic glue. The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe*, Budapest 2015, p. 77, at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/budapest/11382.pdf> (accessed on 4 March 2021).
- 9 Dorothee Beck: Arenen für Angriffe oder Arenen der Akzeptanz? Medien als Akteure in ‚Genderismus‘-Diskursen, in: Annette Henninger/Ursula Birsl (eds.): *Antifeminismen*, pp. 61–104; in this project, a content analysis as well as a frame analysis of gender-related media articles and their readers’ comments was conducted. The sample comprised articles that included compounds of the term ‘gender’. It was collected in the leading newspapers *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Die Welt* (both conservative), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (liberal) and the online service *Spiegel online* (liberal). It was funded by the Hessen State Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Art.
- 10 The term ‘externalisation’ describes the process of shifting the violence that exists within a society onto persons and groups marked as racial or cultural ‘others’.

Key Definitions: The Far Right and Masculism

There are different terms for the rightist political spectrum, primarily the far (or extreme) right, the ‘new’ right, right-wing extremism, right-wing populism. Although there are multifaceted scholarly debates of the aspects and definitions of these terms there are some basic categories. These are racial or ethnic homogeneity and a biologicistic justification of social inequality that is presented as ‘natural’. According to Fabian Virchow, this is the basis of the racist, anti-Semitic, antifeminist, homophobic and elitist programmatics of the far right.¹¹ In this paper, the antifeminist aspect is focussed upon. Birgit Sauer describes right-wing populism as a “gendered issue” that is “rooted in a fundamental transformation of gender regimes, especially in Western bread-winner-oriented societies”.¹² The decline of men’s formerly widespread role as the sole providers for families “was accompanied by the erosion of hierarchical gender regimes and of male dominance in the private sphere as well as in the public sphere”.¹³ The far right can thus be understood as a countermovement to these developments. Hence, antifeminism is a central aspect of far-right ideology. It constructs a dichotomy between ‘normal people’ on the one hand and ‘mighty feminists’ on the other. The latter are perceived as guilty of effeminising autochthonous men.¹⁴

Sauer employs the term ‘right-wing populism’, stressing the political strategy of spreading racist, nationalist, *völkische*¹⁵ and sexist ideologies.¹⁶ By means of this term, Sauer seeks to point out a strategic innovation: the discursive use of chains of equivalence for the antagonism of ‘us’, i. e., ‘the people’, versus ‘the elite’.¹⁷ The term ‘right-wing extremism’, in the German debate, is often linked to the popular metaphor of a horseshoe. This metaphor positions extremism as parallel lines, which figuratively cross somewhere in the distance, on either side of the political spectrum. I disagree with this notion in two respects: first, it suggests an accord of opposing political ideologies (left and right). Second, it suggests that anti-liberal and anti-democratic atti-

11 Fabian Virchow: ‚Rechtsextremismus‘: Begriffe – Forschungsfelder – Kontroversen, p. 10.

12 Birgit Sauer: Authoritarian Right-Wing Populism as Masculist Identity Politics, p. 29.

13 Ibid.

14 Suvi Keskinen: The ‘crisis’ of white hegemony, neonationalist femininities and antiracist feminism, in: Women’s Studies International Forum 68 (2017), pp. 157–163.

15 There is no English equivalent to the German word *völkisch*. It does not only mean nationalist but also includes the notion of ethnic purity and blood-and-soil-ideology.

16 Birgit Sauer: Gesellschaftstheoretische Überlegungen zum europäischen Rechtspopulismus; Idem.: Rechtspopulismus als maskulinistische Identitätspolitik, in: Dorothee Beck/Annette Henninger (eds.): Konkurrenz für das Alphamännchen? Politische Repräsentation und Geschlecht, Roßdorf 2020, pp. 135–154.

17 Birgit Sauer: Gesellschaftstheoretische Überlegungen zum europäischen Rechtspopulismus, p. 2, fn 2.

tudes are only situated on the fringes of the political spectrum whereas, in the political centre, everything is alright. Yet, as I will show below, these attitudes originate from the political centre.¹⁸ Although there are critical concepts of the term ‘right-wing extremism’,¹⁹ I want to avoid any reference to the horseshoe metaphor. That is why I employ the term ‘far right’—not least as the term ‘new right’, mentioned above, is a self-designation of far-right groups, who want to avoid being linked to the crimes committed by the German Nazis.²⁰

The second reference group in this paper are masculists, also called masculinists. Robert Claus defines them as middle-class, partly conservative, and antifeminist adherents of men’s politics. Masculi(ni)sm combines criticism of feminism, which is supposedly hostile towards men, with subtle or obvious misogyny and the call to strengthen traditional concepts of masculinity. It rejects feminist theories, addresses alleged oppression of males and wants to resovereign male self-confidence.²¹ Yet, we can distinguish masculism from masculinism. Eva Kreisky and Georg Spitaler define masculinism as an ideology, which justifies and supports male and patriarchal supremacy, and which is quite resistant to change over time.²² Andreas Kemper refers to masculism as a variation of masculinism.²³ According to him, its goal is to push back ‘femocracie’, i. e., alleged female domination. Thus, the core of masculi(ni)sm is anti-feminism²⁴, defined as an antonym to an understanding of feminism that is critical of power and domination that refers to democracy and that is intersectional. This understanding of feminism aims at breaking down hierarchies, as well as at the liberalisation and deconstruction of norms of gender relations.²⁵ All this is rejected by masculists. Hinrich Rosenbrock states that masculist groups do not define masculinity at all. Yet,

18 See also: Margot Vogel Campanello: *Männlichkeit und Nationalismus*, Zürich 2015, pp. 18f.

19 Fabian Virchow: ‚Rechtsextremismus‘: Begriffe – Forschungsfelder – Kontroversen.

20 Martin Langebach/Jan Raabe: Die ‚Neue Rechte‘ in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, in: Fabian Virchow/Martin Langebach/Alexander Häusler (eds.): *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus*, pp. 561–592.

21 Robert Claus: *Maskulismus. Antifeminismus zwischen vermeintlicher Salonfähigkeit und unverhohlenem Frauenhass*, Berlin 2014, p. 17, URL: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/10861.pdf> (accessed on 4 March 2021).

22 Eva Kreisky/Georg Spitaler: Rechte Fankurve oder Fankurve der Rechten? Fußballfans, Rechtsextremismus und Männlichkeit, in: Robert Claus/Esther Lehnert/Yves Müller (eds.): *Was ein rechter Mann ist... Männlichkeiten im Rechtsextremismus*, Berlin 2010, p. 199.

23 Andreas Kemper: *Die Maskulisten. Organisierter Antifeminismus im deutschsprachigen Raum*, Münster 2012, p. 9.

24 Hinrich Rosenbrock: *Die anti-feministische Männerrechtsbewegung*, p. 26.

25 Juliane Lang/Christopher Fritzsche: Backlash, neoreaktionäre Politiken oder Antifeminismus? Forschende Perspektiven auf aktuelle Debatten um Geschlecht, in: *feministische studien* 36:2 (2018), pp. 335–346, at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/fs-2018-0036> (accessed on 4 March 2021).

they lay claim to sole representation of all men. Thus, antifeminism on the one hand, functions as the leading ideology of otherwise heterogeneous groups.²⁶ On the other hand, it provides a link to far-right ideas.²⁷

Masculinities in the Far Right and in Masculism: Interconnections and Tensions

At a rally in Erfurt in November 2015, Björn Höcke, the most influential representative of the fascist *Flügel* (wing) of the far-right party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternative for Germany) stated: „We must rediscover our masculinity. Only if we rediscover our masculinity, will we become manful. And only if we become manful, will we be valorous, and we must become valorous, dear friends.”²⁸

The attributes “manful” (*mannhaft*) and “valorous” (*wehrhaft*)²⁹ refer to soldierly behaviour. Soldierly masculinity is a hegemonic discourse in the far right. In German society, it was hegemonic before the Second World War but lost this status after the total collapse of the Nazi-regime in 1945.³⁰ According to Raewyn Connell, hegemonic masculinity is a practice used to legitimise the dominant status of men. This dominant structure is twofold: it subordinates women and other genders, but also other males. Connell assumes one hegemonic masculinity in the society.³¹ Contrary to this, I consider different hegemonic concepts in specific societal fields. Hence, I regard soldierly masculinity as hegemonic in the far right. In consequence, other masculinities, like, according to Connell, subordinated, marginalised or complicit ones, can also have a field-specific character.

26 Hinrich Rosenbrock: *Die anti-feministische Männerrechtsbewegung*, pp. 25f.

27 Alva Träbert: *At the Mercy of Femocracy? Networks and Ideological Links Between Far-Right Movements and the Antifeminist Men's Rights Movement*, in: Michaela Köttig/Renate Bitzan/Andrea Petö: *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, Cham 2017, pp. 273–288.

28 „Wir müssen unsere Männlichkeit wiederentdecken. Denn nur wenn wir unsere Männlichkeit wiederentdecken, werden wir mannhaft. Und nur wenn wir mannhaft werden, werden wir wehrhaft, und wir müssen wehrhaft werden, liebe Freunde!“ (translated by the author), at: <https://www.n-tv.de/politik/Bjoern-Hoecke-in-sieben-Szenen-article19700681.html> (accessed on 4 March 2021).

29 The German word *wehrhaft* means willing to and capable of bearing arms. Karen Hagemann translates it as “valorous“, knowing that this is not absolutely exact. See Karin Hagemann: *Of “Manly Valor” and “German Honor”: Nation, War, and Masculinity in the Age of the Prussian Uprising Against Napoleon*, in: *Central European History* 30:2 (2008), pp. 187–220, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938900014023> (accessed on 4 March 2021).

30 Fabian Virchow: *Tapfer, stolz, opferbereit – Überlegungen zum extrem rechten Verständnis ‚idealer Männlichkeit‘*, in: Robert Claus/Esther Lehnert/Yves Müller (eds.): *Was ein rechter Mann ist...*, pp. 39–52.

31 Raewyn W. Connell: *Masculinities*, 2nd ed., Los Angeles 2005, pp. 76–81.

Soldierly masculinity is characterised by heterosexuality, formation of a traditional nuclear family, service to the nation, military attitude, unwillingness to compromise, as well as behaving like a leader. Military attitudes are hardness, willingness to make sacrifices, defiance of death, bravery, toughness, vim, and stamina.³²

Central points of reference to soldierly masculinity are the nation, an external enemy and violence. State morality is imagined as masculine, whereas family morality is feminine, both in a naturalised and essentialised understanding.³³ As the procreator of the nation, the white autochthonous woman's body belongs to the nation. It symbolises the nation's border and must be protected.³⁴ 'Woman' in this context only means 'white woman'. Migrant women are de-gendered and rendered invisible³⁵, whereas migrant men are imagined as inescapably different, i. e., archaic with regard to gender and sexuality.³⁶ There is a close discursive link between crime, sexual assault, and migrant men.³⁷ The racialised and sexualised male 'other' is a threat not only to autochthonous women, but also to the nation as a whole. This 'external enemy' evokes a second representation of the nation's border, namely sexualised violence, by which the female body is threatened.³⁸ Therefore, autochthonous men do not only act as protectors of 'our' women, but also as guardians of racial purity of the nation³⁹, or as white border guard masculinities, as Suvi Keskinen calls it.⁴⁰ Using violence, for them, is justified. Gender-based personal violence within our society remains muted.

32 Fabian Virchow: Tapfer, stolz, opferbereit, p. 42.

33 Yves Müller: Gegen Feminismus und ‚Dekadenz‘ – die Neue Rechte in der Krise?, in: Robert Claus/Esther Lehnert/Yves Müller (eds.): Was ein rechter Mann ist..., p. 75.

34 Maja Sager/Diana Mulinari: Safety for whom? Exploring femonationalism and care-racism in Sweden, in: Women's Studies International Forum 68 (2018), pp. 150f.

35 Ibid., p. 153.

36 Suvi Keskinen: The 'crisis' of white hegemony, neonationalist femininities and antiracist feminism, p. 158.

37 Gabriele Dietze: Das ‚Ereignis Köln‘; Maja Sager/Diana Mulinari: Safety for whom?, p. 152.

38 Suvi Keskinen: The 'crisis' of white hegemony, neonationalist femininities and antiracist feminism, p. 157.

39 Renate Bitzan: Research on Gender and the Far Right in Germany Since 1990: Developments, Findings, and Future Prospects, in: Michaela Köttig/Renate Bitzan/Andrea Petö: Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe, pp. 72f.; Hans-Gerd Jaschke: Strategien der extremen Rechten in Deutschland nach 1945, p. 118; Ulrich Overdieck: Der Komplex der ‚Rassenshande‘ und seine Funktionalität für Männlichkeitskonstruktionen in rechtsextremen Diskursen, in: Robert Claus/Esther Lehnert/Yves Müller (eds.): Was ein rechter Mann ist..., pp. 100–108; Fabian Virchow: Tapfer, stolz, opferbereit, p. 49.

40 Suvi Keskinen: Antifeminism and white identity politics. Political antagonisms in radical right-wing populist and anti-immigration rhetoric in Finland, in: Nordic Journal of Migration Research 3:4 (2013), pp. 225–232.

There are other, partly modernised, masculinities in political far-right groups.⁴¹ There is the modern man of action, whom Jörn Hüttmann describes as another hegemonic model of masculinity.⁴² Nils Schuhmacher identifies three types of far-right masculinities: first, the thug, who can be classified as subordinated masculinity, who wants to subjugate other subordinated masculinities. Second, the political soldier, who resorts to violence in an instrumental manner. Third, the performer, who displays assertiveness without necessarily exercising violence.⁴³ Renate Bitzan observes the prevalence of soldierly masculinity and, at the same time, a simultaneity of modernisation and re-traditionalisation of masculinities on the far right, causing inconsistencies.⁴⁴

The same inconsistencies can be observed with regard to femininity. The spectrum of discourses and policies on this topic in far-right parties and groups across Europe has become wider. There are well-known female far-right leaders, as well as young female activists.⁴⁵ Despite that, for Sauer, soldierly masculinity is one of the main driving forces behind the rise of right-wing-populism in Europe.⁴⁶ Soldierly masculinity as a manner of male re-sovereigning seems to be attractive especially for men who feel deprived of their vested privileges. In their view, this is due to equal opportunity policies for women as well as to the liberalisation of gender relations in society. According to Kurt Möller, attitudes of men on the far right of the political spectrum show a tension between a claim to a hegemonic status on the one hand, and experiences of marginalisation on the other.⁴⁷ Far-right men seem to see themselves as the embodi-

- 41 Renate Bitzan: Geschlechterkonstruktionen und Geschlechterverhältnisse in der extremen Rechten, in: Fabian Virchow/Martin Langebach/Alexander Häusler (eds.): Handbuch Rechtsextremismus, pp. 347–51; Andreas Heilmann: Normalisierung und Aneignung – Modernisierung und Flexibilisierung von Männlichkeiten im Rechtsextremismus, in: Robert Claus/Esther Lehnert/Yves Müller (eds.): Was ein rechter Mann ist..., pp. 53–66.
- 42 Jörn Hüttmann: Männlichkeitsdiskurse in der Deutschen Stimme, in: Ursula Birsl (ed.): Rechtsextremismus und Gender, Opladen 2011, pp. 147–169.
- 43 Nils Schuhmacher: ‚Mit den Leuten zusammen kann man wirklich schon was darstellen‘ Über verschiedene Wege in rechte Jugendcliquen, in: Ursula Birsl (ed.): Rechtsextremismus und Gender, pp. 265–280.
- 44 Renate Bitzan: Research on Gender and the Far Right in Germany Since 1990, pp. 72f.
- 45 Judith Goetz: „Postergirls“ und „White Power Barbies“. Zur ambivalenten Sichtbarkeit *identitärer* Frauen [italics in original text], in: Dorothee Beck/Annette Henninger (eds.): Konkurrenz für das Alphamännchen?, pp. 199–217; Maja Sager/Diana Mulinari: Safety for whom?; Suvi Keskinen: The ‘crisis’ of white hegemony, neonationalist femininities and anti-racist feminism, pp. 157–163; Michaela Köttig/Renate Bitzan/Andrea Pető: Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe.
- 46 Birgit Sauer: Authoritarian Right-Wing Populism as Masculinist Identity Politics; Idem.: Gesellschaftstheoretische Überlegungen zum europäischen Rechtspopulismus; Idem.: Rechtspopulismus als maskulinistische Identitätspolitik.
- 47 Kurt Möller: Männlichkeitsforschung im Rahmen von Rechtsextremismusstudien. Ausgangspunkte, Ansätze, Ergebnisse und Perspektiven, in: Robert Claus/Esther Lehnert/Yves Müller (eds.): Was ein rechter Mann ist..., pp. 25–38.

ment of “true masculinity”.⁴⁸ Thus, activism in extreme right organisations would be a beneficial way for self-assertion.⁴⁹ In this respect, self-assertion might function as a link to masculist concepts of masculinity.

Historically, male patriarchal supremacy, mostly in the shape of soldierly masculinity, was the starting point for masculinism around the turn of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰ With the collapse of the Nazi-regime in Germany, soldierly masculinity fell into disrepute.⁵¹ Nowadays, male supremacy has remained the vanishing point of masculist dreams in view of a perceived crisis of masculinity.⁵² The assertion of this crisis entails a discourse of victimisation of men.⁵³

This discourse of victimisation focuses on different groups. Boys are regarded as disadvantaged in education, regardless of intersectional influences like class or migration background. This discourse refers to the fact that the majority of teachers are female; their pedagogical methods are reproached for supposedly prioritising girls.⁵⁴ Unmarried and divorced fathers are said to be discriminated against in the assigning of child custody. Men in general are said to be discriminated against by equal opportunities policies for women, for example on the labour market.⁵⁵ These reforms have been introduced to improve women’s inclusion in important sectors of society. In addition, there have been reforms to liberate the heteronormative gender order. Yet,

48 Eva Kreisky/Georg Spitaler: *Rechte Fankurve oder Fankurve der Rechten?*; See also Hedwig Dohm: *Die Antifeministen. Ein Buch der Verteidigung*, Frankfurt/Main 1976.

49 Fabian Virchow: *Tapfer, stolz, opferbereit*, p. 46.

50 Eva Kreisky/Georg Spitaler: *Rechte Fankurve oder Fankurve der Rechten?*; See also Hedwig Dohm: *Die Antifeministen. Ein Buch der Verteidigung*.

51 Fabian Virchow: *Tapfer, stolz, opferbereit*.

52 The term ‘crisis of masculinity’ refers to multi-dimensional changes in the gender order, above all the erosion of the earner-carer-model in the production and reproduction spheres, liberalisations of ways of living together, sexuality and desire, as well as the gendering of power and hierarchies in society, politics and economy. Although these dimensions may bear some critical aspects, there is no evidence to support the idea that the gender order in general is in a manifest state of crisis. Yet, masculists refer to these changes in terms of threat and breakdown. Their aim, according to Claus, is to maintain privileges and to prevent the loss of male power. Annette Henninger et al.: *Krise der Geschlechterverhältnisse oder Krisenrhetorik? Antifeministische Bedrohungsszenarien aus regulationstheoretischer Perspektive*, in: Annette Henninger/Ursula Birsl (eds.): *Antifeminismen*, pp. 355–386; Robert Claus: *Maskulismus*.

53 Elli Scambor/Daniela Jauk: *„Mander es isch Zeit.“ Antifeministische Positionen im österreichischen Männerrechtsdiskurs*, in: Juliane Lang/Ulrich Peters (eds.): *Antifeminismus in Bewegung. Aktuelle Debatten um Geschlecht und sexuelle Vielfalt*, Hamburg 2018, pp. 159–188.

54 Thomas Viola Rieske: *Bildung von Geschlecht. Zur Diskussion um Jungenbenachteiligung und Feminisierung in deutschen Bildungsinstitutionen*, Frankfurt/Main 2011.

55 Hinrich Rosenbrock: *Die anti-feministische Männerrechtsbewegung*, pp. 67–82; Suvi Keskinen: *The ‘crisis’ of white hegemony, neonationalist femininities and antiracist feminism*, pp. 157–163.

in the masculinists' view, the reforms resulted in the discrimination of men, either as an effect of excessive equal opportunities policies, or as a strategic aim of powerful femocratic lobbies.⁵⁶ In brief, the shared concept of the masculinists' enemy is feminism (in general), as well as *the* feminists and *the* women's movement, presupposing that they are all identical and that there is only one powerful feminism and one powerful women's movement.⁵⁷ Self-defence, therefore, seems justified to them, even acts of violence like hate speech, verbalised phantasies of rape or the intention to publish the addresses of women's refuges.⁵⁸ The racist attacks in Halle, on 9 October 2019, and in Hanau, on 19 February 2020, must be seen in the same context. The assassins tried to legitimise their deeds, referring, amongst other things, to an alleged female domination.

In this context, the two discursive figures mentioned at the beginning of the present paper, can be recognised. According to the first one (equality as being achieved), in history, feminism was justified and fought for important rights. But today, equal opportunities policies are useless and lead to the discrimination of men.⁵⁹ The second figure assumes male supremacy in a gender hierarchy that is built on the idea of gender characteristics as being natural. In this concept gender inequalities are legitimised by nature, by the order of creation or by god.⁶⁰

In far-right groups, the alleged crisis of masculinity and the discourse of victimisation are not as dominant as in masculinist contexts. Yet, there is a certain relevance. As in masculinist discourse, boys are regarded as educationally disadvantaged. There are narratives of men emasculated by gender mainstreaming⁶¹ or feminism.⁶² The supremacy of 'true German masculinity' is said to be threatened by racialised masculinities.⁶³ Today's (male) youth is blamed for their lack of masculinity.⁶⁴ Thus, the discourse of crisis is used for male resovereigning and to fight the pluralisation of masculinities.⁶⁵

56 Ibid.

57 Kurt Möller: Männlichkeitsforschung im Rahmen von Rechtsextremismusstudien, p. 80.

58 Hinrich Rosenbrock: Die anti-feministische Männerrechtsbewegung, pp. 15–16, pp. 134–151; Robert Claus: Maskulismus, p. 13.

59 Robert Claus: Maskulismus, p. 52.

60 See also Karin Hausen: Die Polarisierung der ‚Geschlechtscharaktere‘ – Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben, in: Werner Conze (ed.): Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas, Stuttgart 1976, pp. 363–393.

61 Hinrich Rosenbrock: Die anti-feministische Männerrechtsbewegung, pp. 131f.

62 Suvi Keskinen: The 'crisis' of white hegemony, neonationalist femininities and antiracist feminism, pp. 157–163.

63 Robert Claus/Esther Lehnert/Yves Müller: Einleitung, in: Idem. (eds.): Was ein rechter Mann ist..., p. 15.

64 Fabian Virchow: Tapfer, stolz, opferbereit, p. 43.

65 Renate Bitzan: Geschlechterkonstruktionen und Geschlechterverhältnisse in der extremen Rechten, pp. 350f.; Yves Müller: Gegen Feminismus und ‚Dekadenz‘ – die Neue Rechte in der Krise?, pp. 67f.

One could argue that far-right groups actually need the crisis discourse to perform supremacy and to legitimise men's role as protectors of the family and the nation.

As discussed above, there are three important links between the far right and masculinist groups: first, the claimed male supremacy, predominantly in the shape of soldierly masculinity, second, the discourse of crisis and victimisation and, third, the legitimacy of violence. But these issues are approached from two completely different perspectives: in far-right contexts, soldierly masculinity is performed as a characteristic of a self-proclaimed elite. Yet, there is an inherent contradiction to this construct. Far-right populist arguments stress the contrast between 'us', i. e., 'the people', and an 'elite', be it in politics, in the media or feminists ('femocrats').⁶⁶ At the same time, regarded as hegemonic masculinity, soldierly masculinity itself is constructed with elitist aspects. As I have already outlined, far-right men imagine themselves as protectors, guardians, or saviours of the nation's purity.⁶⁷

In masculinist groups, soldierly masculinity functions as a vision which leads out of the crisis of masculinity and the victimisation of males. That is to say, far-right concepts of masculinity represent what masculinists aspire to. The purpose of the crisis discourse, in both groups, can be judged as legitimisation of soldierly masculinity and male resovereigning. Yet, in far-right contexts, violence is justified as a means of defence of white autochthonous women or the nation as a whole against foreign 'enemies'. Thus, far-right actors, in practice of their alleged soldierly masculinity, claim to use violence to protect their beloved (family or nation). On the contrary, masculinists, as victims, accept violence for alleged self-defence or to threaten feminists. Yet, between both perspectives there are grey areas.

Although these aspects function as bridges between the far right and masculinism, they simultaneously bear a certain tension. The relation of far right and masculinist masculinities permanently oscillates between superiority and inferiority, between assertion and aspiration. By constructing an external threat, this tension can be neglected by both groups. The migrant man's representation as the racialised and sexualised male 'other' who threatens the white autochthonous woman, serves to this end, and legitimises the use of violence. This externalisation of violence and threat constructs a homogenous nation, which is to be protected. This also helps to back male resovereigning and stabilises white masculine hegemony.⁶⁸ In this manner, the wide-spread gender-based personal or sexualised violence within the German society is suppressed in discourse. The imagination of the white, strong, and autonomous woman, who nonetheless must be protected against external threat, creates an inescapable double

66 Suvi Keskinen: Antifeminism and white identity politics.

67 Renate Bitzan: *Research on Gender and the Far Right in Germany Since 1990*, pp. 72f.

68 Suvi Keskinen: Antifeminism and white identity politics; See also Michael Kimmel: *Angry White Men. Die USA und ihre zornigen Männer*, Bonn 2013, pp. 225–231.

bind. While gender equality is emphasised as an achievement of modern Western European societies, it is, at the same time, undermined by white masculine hegemony.

In the next section I discuss in how far some of the findings in the print and online media sample of the project *'Genderism' in Media Debate* are related to these conceptualisations.

'Genderism' in Media Debate: Valorous Masculinity

Studies of gender aspects in the media coverage have repeatedly revealed far-right gender stereotypes that are reproduced in the media. Using the example of the National Socialist Underground (NSU), Michaela Köttig analyses in how far media added to the image of women as being incapable of political action. These stereotypes could be referred to by the female offenders and supporters of the NSU for self-defence.⁶⁹ Consequently, the visibility of women in the so called identitary movement (*identitäre Bewegung*) was constructed as absolutely new, although there have been female far-right activists and intellectuals at least since the end of the Second World War. Still, the media continue to depict these women as naïve, harmless and unpolitical, as Judith Goetz states.⁷⁰ Together with Markus Sulzbacher, Goetz gives an overview of the media coverage of the far right, analysing this media representation as unintentional complicity and as far-right self-dramatisation in the media, and their playing their games with the media.⁷¹ In two case studies, Ricarda Drüeke and Corinna Peil investigate the meaning and relevance of antifeminist narratives in internet shitstorms.⁷²

In the project *'Genderism' in Media Debate*, a focus on masculinity emerges. In this project, a qualitative content analysis, as well as a frame analysis of leading quality news media, was conducted. Four outlets were selected by the criterion of reach: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), *Die Welt* (both conservative), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) and *Spiegel Online* (SPON) (both liberal). For pragmatic reasons, I left aside tabloids like *Bild-Zeitung*. The sample for the content analysis comprised 389 articles

69 Michaela Köttig: Gender Stereotypes Constructed by the Media: The Case of the National Socialist Underground (NSU) in Germany, in: Michaela Köttig/Renate Bitzan/Andrea Petò: Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe, pp. 221–234.

70 Judith Goetz: „Postergirls“ und „White Power Barbies“. Zur ambivalenten Sichtbarkeit *identitärer* Frauen, in: Dorothee Beck/Annette Henninger (eds.): Konkurrenz für das Alphamännchen?, pp. 199–217.

71 Judith Goetz/Markus Sulzbacher (eds.): Rechtsextremismus Bd. 4: Herausforderungen für den Journalismus, Wien 2021.

72 Ricarda Drüeke/Corinna Peil: Haters gonna hate. Antifeministische Artikulationen in digitalen Öffentlichkeiten, in: Marion Näser-Lather/Anna Lena Oldemeier/Dorothee Beck (eds.): Backlash?! Antifeminismus in Wissenschaft, Politik und Gesellschaft, Roßdorf 2019, pp. 191–212.

published between 2006 and 2016 that included compounds of the term 'gender'. For the frame analysis, the sample was reduced to 59. Nine frames could be identified, one of which was *questioning masculinities*. In this section I only discuss findings of this frame.

One of the project's main results was that the media act autonomously in discourses on 'gender'. They are not neutral reporters that react to specific events, but instead set their own agenda, for example by inviting guest authors with a certain political opinion, and by setting their own thematic priorities. This means that media do not only provide for a specific political public sphere. Rather, they take up the discourse in their own account and with their own interests in accordance with their political tendency. For example, mainly the liberal SZ took up the discourse on the crisis of masculinities. By contrast, the conservative FAZ, according to the media sample of the project, took part to only a small degree in discourses about masculinities, while the (also conservative) newspaper *Die Welt* strengthened heteronormativity and gender hierarchy in a variety of texts with different topics referring to masculinity and gender.

In all, 35 out of the total sample of 389 gender-related articles that were published between 2006 and 2016 in the leading political print news media in Germany (see fn 9) fit into the thematic area of masculinity. For the frame analysis, the overall sample was reduced to 59 articles. 12 of them fitted the frame *questioning masculinities*. During the first half of the investigation period, articles prevailed which addressed diverse topics of masculinity as well as men's or boys' lives. Then these topics disappeared and turned up again in 2016 in the aftermath of the Cologne incidents with the rather restricted thematic focus of 'valorous masculinity'. The specific combination of the issues of masculinity, migration and violence was solely to be found in the four articles in three media outlets that were analysed for the present paper (see next paragraph). This small number might be due to the sampling strategy referring to the term *gender*. Yet, there were texts in other frames that appropriated gender equality and feminism to construct culturised 'others'.⁷³ Consequently, the empirical basis of this paper is restricted; however, the news media I analysed are quite influential in the German public debate, and further research with a focus on masculinity may identify additional contributions.

In February 2016, there was an article in the conservative daily newspaper *Die Welt*, written as a plea for bravery in view of violence exerted in absence of the police.⁷⁴ In May 2016, the conservative journalist Jan Fleischhauer published an article with a similar focus in his column on *Spiegel online* (SPON, liberal). He discussed the

73 Dorothee Beck: Arenen für Angriffe oder Arenen der Akzeptanz?

74 Eckhard Fuhr: Ballt das Händchen doch mal zur Faust, in: *Die Welt*, 11 February 2016.

alleged effeminacy of German men, as an effect of non-violent upbringing.⁷⁵ Monika Frommel, a professor of legal studies writing as a guest author in the liberal daily newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), reflected upon the delinquency of young male Muslim migrants as a matter of the sub-culture of their peer groups.⁷⁶ There was one counterpoint in this set of articles: the writer and men's rights activist Ralf Bönt regarded delinquency and violence exerted by men as "hypermasculinity", as resulting from the absence of a biological father in the nuclear family.⁷⁷

Two articles, explicitly, demand bravery and preparedness for defence. The author in *Die Welt*, a member of the editorial board, warns that the "comfort zone" in Central Europe would disintegrate, because millions of refugees and migrants are supposedly on their way to intrude upon this comfort zone. This would cause violence, exerted by migrants as well as by xenophobic native hordes. The text in SPON is not as explicit as this. Fleischhauer only states that pacified societies would collapse, if they were confronted with violence coming from outside. Their inability to defend themselves, in Fleischhauer's opinion, is caused by non-violent upbringing, which he regards as one of the most important values of many parents. *Die Welt* points out gender mainstreaming as the cause of the lack of bravery. The author wonders whether, "in a feeling of elation for gender mainstreaming, we have too briskly devalued masculine connoted virtues like defence readiness and physical assertiveness".⁷⁸ According to him, therefore, one would have to be concerned for the country. The solution offered in both articles is similar. The *Welt*-author claims that boys must learn to be brave men. Fleischhauer states that a slight militarisation of children's rooms would be useful.

In both articles, violence is constructed as a threat from outside that endangers society as a whole. Yet, society is not prepared for this intrusion, as men's and boys' physical assertiveness has been trained down. This is claimed to be the work of women, as mothers, as teachers or as nursery schoolteachers. So, women are accused of being guilty of the effeminacy of males.⁷⁹ Therefore, the authors construct two concepts of the enemy that have to be fought: first, the violence intruding from abroad (used by Muslim migrant men), and second, women who effeminate men and boys. Although gender mainstreaming is only mentioned in one article, the wording in both texts

75 Jan Fleischhauer: Aua, Papa!, in: Spiegel Online, 30 May 2016.

76 Monika Frommel: Legal, illegal, alles egal, in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 11 February 2016.

77 Ralf Bönt: Neue Väter, neue Männer, in: Die Welt, 13 February 2016.

78 „[...] ob wir im Hochgefühl des Gender-Mainstreaming ‚männlich‘ konnotierte Tugenden wie Verteidigungsbereitschaft oder körperliche Durchsetzungsfähigkeit nicht allzu forsch entwertet haben.“ (translated by the author).

79 Regardless of the topic, the complaint about women's guilt for men's every problem, is a common statement in many of the articles in the frame *questioning masculinities*, in the first part of the investigation period, as well.

connotes that it is leftist (and ecology conscious)⁸⁰ women or feminists who must be blamed.

Although both authors state that they would prefer non-violent solutions to conflict, they do not elaborate on this alternative. However, the use of violence is not explicitly verbalised, either. Instead, it is circumscribed with terms like ‘bravery’, ‘physical assertiveness’, ‘manly valour’, or readiness for defence. The adverse alternative to this is described as ‘effeminacy’, ‘fury and fear’, or ‘rabbits paralysed by the snake’ (to translate the German idiom). Nor is the legitimacy of the use of violence discussed. Rather, it is presupposed by the threat intruding from abroad and by the alleged lack of action or complete absence of the police. The arguments culminate in the request that boys should learn to defend themselves (and their beloved ones) physically. In fact, both authors mention the necessity of girls’ self-defence. Yet, in the line of arguments this only has the notion of a fig-leaf, as it is not elaborated upon.

Both articles combine far right and masculist arguments. They refer to the man as protector of the family and the (autochthonous) woman. This can be characterised as an aspect of male resovereigning and is reminiscent of soldierly masculinity. They blame women for having caused the men’s inability to defend themselves and others. This accusation can serve as a link to the discourse on the crisis of masculinity. In contrast, gender-based violence within the society is ignored.

Fleischhauer’s column was the only article with 241 readers’ comments within the small selection of texts which are the basis of this paper. This notwithstanding, I include these comments in the analysis, as they show how readers approve of, reject or modify the author’s line of argument. In the following, the nicknames used by commentators are added in parentheses as a means of reference. For pragmatic reasons, in the project ‘*Genderism*’ in *Media Debate*, only the first 20 of these comments could be included in the analysis. A starting point of the comments was the statement that non-violent upbringing would leave children defenceless. Instead, boys should learn how to defend themselves. In this respect a physical difference between boys and girls was stated. Most commentators’ only concern were the boys. Other than Fleischhauer himself, the commentators explicitly shifted the blame to women, either the proponents of non-violent upbringing, or “disorientated mothers” (*Tienanmen*)⁸¹, and girls in day care facilities, who would exert verbal violence, because their linguistic capacity is said to be more developed than the boys’ (*dr.joe66*). This can be seen as an effort to equate male and female acts of violence.⁸²

80 Mothers who pay attention to healthy food, non-violent conflict solution and ecological needs are cartooned as patsies in some conservative and liberal milieus.

81 Readers’ comments to Jan Fleischhauer: Aua, Papa!, in: Spiegel Online, 30 May 2016.

82 Critical: Monika Schröttle: Kritische Anmerkungen zur These der Gendersymmetrie bei Gewalt in Paarbeziehungen, in: GENDER (1/2010), pp. 133–151; Holly Johnson: Degen-dering Violence, in: Social Politics 22:3 (2015), pp. 390–410.

The legitimacy of violence was broadly discussed in the comments. In most commentators' opinion, this sort of street justice is justified to defend one's family, as well as one's wife, one's girlfriend or oneself against violence. Some stated that individuals should be entitled to resort to violence when institutional protection, above all by the police, is lacking. In several comments, violence was regarded an *ultima ratio*. There were also some references to the discourse of victimisation. Nobody should be forced to make oneself a victim (*Leser.161*). In this case, one would have a right to self-defence and an obligation to help (*Katzazi*). Yet, many would not dare to intervene, because they would be afraid to be hurt or even killed (*huger56, tuedelich*). *Suppenkoch* stated that those who protect their family would risk being taken to court, whereas the perpetrator would be regarded as the victim. Two commentators described their own physical interventions. Their explanations were dominated by complacency and the performance of male supremacy. This can be characterised as personal efforts of male resovereigning.

There were three explicit references to the Cologne incidences. A fourth commentator referred to "sections of the population, in which people act more churlish"⁸³ (*licht2009*), without specifying, which sections this person was referring to. Apart from that, violence remained abstract, yet intruding from the outside. Thus, violence, in many comments, was externalised and men were imagined in the role of the protector. Some repeatedly pointed out that boys should be prepared for this task.

Most of the comments strengthened Fleischhauer's arguments about the man as protector and explicitly blamed women. Yet, there was a broad and surprisingly differentiated discussion about the legitimacy of violence. Although nobody entirely rejected the use of violence, many aspects were addressed: violence as *ultima ratio*, legitimate self-defence, or an obligation to help in the case of threat. Some differentiated between conflicts which can be solved without violence and aggressive attacks that demand defence. In all comments, violence was regarded an external threat that demanded a (violent) response. Gender-based violence within society, again, was ignored.

An article in the liberal daily newspaper SZ represented a more differentiated way of externalising violence. Monika Frommel, a professor of legal studies, rejected the idea of an archaic Muslim culture as the background of the Cologne incidents. Muslim societies might not regard women as equals, she writes. Nonetheless, young men would not learn to attack women. Yet, the members of Maghrebian gangs in Germany would not want to integrate themselves into society. Rather, they would raise as much money as possible, return to their countries of origin and have good lives. As they do not want to stay here, they would resort to sexualised violence without any scruples, like they do in upheavals in their countries of origin. For, in phases of upheaval, acts

83 „Bevölkerungsschichten, da gehts halt eben rustikaler zu“ (translated by the author).

of sexual assault would occur more frequently. As upheavals in these countries would not lead to peace and democracy, but instead to just another military or autocratic regime, the police would not protect women against sexual assault. Besides, in criminal sub-cultures, young men would only be able to perform marginal masculinity. Belonging to a gang would give them some sort of precarious power, which could only be stabilised by scaring others and by subordinating them. In this line of argument, Frommel does not relate to the experience of marginalisation in our society to understand migrants' delinquency. Instead, she focuses on aspects of culture and the political system in their countries of origin. Therefore, in Frommel's opinion, their resorting to violence has nothing to do with problems within the German society.

Frommel's arguments are more differentiated than the articles in SPON and *Die Welt*, as she does not blame 'all' male refugees from Muslim, Arab and North African countries. Yet again, violence as a gender-based problem within our society is ignored. Furthermore, Frommel states that sexualised violence is decreasing, which, as a blanket statement, is not tenable.⁸⁴

In the frame *questioning masculinities*, there was one article by men's rights-activist and writer Ralf Bönt. It was published in the conservative daily newspaper *Die Welt*, forming a blatant contrast to the texts just analysed. Bönt regards violence, exerted by the far-right as well as by migrant men in Cologne or even IS-terrorists, as an expression of the crisis of masculinity and a senseless defence of hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinity, in Bönt's opinion, is what boys and (young) men perform, when they overcompensate for growing up without a male role model. Yet, Bönt does not elaborate upon the desirable attitudes of this role model. Instead, he reveals a naturalised understanding of gender. And his complaint of boys lacking a male role model (in the nuclear family) indirectly puts the blame for the men's boost of violence on mothers, i. e., on women.

Bönt does not externalise violence in the sense of accusing migrant Muslim men of attacking 'our' women. Instead, he states that the refugees would have made up their minds to escape violence in their countries of origin by migrating to Europe. It cannot be denied that refugees try to escape violence. Yet, Bönt, too, constructs a contrast between the violence elsewhere and the absence of violence in German society, and, again, male violence within our society is concealed and hidden behind the term "hypermasculinity".

Although Bönt rejects the use of violence, he indirectly adds to its externalisation as well as to the neglect of gender-based violence within the society and to the blaming of women for the violence of men.

84 See by contrast police data BKA: Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik. Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Jahrbuch Wiesbaden: 2017.

Media Discourses as Discursive Bridges?

The findings discussed above can help us understand in which respects taboos in societal debates are being broken by ‘expressing the unsayable’, to popularise and reinforce far-right narratives. I use the metaphor of a *discursive bridge* to illustrate this process.

In the sample analysed for this paper, news media, conservative or liberal, take up masculist narratives and arguments. Implicitly or explicitly, they reproduce the placing of blame upon women for the supposed crisis of masculinity. They support hegemonic masculine values. And they reassert heteronormative gender hierarchies. Thus, they add to male resovereigning. This can relate to other media analyses, which highlight the reproduction of gender stereotypes. Yet, liberal as well as conservative media in general do not refer to far-right political stance directly. Far-right opinions only rarely permeate mainstream media, and if so, only via the overlaps with masculist views. This is especially evident in the case of the two articles in *Die Welt* and on SPON, which deal with soldierly masculinity and the externalisation of violence. The positive references to a concept of masculinity that had been discredited since the end of the Nazi regime can be regarded as a breach of taboo. I argue that this would not have been possible without the reference to masculist narratives.

Some of the print media in the sample almost serve as platforms for masculists. For example, both the sociologist and masculist activist Gerhard Amendt, as well as Ralf Bönt, are frequent authors in the daily newspaper *Die Welt*. Jan Fleischhauer, until 2019 conservative figurehead in the columns on SPON, is frequently cited on masculist webpages like *Genderama*, *man tau* or *Sons of Perseus*.⁸⁵ SPON runs one of the most frequently visited internet forums in Germany. Here, masculists can reach far more readers than in their own media. That is why the webpage www.wgvdl.de⁸⁶ lobbied among their fellows to comment in the SPON-forum.⁸⁷ As a consequence, in the discussion of some topics, there is a majority of masculist positions, although masculism represents only a tiny, albeit extremely vocal, minority of men in German society as a whole.⁸⁸

Hence, thematic consistency, as well as commenting strategies, provide evidence for a *discursive bridge*—initially between masculist views and the news media analysed in the foregoing. Yet, regarding the issue of soldierly masculinity and (the externalisation of) violence, this bridge reaches further. Indeed, these two discourses do not just link two societal spheres, or—more drastically—bridge the gap to the political

85 In 2019, Jan Fleischhauer left SPON to write columns for *Focus online*.

86 The abbreviation *wgvdl* means “how much equal rights does the country tolerate?” or, in German “Wieviel Gleichberechtigung verträgt das Land?” (translated by the author).

87 Hinrich Rosenbrock: *Die anti-feministische Männerrechtsbewegung*, pp. 142–144.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

far right. The phenomenon is more complex than this. As I have shown, the political print and online news media, which I have analysed in my project, add to the mainstreaming of masculist views. As I have argued, masculist views have strong links to far-right discourses, for example, by referring to soldierly masculinity and the externalisation of violence. Hence, it is not the news media that build a discursive bridge to the far right. Rather, they serve as one bridgehead reaching out towards masculist political views at the centre of the bridge. On the other end, the political far right, regarded as the other bridgehead, does the same. This discursive bridge only works with masculism as the central pillar. Thus, one can conclude, breaking taboos in democratic discourse needs catalysts such as masculist narratives.

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