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Abstract: This article is an empirical investigation into the visual mobilization strategies by far-right political parties for election campaigns constructing Muslim immigrants as a "threat" to the nation. Drawing on an interdisciplinary theoretical approach of social movement studies and research on media and communication, I focus on the far-right political party Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has produced several widespread inflammatory series of visual election posters featuring anti-Islam rhetoric, combined with provocative images of gender and sexuality. By approaching visual politics through a perspective on actors constructing visual forms of political mobilization, I show how far-right populist "movement parties" are supported by professional graphic designers commercializing extremist ideologies by creating ambivalent images and text messages. My findings on the AfD's visual campaign politics document the instrumentalization and appropriation of the rhetoric of women's empowerment and LGBT rights discourse, helping the AfD to rebrand its image as a liberal democratic opposition party, while at the same time, maintaining its illiberal political agenda on gender and sexuality. Visual representations of gender and sexuality in professionally created election posters served to ridicule and shame Muslim minorities and denounce their "Otherness"—while also promoting a heroic self-image of the party as a savior of white women and Western civilization from the threat of male Muslim migrants. By documenting the visual politics of the AfD, as embedded in transnational cooperation between different actors, including visual professional graphic designers and far-right party activists, my multimodal analysis shows how far-right movement parties marketize and commercialize their image as "progressive" in order to reach out to new voters.

Keywords: far-right; extremism; visual politics; multimodal analysis

1. Introduction[1]

This article is an empirical investigation into the visual politics created by far-right political parties for election campaigns constructing Muslim immigrants as a "threat" to the nation. In a time when elected representatives promote or support far-right activists' visually staged protest performances of 'rebellion' or dramatic 'takeover' of parliament and institutions, my study aims at deepening understanding of the global rise of far-right social movements focusing on visual forms of political mobilization and cooperation between party officials, professionals, and far-right activists. Far-right populist parties in different Western European countries have used election campaigns to construct and legitimate ethno-nationalist and homogeneous representations of citizenship and national belonging that demeans and marginalizes minorities, specifically Muslims (Betz 2013; Wodak 2015; Özvatan and Forchtner 2019; Yurdakul et al. 2019; Freistein et al. 2020).

This article aims to contribute to the research on the global rise of the far-right focusing on the visual dimension of far-right political mobilization by drawing on an interdisciplinary theoretical approach of social movement studies and research on media and communication. Trying to understand the global rise of the far-right, scholars of far-right political mobilization in social movements have called for new research on how visual culture (including photographs, posters, and internet memes) serve the commercialization and mainstreaming of extremist and nationalist beliefs online (Miller-Idriss 2017; Miller-Idriss and Graefe-Geusch 2020; see also Bogerts and Fielitz 2019). Because of their open-ended, ambivalent characteristics, visual images have the capacity to address different audiences and help political parties gain electoral support (Müller 2007; Müller et al. 2009). Critical historical discourse theorist Ruth Wodak describes how far-right parties mobilize the power of images together with ambivalent text statements as part of a "calculated ambivalence" rhetoric strategy, adding to the normalization of far-right racist discourse (Wodak 2013, p. 27; see also Richardson and Wodak 2009). Media scholars show how far-right populist visual communication strategies in Europe construct gendered "attraction images" that represent "the party" through popularizing images of an ethno-nationalist "people" in order to appeal to a larger segment of voters (Schober 2019, pp. 1–2). The research question this paper asks is "How do far-right political parties use gendered visual politics in election campaigns in order to reach out and mobilize supporters?"

Images of gender and sexuality serve far-right extremist activists by targeting younger generations and diverse groups (Miller-Idriss 2017) while also renegotiating and modernizing claims of "true" and "authentic" Nazism in relation to history, nature, and binary gender roles (Forchtner and Kølvraa 2017). Through digital media economies, far-right parties and their gendered images facilitate the spreading of extremist images and videos into the mainstream (Askanius 2019; Bennett and Livingstone 2017; Baele 2019; Betz 2013; Hokka and Nelimarkka 2019; Langenohl 2013).

A new study in Germany analyzed thousands of far-right images and used qualitative interviews to show how visual images facilitate the commercialization and mainstreaming of a far-right visual culture (Miller-Idriss and Graefe-Geusch 2020). Most recent empirical studies show that some far-right activist groups use internet memes or social media visuals rejecting and coopting left-wing, feminist, and LGBT gender identities (Bogerts and Fielitz 2019; Forchtner and Kølvraa 2017). Other far-right groups include LGBT and gender equality claims within their nationalist, anti-Islam ideology (Pilkington 2017; cf Sauer 2017; Hennig 2018; Verloo and Paternotte 2018). Jasbir Puar has

developed the concept of *homonationalism* to refer to the appropriation of liberal LGBT rights politics for anti-Islam rhetoric by far-right populist political parties, among others (Puar 2007).

Given the variety of political mobilization practices around gender and sexuality, and the sharing among far-right activists digitally through tens of thousands of far-right webpages, more research is needed on how political parties appropriate and capitalize on far-right images or gendered images of "radical authenticity" found online (Forchtner and Kølvraa 2017, p. 252). Parallel to the diffusion of large amounts of visual digital data shared by far-right activists, far-right populist parties have shifted to an increasingly unapologetic use of nationalist and white supremacist imagery promoting gendered stereotypes in election campaigns (Bevelander and Wodak 2019; Geva 2018; Marx-Ferree 2020; Miller-Idriss 2018; Yurdakul et al. 2019). Furthermore, in "mainstream" media discourse and public debates about gender and sexuality in European societies, male Muslim migrants are frequently constructed as a "threat" to the ethno-nationalist narratives of belonging and the ideals of heterosexual masculinity (Özcan 2013; Uitermark et al. 2013; Wodak 2015; Norocel 2017; Miller-Idriss 2018). In connecting the different streams of research on visual images, far-right political mobilization, and gender, my aim for this paper was to study how far-right parties use images of gender and sexuality in election campaigns to agitate against minorities, migrants, and, especially, Muslims.

The contribution of my paper to research on social movements and political mobilization illustrates how far-right *movement parties* (Caiani et al. 2012) appropriate issues such as gender and sexuality previously mobilized and "owned" by left-wing movement actors (McAdam and Kloos 2014). The literature on social movements has called attention to visual media as a communicative tool that facilitates cross-ideological knowledge exchange, symbolic bonding, and convergence of ideas between professional political parties on the far-right and grassroots, extremist far-right activists (Flam and Doerr 2015; Doerr 2017a, 2017b; Askanius 2019; Bogerts and Fielitz 2019). McAdam and Kloos suggest that social movement scholars should study coalitions between far-right parties and grassroots movements particularly, given the resources that professionalized political parties provide to extremist activists (McAdam and Kloos 2014; see also Fielitz and Marcks 2020).

Taking a social movement perspective, I focused on collaborations between various actors within far-right social movements, including commercial actors and political party elites (McAdam and Kloos 2014). My case study focused on gendered images in order to discuss an important, yet neglected aspect: the professionalization of far-right parties' visual politics, through the work of experienced graphic designers facilitating the diffusion of far-right rhetoric internationally (cf. Miller-Idriss 2018). I focus on the far-right political party Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has commercially produced several widespread inflammatory series of visual election posters featuring anti-Islam rhetoric with ethno-nationalist images of German citizenship (Yurdakul et al. 2019, p. 1; Özvatan and Forchtner 2019). For its national election campaign in 2017, the AfD professionally employed the US graphic design company Harris Media, known for having radicalized the electoral campaigns of Republican candidates in the United States, as well as of other conservative political parties internationally, to assume a more far-right ideology (Amann 2017). Like the Swiss People's Party, whose leaders chose to cooperate with commercial graphic designers in order to create provocative anti-immigration and anti-Islam posters (Doerr 2017a), the AfD succeeded in reaching out to more voters in elections (Özvatan and Forchtner 2019; cf. Betz 2013). Previous empirical research has documented how the AfD, while professionalizing its visual design, also shifted to a more decidedly anti-Islam visual poster style based on gendered images and ethno-nationalist rhetoric (Özvatan and Forchtner 2019).

The AfD is a case in point illustrating the professionalized use and mobilization of gendered images denigrating Muslims and migrants during election campaigns. Critical extremism research suggests that the AfD's inflammatory and provocative rhetoric in the

particular context of Germany is a mobilization strategy to create public visibility, thus subverting the attempts of established political parties and liberal media actors to contain extremist and far-right discourse (Fielitz and Marcks 2020). As an example, the AfD's series of provocative national campaign posters for its 2017 national parliament election included the one shown in Figure 1.

In order to interpret and contextualize the poster in Figure 1 in the empirical findings section, I trace how the AfD's campaign appropriated issues such as gender equality and sexuality, coopting left-liberal themes and ideas (cf. Farris 2017; Fielitz and Marcks 2020). Figure 1 is a good example of what feminist scholar Sara Farris has termed the *femonationalist* rhetoric of mainstream anti-immigration discourse overlapping with far right nationalist political agendas in Western societies (Farris 2017). Femonationalist rhetoric is defined by its appropriation and distortion of feminist ideas of gender emancipation for the stigmatization of migrants, ethnic minorities, and Muslim women through racialized representations of these groups as "oppressed" and inferior to the imaginary ideal of "empowered" white women in neoliberal capitalist economies (Farris 2017:5-12). The poster's instrumental use of the notion of a bikini as an alleged symbol of "women's self-determination over their bodies" constructs an explicit dichotomy between "us" and them", in which Muslim women are indirectly represented as repressed "Others" through the reference to the burka.

In the following, I first discuss the definitional challenges in the analysis of far-right political mobilization and outline out my interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approach to analyze the AfD's visual campaign, including sampling and data collection strategies. In my multimodal visual analysis, I trace how the AfD combined a sophisticated set of visual images and text-based statements constructing an image of Muslim women as "oppressed" in relation to the "threat" of an "invasion" by male Muslim migrants (Wodak 2015; Betz 2013; Uitermark et al. 2013; Farris 2017). In interpreting the visual mobilization of boundaries in relation to text-based campaign rhetoric, I ask "How did the AfD posters portray the gendered relationship between immigrants and citizens in order to reach out and mobilize supporters?" Right-wing populist parties use a range of different discursive strategies to construct "border politics" between an exclusionary majority national "we-group identity" and a "dangerous", threatening "Other" (Wodak 2015, pp. 2, 4).

Definitional Challenges and the AfD as a Far-Right Populist Party

Caiani et al., discuss the definitional challenges as well as the broad variety of ideologies to be included among right-wing "extremist" political actors, from those espousing revisionist neo-Nazi ideas or neo-fascist convictions to religious extremists of various denominations (Caiani et al. 2012, p. 3). Wodak defines right-wing populist parties based on their stigmatization of cultural, religious, linguistic, or ethnic minorities as threats and scapegoats for a wide variety of political problems, drawing on Pelinka's work (Wodak 2013, pp. 26–27; Pelinka 2013, p. 8). Mobilizing on the issues of migration, the refugee crisis, and gender, extremists increasingly use anti-Islamist discourses that construct the essentialist idea of defending a nativist European "culture" based on Christianity (Mudde 2007, p. 85). Following my research interest in political mobilization, I conceived of the AfD as a *populist far-right party* (Mudde 2007). As a *movement party* (Caiani et al. 2012) the AfD is a far-right party with strong connections to non-parliamentary groups, such as extremist movement networks (Caiani et al. 2012; see also Rydgren 2018). After its foundation in 2013, the party shifted from its initially conservative Eurosceptical discourse toward an increasingly far-right rhetoric (Arzheimer 2019). Due to its repeated electoral success, the AfD has by now gained access to institutional resources that increasingly make the party a resourceful hub with a public voice and agenda, connecting a multitude of grassroots far-right and extremist groups with a broad and multifaceted far-right and extremist ideology (Arzheimer 2019; Fielitz and Marcks 2020; Weisskircher and Berntzen 2019). The use of social networks and social media

channels facilitates joint mobilization of the wide variety of extremist organizations and populist right-wing parties (Caiani et al. 2012).

Among far-right populist parties in Europe, the AfD is an interesting case for an analysis focusing on visual political mobilization. First, it is a relatively recently founded party that, from the beginning, has imported visual election campaign symbols by far-right parties in other German-speaking countries, while simultaneously working at professionalizing its own visual politics (Amann 2017; Özvatan and Forchtner 2019). Second, the AfD is a particularly relevant case for understanding the commercialization of a far-right visual culture through a political party that serves as an institutional base for a large number of extremist and far-right digital platforms in Germany (Fielitz and Marcks 2020; Miller-Idriss and Graefe-Geusch 2020). Thus, my research aims to contribute knowledge to understanding how the AfD's visual politics construct a gendered, ethno-nationalist narrative of "Germanness" that connects different societal groups with varying ideologies and backgrounds, both radical extremists as well as mainstream voters frustrated by established political parties (Özvatan and Forchtner 2019; Caiani et al. 2012).

2. Methods and Data: A Multimodal Approach to Visual Political Mobilization

This paper applies a multimodal approach to visual political mobilization, combining theoretical and methodological insights from research on social movements, media studies, and multimodal perspectives of visual and discourse analysis (Doerr 2010, Doerr et al. 2013; Flam and Doerr 2015; Müller et al. 2009; Özcan 2013; Richardson and Wodak 2009; Forchtner and Kølvraa 2017). I define visual analysis by primarily focusing on three aspects of visual political mobilization dynamics, which I analyzed in the case of the AfD's campaign: (1) the visual expression of the party's political program, focusing on its visual campaign materials; (2) the representation of gender, citizenship, and of Muslims and migrants in the campaign; and (3) the larger societal context and the broader public discourse on migration (Doerr et al. 2013).

In the first step of visual content analysis, I analyze the content of images in the campaign, their representation of gender and spatial organization as well as the applied visual technologies. I then, in a second step, apply the interdisciplinary methodology of visual iconography (Müller 2007), in order to analyze the complex aesthetic messages and possible inflammatory potential within visual images (Müller et al. 2009). For example, I apply visual iconography to explore the visual construction of gender in narratives of "Germanness", and the affirmed "we"-understanding in poster contents targeting Muslims or Islam (Yurdakul et al. 2019). Given my research interest in the professionalization of political mobilization, I trace how the graphic designers employed by the AfD constructed visual images of ethno-nationalist citizenship, while at the same time, avoided explicit extremist iconography (such as nationalistic flags or allusions to Nazi iconography) (cf. Richardson and Wodak 2009).

Following my iconographic interpretation, I added a third step of contextual analysis. This contextualization serves to deepen my knowledge of the genres of the images, and the place within the historical context of image traditions and forms (Müller 2007). Addressing the role of images versus texts, I compare the visual images and text-based rhetoric in the AfD's campaign materials as embedded within the particular national and discursive political context of far-right politics in Germany (Arzheimer 2018; Özvatan and Forchtner 2019; Fielitz and Marcks 2020). For analyzing the text slogans and statements, my multi-modal theoretical approach was inspired by the Discourse Historical Approach in Critical Discourse Studies (DHA), where I am interested in contributing to a critical visual literacy of far-right "visual rhetoric" (Richardson and Wodak 2009, p. 50; Kress and Van Leeuven 2006). For instance, textual elements of posters may support an image, or they might use "vague and ambiguous" notions that avoid explicit racist claims (Richardson and Wodak 2009, p. 69). In combination with coded racialized images though, such posters construct salient features in ridiculing and othering distinct groups or

establish a contrast between citizens and migrants, Christians or Muslims (Forchtner et al 2013).

I situated the posters in their social context of broader media debates about gender, and male Muslim migrants as a "threat" in the context of the discourse about a "European refugee crisis" (Bevelander and Wodak 2019). Due to restrictions of time and space, I focused my analysis of the political and historical context on preceding far-right propaganda posters, visuals, and texts created by the AfD and other far-right parties that seem to have influenced the creation of the posters analyzed in this piece (intertextual and interdiscursive relations) (Forchtner et al. 2013). In ethical terms, I see my study as part of a critical research tradition directed at revealing racist visual contents in order to create a broader "critical visual literacy" perspective in the social sciences (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006).

3. Data Selection, Sampling Strategy, and Challenges of Sampling and Data Analysis

I restricted my in-depth multimodal analysis to two distinct posters that formed part of the AfD's national and state-level election campaign materials. I selected these visuals based on my theoretical interest in understanding how far-right politicians appropriate various progressive topics, including (1) feminist politics of women's emancipation for a nationalist agenda (Farris 2017), and (2) politics of LGBT rights and sexuality (Puar 2007). My data sample included 20 widely diffused AfD election campaign poster motives, distributed digitally by the party, as well as physically in street campaigns all over Germany. My sampling strategy draws insights from a previous systematic overview of the AfD's 2017 election campaign and its use of anti-Islam rhetoric combined with a multitude of gendered images (Yurdakul et al. 2019). Regarding the challenges in studying the multitude of regional and subnational grassroots of right-wing movement parties (Caiani et al. 2012), I also considered that state-level vs national campaigns were professionally designed to appeal to a variety of groups with contrasting ideologies and in different regions of Eastern and Western Germany (Weisskircher 2020).

4. Findings

The findings presented in this section fill a gap in the literature on visual posters by far-right parties by showing how gendered stereotypes served the AfD as a rhetorical tool to construct a racialized image of Muslims as Germany's "Others". As will be shown, graphic poster titles and subtitles, in combination with visual contents, constructed somewhat ambivalent gendered stereotypes of "oppressed" women symbolizing "Germanness" under threat, while other posters highlighted the role of male Muslim migrants as "invaders". This made it possible for poster producers to claim that their message was not racist (Wodak 2015). I first trace how the AfD appropriated (1) an image of women's liberation for an election poster to promote what I interpret as a femonationalist political agenda (Figure 1). Thereafter (2), I discuss a second election poster to show how the AfD is connecting the image of gay rights with the rhetoric of Germany being "threatened" by male Muslim migrants, which I interpret as promoting a homonationalist agenda (Figure 2).

Figure 1. [AfD election poster. Credit: imago images/IPON].

Figure 1 uses bold, graphic text superimposed on a beach scene featuring three female bodies in scanty bikinis. At the level of visual content (1), the visual style of female bodies wearing bikinis in the center of the poster recalls the sexualized marketization and objectivation of female bodies through capitalism, as criticized by feminist theorists and visual artists (Schober 2001). What is interesting in this poster's visual design is how the graphic design highlights a bold white text statement over a sexualized image styled realistically as beach scene photography (Yurdakul et al. 2019). What is distinct about this poster (in comparison with known anti-Islam posters of far-right parties) is that its sophisticated, professional visual style represents Muslim women, through the metaphor of "burkas," simultaneously as repressed victims and as absent—since the photography in the center constructs a chauvinist image of attractive women representing "Germanness" (cf. Yurdakul et al. 2019; Özvatan and Forchtner 2019). The visually highlighted title "Burkas? We prefer Bikinis," is followed by an equally bold subtitle at the bottom of the visual "Courage, Germany" (my English translation of the German subtitle "*Trau dich, Deutschland*", in bold).[2] I will return to the text-based elements of the poster below.

Second (2), from an iconographic perspective, bikinis are a multi-faceted symbol of Western popular culture, women's emancipation, capitalism, as well as the exploitation of women's bodies through fashion advertising (Schober 2001). Since the Seventies, feminist artists and activists have used performance art to question the sexist marketization of women's bodies through gendered, sexualizing advertisements (Schober 2001:271). The poster text coopts historic feminist ideas of women`s freedom to choose one's own dressing style, while the sexualizing visual poster contents reproduce the

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[2] I here follow the translation of Yurdakul et al. "Courage, Germany" or "Be courageous". An alternative translation into English could be "wake up Germany". The reference to 'courage' also resonates with traditional Nazi discourse on "courage" as a distinctively "German" virtue.

symbolic violence of the male chauvinistic gaze (Rose 2016). Combined, image and text produce a cynical visual politics denigrating women's bodies and mobilizing against Muslims.

The iconography in Figure 1 is in line with the cynical visual politics in older, previously created AfD campaign posters with similar sexualizing, gendered representation of women in commercial advertisements. For example, a previous digital poster designed by the AfD youth organization Junge Alternative (JA) for its 2014 European election campaign had, in its center, a pinup-style photograph of women wearing string tangas.[3] In an interview conducted by the daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* about this controversial poster, widely perceived as denigrating women, leaders of the JA referred to their own politics as "antifeminist." [4] Following a negative reaction by liberal media, the AfD JA poster designers apologized and withdrew the poster, yet replaced it immediately with another, equally sexualizing digital poster promoted with a sarcastic statement repeating their antifeminist political agenda.[5] Thus, the only new rhetorical element of the 2017 campaign was that the AfD campaign makers connected their sexualizing bikini symbolism to anti-Islam discourse. As Özvatan and Forchtner have highlighted, the bikini poster was part of a larger election campaign series creating a visual narrative of a "doomsday scenario for Germany" in relation to the arrival of "Arab/Muslim or African" migrants (Özvatan and Forchtner 2019, p. 211). From an iconographic perspective, the "bright" beach scenario in posters like Figure 1 constructs a visual equivalent for the male chauvinist and neo-racist narrative of "a bright future" with a "happy ending" for Germans who would vote for the party (Özvatan and Forchtner 2019m p. 211).

Thirdly (3), in terms of political context, it is notable that the AfD's controversial visual campaign for the 2017 national elections helped the party, for the first time, score 12.6 percent of votes (almost 10 percent more than in 2013—a big success and an outcome of a political shift to the far-right) (Özvatan and Forchtner 2019). During the period of 2014–2017, the AfD professionalized its visual design while also radicalizing its ethno-nationalist and anti-Islam agenda (Özvatan and Forchtner 2019). I would also argue that the more aggressive visual design of the AfD's campaign was facilitated through the party's transnational networking and cooperation with right-wing populist media campaign experts. Moreover, the newspaper *Der Spiegel* reported in 2017 that the AfD had employed Harris Media, a Texas company of visual designers known as specialists in appropriating extremist discourse and symbolism for conservative and right-wing populist election campaigns in the United States and internationally.[6] Before the AfD's campaign, Harris Media had worked at radicalizing and popularizing the online image of the Republican Party in the United States, the governing Likud Party in Israel, and the euro-sceptical UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the UK (Amann 2017). German liberal news criticized the AfD regarding its anti-immigrant and anti-Islam contents (see, e.g., Amann 2017). Interestingly, according to media reporting by *Der Spiegel*, the AfD political leadership did not apparently implement all suggestions made by the American designers. For example, according to media reporting, Harris Media designers proposed that the AfD use the slogan "Germany to the Germans" (German original: "Deutschland den Deutschen"). Party officials, however, rejected the idea – perhaps as it directly

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[3] http://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/jungorganisation-der-afd-wahlkampf-mit-nackten-hintern-12903064.html (20   April 2014).

[4] http://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/jungorganisation-der-afd-wahlkampf-mit-nackten-hintern-12903064.html (20   April 2014).

[5] http://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/jungorganisation-der-afd-wahlkampf-mit-nackten-hintern-12903064.html (20   April 2014).

[6] http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/u-s-ad-agency-boosts-right-wing-populist-afd-a-1164956.html.   Accessed   at 1.1.2018.

resonated with extreme right jargon having the potential for recreating old conflicts within the party and its associated grassroots activist movements (cf Amann 2017).[7]

The influence of the Harris Media team of commercial graphic designers on the AfD's visual politics can be traced in several of the elements in Figure 1. First, by picturing attractive naked female body parts from behind, Figure 1 introduces the genre of fashion advertising into electoral politics in order to reach out to male consumers (Rose 2016), signaling a shift from the previous antifeminist visual politics of the AfD in 2014 to a new, professional style. However, unlike the earlier antifeminist AfD posters of 2014, the 2017 poster in Figure 1 is distinctive in its combination of a sexualizing focus on women's bodies with text contrasting "bikinis" to "burkas". This Harris Media design, unlike mainstream fashion advertisements, calls upon the political "consumer" of Figure 1 to protect white majority women from the "threat" of wearing a burka (Yurdakul et al. 2019; Farris 2017). By exploiting the fear of repression of the majority by a radical religious minority, this poster simplifies and caricatures the relationship between a representative "We" and an enemy "Other" (Forchtner et al. 2013). The visual elements in Figure 1 combine femonationalist stereotypes and sexualization in order to commercialize and promote fear toward migrants and Muslims (cf. Wodak 2015; Özcan 2013).

Another important visual element of the poster is the party logo itself, highlighting the marketing and branding of far-right politics in the genre of fashion design (Miller-Idriss 2018). The logo "Alternative for Germany" is visualized as a flashy red arrow resembling the commercial Nike logo. The color red acts as a signaling function and recalls the visual style of electoral propaganda campaigns by other far-right parties (Kress and Van Leeuven 2006; Doerr 2017a). Within a German-speaking context, the AfD's slogan at the bottom of the poster ("Courage, Germany!") implicitly calls up Nike's slogan ("Just do it."). Moreover, the AfD's red logo visually resembles the Nike logo styled as an arrow. I would thus argue that the appeal "Courage, Germany" both intertextually and, through its visual similarity to the Nike logo, marketizes the AfD's politics by connecting it to fashion branding (cf. Miller-Idriss 2018).

At the immediate level of text-based discourse within the poster, the slogan, by calling upon "Germany" to show "courage", is ambivalent. In drawing on Ashley Mattheis' work (Mattheis 2018), I suggest that the call to courage references the alt-right/far-right narrative of men's duty to defend white women from an alleged invasion by Islam, wherein Western civilization is a romantic gift by white men to white women in need of protection (Mattheis 2018). In addition, the ambivalent notion of "courage" implicitly appeals to and references other far-right narratives, such as Replacement Theory and Eurabia conspiracy theories, according to which, continued Muslim migration threatens Western civilization and Western freedoms (Davey and Ebner 2019). I would also argue that, from a discourse-historical perspective, the slogan has a strong intertextual resonance with neo-Nazis and historic Nazi rhetoric strategies, connecting virtues such as "courage" and "truthfulness" to "Germanness"(Wodak 2013). Likewise, Figure 1 implicitly recalls posters by the far-right Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA)[8] movement, whose grassroots activists used visual representations of male refugees as rapists (Schober 2020). However, in contrast to the far-right visual politics of the street, the AfD's professional graphic design subtly appeals to far-right masculine ideals, in such a way as to reach out to "mainstream" voters as well as potentially more extremist supporters (Miller-Idriss 2018). Thus, this cleaned up and professionally designed "coded racist" slogan (Wodak 2013:25) resonates on several levels with far-right, male, digital rebel culture, without the need to explicitly reference Nazi iconography (Miller-Idriss 2017).

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[7] The rejected title (Deutschland den Deutschen) would have had multiple extreme right connotations including a 1980s song associated to the band Böhse Onkelz popular in neo-nazi circles, an old NPD campaign slogan with the same name.

[8] PEGIDA stands for Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (for connections between the AfD and PEGIDA, see, e.g., Özvatan and Forchtner 2019; Arzheimer 2019; Weisskircher 2020).

While appropriating elements of mainstream, visual, gendered, symbolic representation of Islam in German media (Özcan 2013), the poster in Figure 1 is distinct in its combination of sexist symbolism and anti-Islam rhetoric. The poster's text-based title and subtitle combine rhetorical strategies such as simplification, exaggeration, and caricature in order to denigrate religious Muslims as Germany's "Others." The anti-Islam symbolism of a burka is rhetorically invoked in opposition to the visual image of bikinis, which act as simplistic symbols for women's freedom (Yurdakul et al. 2019). Yet, this jingoist expression of female emancipation is in stark contrast to the sexualizing visuals of the poster. Resistance and critical reaction were widespread when it was displayed in public spaces in Berlin, where citizens painted "sexism" over it (Yurdakul et al. 2019, p. 2). While the burka is almost never worn by European Muslims, symbolically, it holds religious or cultural meanings for some groups, embedded in varying national contexts (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014, p. 8).

In Western European media debates about Islam, citizenship, and gender, the headscarf commonly stands as a symbol of diversity in the context of post-war immigration into European society (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014, p. 2), yet this poster rhetorically invokes a burka as a radical symbol of Islam. Korteweg and Yurdakul (2014, p. 35) document how the notion of the burka in controversial debates about citizenship, culture, and national belonging in majority white secular European societies has come to stand symbolically for women's submission. The implicit, simplified representation of Islam through burkas entirely overlooks the feminist and emancipatory claims of young European Muslim women, who argue that the veil represents to them a variety of things, including a collective notion of belonging to a particular national group, or to a transnational, cosmopolitan community (cf. Dagg and Haugaard 2016). Thus, the poster text simplifies and reduces Islam by focusing on one specific version of it, neglecting the multiplicity of cultures of veiling by Muslim women in Europe and Germany (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014).

Secondly, the poster title also uses simplified dichotomies to construct a white supremacist Christian notion of German citizenship. By using the short slogan "We prefer bikinis over burkas" (German: Burkas? Wir steh'n auf Bikinis") the viewer imagines a stark "choice" of either "burka" or "bikini". The reference to an explicit "we" group in relation to the assumption of (Germans) "preferring bikinis" in the context of an election poster suggests a collective majority of voters ("Germans") who "prefer" bikinis. By associating "Islam" with "burka" (restriction) and "Western" with "bikini" (freedom), the poster opposes two simplistic and stereotypical images while hiding its implied messages (1) that women should not wear burkas, and (2) that Islam and women's liberation are irreconcilable.

I would thus argue that this poster promotes what Sara R. Farris (2017) defines as a femonationalist discourse of women's oppression through Islam. The simplification of Muslim and minority women represented through an allegedly oppressive dress code in juxtaposition to a sexualizing image is ironically both utilizing and inviting a male chauvinistic gaze. This imaginary male chauvinist viewer is invited to be more "courageous," yet both the word and the act of "courage" are here invested with a double meaning, at once sexual and femonationalist. Indeed, Özvatan and Forchtner (2019) discuss another AfD poster in the 2017 election campaign that combined photography of the body of a pregnant white woman with an "encouraging" ethno-nationalist narrative explicitly calling upon white "Germany" to reproduce ("New Germans? We make them ourselves", a statement constructed in opposition to German government discourse on immigration's demographic benefits (Özvatan and Forchtner 2019, p. 212).

I included a second campaign poster by the AfD, which was part of the party's 2016 election campaign for the Berlin House of Representatives (see Figure 2 below). The poster in Figure 2 targeted LGBT voters in the state of Berlin specifically and was received with mostly negative public reactions within the LGBT community itself. As an example, the AfD's truck parading the controversial poster at the Berlin Christopher Street Day (CSD)

parade preceding the 2016 Berlin House of Representatives election led to the poster being demolished (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. [AfD poster at the CSD parade 2016, Berlin, credit: imago images/Snapshot].

As I highlight in this section of my empirical analysis the poster in Figure 2 is a coded racist image that constructs a simplified negative stereotype of male Muslim migrants as homophobic. In other words, the poster in Figure 2 constructs *homonationalist* visual politics in the sense that the poster design relies on appropriating gay rights struggles in order to push through a nationalist political agenda (cf. Puar 2007).

Moreover, like Figure 1, the poster in Figure 2 is a professionally designed visual image in the genre of populist election designs that use bold text statements positioned on top of a photographic illustration in such a way as to ensure that the intended ideological message is explicitly determined by the highlighted text. The visual design of Figure 2 has, at its center, two figures portrayed as a 'gay couple' in the poster's text statement that is styled using bold quotation marks. The bold text graphic contains a homonationalist statement (cf. Puar 2007): "We aren't interested in getting to know Muslim immigrants who think of our love as a mortal sin." (my English translation of the German poster text "Mein Partner und ich legen keinen Wert auf die Bekanntschaft mit muslischen Einwanderern, für die unsere Liebe eine Todsünde ist"). While both men in the photograph are white, the poster's professionally constructed visual design invites different viewers and interpretations. The men's serious facial expressions support the polarizing text message, creating a boundary between "Muslim migrants" and gay love.

Like Figure 1, Figure 2 combines text statements and visual content directed against Muslim minorities and/or migrants. However, Figure 2, unlike the poster shown in Figure 1, does not show naked body parts, nor does it represent "Germanness" through the use of female bodies. In fact, the poster in Figure 2 reflects a contradictory image that attempts at constructing an "authentic" image of "Germanness" and masculinity through producing an emotionally tense, ambivalent representation of a gay couple.

Unlike Figure 1, the two figures here are forward-facing and make direct eye contact with the viewer, suggesting authenticity (cf. Forchtner and Kølvraa 2017). The fashionable clothing style and the body postures construct the figures as typical, "everybody" citizens in a popularizing visual narrative of national belonging (Schober 2019). The arrangement of the two figures—one standing, the other seated—evokes contemporary family portraits beyond the heterosexual matrix, while at the same time, recalling elements of a visual iconography of traditional bourgeois group portraits (cf. Kröncke 2019).

Several other visual and text-based elements in the poster also work to construct a popular image of far-right authenticity in which German citizenship reflecting the AfD's mobilization of ethno-nationalist brotherhood as condition to the survival of the state and the nation (Marx-Ferree 2020). For example, the graphic text style placed in typewriter font at the center of the visual design suggests that this statement is a direct quotation from one of the two white male figures pictured. The poster explicitly suggests "authenticity" through the use of the subtitle in the slogan "AfD—uncomfortable, authentic, courageous". Here, the visual and the textual combine to construct an image of the AfD as a social movement party (cf Caiani et al. 2012)—a party that is courageous enough to speak the truth about Muslims' alleged anti-gay attitudes, beyond the perceived hegemony of leftish political correctness. The poster thus professionally combines anti-gay and anti-Muslim stereotypes to promote a universalizing self-image as a populist party for "everybody" (cf. Schober 2019)—while in fact catering to white majority Germans.

Interestingly, from an iconographic perspective (2), there is a discrepancy between the visual elements and the poster's text regarding the representation of gay love relationships. In the graphic text at the center of the poster, the words for love (*Liebe*) and mortal sin (*Todsünde*) are highlighted in bold, suggesting a reference to the two men in the image as gay lovers. However, the body language and facial expressions of the men could be described, at best, as ambivalent. In contrast to popular representations and efforts to represent gay love relationships in pride parades and LGBT activism, the body language of the two men can be read as tense, emotionally detached, and even defensive. Thus, the visual iconography of the poster (Figure 2) does not connect to the open expression of gay popular culture and the expression of love in pride parades. The poster's visual elements thus serve to carry those subtle ideological messages that are omitted in the text.

Interpreting the poster within the *political context* of its creation (3), I would suggest that the lack of a more explicit, positive depiction of gay love in the visual content (as known, for example, from the iconography of pride parades) actually fits the political discourse of the AfD's general political line toward LGBT politics. Feminist and gender scholars have shown how the AfD, since its creation, has formed part of the networks of political parties, together with the PEGIDA movement, mobilizing in Germany and internationally against LGBT rights and education about gender and sexuality (Sauer 2017; Hennig 2018; cf. Verloo and Paternotte 2018). AfD politicians have regularly used state-level parliaments in several German Länder in order to advance anti-gender and anti-LGBT rights politics in the area of public education (Hennig 2018; Kemper 2014). This broader political context could help in understanding the intriguing contrast between the poster text in Figure 2, speaking romantically about love, and the tense facial and body expressions in the photograph.

Based on the three steps of multimodal analysis I have shown how the disruption between text-based and visual content in Figure 2 corresponds to the AfD's attempts to incorporate liberal anti-LGBT rhetoric into its illiberal, conservative, and homonationalist political discourse. My findings show that, while appropriating liberal LGBT themes in a homonationalist propaganda style, Figure 2 omits the AfD's actual anti-gender and anti-LGBT policies. The cautious, tense visual representation of homosexual love allows the AfD to present an "acceptable" image of homosexuality, professionally designed to avoid offending voters with homophobic attitudes. At the same time, the poster cynically constructs a homonationalist image as a party that "courageously" defends German gay

couples toward allegedly "homophobic" Muslim migrants. The core of homosexual social movements' images of gay pride, their public expression of homosexuality, is in fact suppressed to suit the party's audience. The poster positions white working-class men (who are frequently accused of homophobia) as rebels and heroes being on the "good" side of politics—a known rhetoric of current far-right extremist propaganda in digital networks (cf. Miller-Idriss 2017). The appropriation of homosexual love, at the same time, serves to create an essentialist "savior" narrative, drawing on cultural archetypes that imply that if the AfD's rebellion is not victorious, European societies will be taken over to give birth to a threatening, Muslim-dominated alternative reality—at its core, the repression of Western values (Forchtner and Kølvraa 2017; Özvatan and Forchtner 2019).

5. Conclusions

In response to the call by social movement scholars to study collaborations between far-right "movement parties" and their professionalized allies (Caiani et al. 2012; Caiani and Cisar 2018; McAdam and Kloos 2014), this paper has investigated visual forms of political mobilization involving the collaboration between political groups and commercial graphic designers. By approaching visual politics through a perspective on the actors behind the construction of infamous images, I have shown how global far-right "movement parties" rely on professional graphic designers to commercialize and popularize extremist ideologies. As a specific example, I have shown how the AfD in Germany used provocative images of gender and sexual freedom together with anti-Islam rhetoric to promote the party's election campaign at the national and state levels. Previous research on the AfD has shown how the party has attacked both the liberal media and, through parliamentary attacks, liberal gender advocates. However, the findings of my in-depth multimodal analysis show how the AfD's election posters sophisticatedly appropriate elements of progressive feminist and LGBT rights symbolism for the sake of promoting anti-Islamic discourse, while at the same time, maintaining the party's illiberal political agenda directed against feminist and LGBT rights movements.

The AfD's polarizing representation of Muslims as both (visually) absent from the picture as well as (textually) dangerous invaders is a projection to legitimize the AfD's self-image as a "we" group of rebel heroes (AfD—"be courageous, Germany"). Moreover, the professionalized combination of discursive and visual rhetorical strategies permits the party to ridicule as well as shame Muslim minorities and to denounce their "Otherness", while also appropriating feminist and LGBT norms of gender equality and sexual freedom.

From a critical visual perspective on democracy and the public sphere, this appropriation indicates that the far-right is re-branding its image as "progressive" in line with liberal democratic discourse, in order to reach out to new voters. Behind the AfD's deliberately ambivalent visual politics, I have shown, is the knowledge of and collaboration with experienced commercial graphic designers. These professional designers have helped the party to construct sophisticated anti-Islam images by divorcing progressive gender ideas from their liberal core. Paradoxically, in one striking visual poster (Figure 1), the AfD combined a sexist photograph with a slogan portraying the party as an advocate of women's liberation in the face of an alleged invasion by Islam. Another controversial AfD propaganda poster (Figure 2) combined a pro-LGBT love statement with a photograph deliberately promoting a sexually repressed image of a gay couple (not even holding hands)—thus promoting an image that would work with homophobic AfD supporters. In sum, in its attempt to separate liberal democracy from its core, the global rise of the far-right operates through professional collaborations between commercial actors supporting alt-right ideologies and far-right parties.

The impact of dramatic visual and symbolic politics involving implicit or explicit collaborations and expressions of mutual support between professional political leaders and far right grassroots movements have recently become visible during dramatic performances of 'rebellion' during protest marches staged at the U.S. capitol, or in front

of the German Reichstag parliamentary building. My empirical perspective on visual politics y study shows how collaborations by far-right activists in different segments of commercial graphic design and professional political parties unite to promote radical far-right movement ideologies. On a global far-right movement stage, commercial designers and far-right party activists together construct a shared visual repertoire for political mobilization, drawing on cultural images, mainstream references, and efficient propaganda materials that hold a strong resonance with popular audiences. They juxtapose narratives and images drawing on anti-Islam, ethno-nationalism, and alt-right/far-right conspiracy narratives by appropriating and utilizing mainstream progressive references. By contributing new insights into the visual culture of far-right mobilization strategies, my case study shows how the AfD's campaign combined professionalized visual branding strategies with the power of gendered visual mobilizations in order to popularize attacks on minorities, migrants, and Muslims, while avoiding the use of explicit racist jargon and visual iconography, thus potentially helping the party reach a larger segment of voters. Future research should explore more systematically how the AfD's visual politics appropriate other progressive topics, such as climate justice (e.g., Forchtner 2019), in addition to the above-discussed themes of gender and sexuality, in order to promote illiberal ideas within liberal democratic publics and contribute to the spread of far-right movements internationally.

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