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Journal for Discourse Studies

Mimicry of Marginality

Ed. by Ingo H. Warnke, Charlotta Seiler Brylla and Silvia Bonacchi

BELTZ JUVENTA



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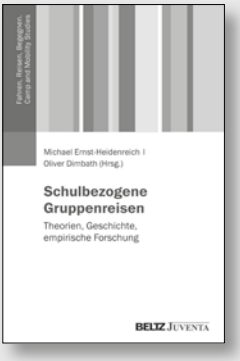


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Editorial

Sehr geehrte Leserinnen und Leser,
wir freuen uns, Ihnen mit dem vorliegenden Heft erneut eine Schwerpunktausgabe der Zeitschrift für Diskursforschung vorzulegen, nachdem die letzte vor zwei Jahren zu dem Thema »Diskurs und Materialität« erschienen ist. Das Thema, um das es in dieser Ausgabe geht, lautet: »Mimicry of Marginality« – vorgeschlagen und editiert von Ingo H. Warnke, Silvia Bonacchi und Charlotta Seiler Brylla. Der von den Gasteditor:innen des Sonderhefts geprägte Begriff setzt an der Beobachtung an, dass seit einigen Jahrzehnten in vielen Diskurskontexten die Sprechposition der ›Marginalisierten‹ sowie dazu affine soziale Lagen und Bezeichnungen deutlich an Wert oder – in Referenz an die Soziologie der Rechtfertigung von Luc Boltanski und Laurent Thévenot – ›Größe‹ gewonnen haben. Die Spuren solcher Positionen kann man mindestens bis in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivaks Beobachtungen zu den Diskurspositionen der »Subalternen« zurückverfolgen, sicherlich auch weiter zu Antonio Gramsci und anderen wissenschaftlich-intellektuellen Konturierungen der gesellschaftlich ›Randständigen‹. Und gewiss liefern die verschiedenen sozialen Anerkennungsbewegungen des 20. Jahrhunderts – etwa die US-amerikanische Bürgerrechtsbewegung, die Frauenbewegung, die ›indigenous people‹, die Schwulen- und Lesbenbewegungen bis hin zu gegenwärtigen queeren Positionen dafür eindrucksvolle und in ihren Anliegen zweifellos gerechtfertigte Beispiele.

In diesem Zusammenhang nun von »Mimikry« zu sprechen, verweist jedoch gerade darauf, dass die bisherige, relativ erfolgreiche Diskursgeschichte dieser Sprechposition in den gegenwärtigen Diskursfeldern zu ihrer strategischen Nutzung verführt und von Sprechenden eingenommen werden kann, welche ihre ›Marginalität‹ simulieren, nachahmen, sich in Form einer Vor-Täuschung zu eigen machen, um daraus diskursiven ›Profit‹ zu schlagen. Genau darum geht es in der einleitenden Heranführung der Gasteditor:innen an die Thematik und in den sechs ganz unterschiedlichen Beiträgen der einzelnen Autorinnen und Autoren. Wir halten diesen Zugang für vielversprechend, nicht zuletzt deswegen, weil es sich damit um einen Ansatz handelt, der sich von konkreten, auf spezielle empirische Themen fokussierte Diskursstudien ein Stück weit löst und nach einem spezifischen Strukturmerkmal der gegenwärtigen Umordnung von Diskursen fragt. So kommt ein derzeit erkennbarer Mechanismus von Diskursstrukturierungen in den Blick, der jenseits einzelner Fallstudien auf allgemeine, womöglich grundlegende Transformationen verweist und zugleich in der Lage ist, aktuell und zukünftig ganz unterschiedliche Fallanalysen anzuregen.

Die Gasteditor:innen führen in ihrer Einleitung nicht nur ganz vorzüglich in den Themenschwerpunkt ein. Ergänzend stellen sie auch die einzelnen Beiträge vor, so dass wir an dieser Stelle darauf verzichten können. Wir möchten uns deswegen hier nur abschließend bei Ingo H. Warnke, Silvia Bonacchi und Charlotta Seiler Brylla sehr herzlich für die Initiative zum Schwerpunkt und die hervorragende Zusammenarbeit bedanken.

Dieser Dank gilt selbstverständlich ebenso den Autor:innen der Beiträge für ihre Mühen und Geduld mit den verschiedenen Reviewstufen, die das Heft durchlaufen hat. Wir wünschen Ihnen eine anregende Lektüre und verbinden dies gerne mit der ausdrücklichen Einladung zu Vorschlag und Herausgabe weiterer Themenschwerpunkte.

Reiner Keller, Werner Schneider, Wolf Schünemann, Inga Truschkat und Willy Viehöver

Dear Readers,
We are pleased to present to you another special issue of the Journal for Discourse Studies, after the last one was published two years ago on the topic of »Discourse and Materiality«. The topic of this issue is »Mimicry of Marginality« – proposed and edited by Ingo H. Warnke, Silvia Bonacchi, and Charlotta Seiler Brylla. The term coined by the guest editors of this special issue is based on the observation that in many discursive contexts over the past few decades, the speaking position of the ›marginalized‹ and related social positions and labels have significantly gained in value or – in reference to the sociology of justification by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot – ›worth‹. Such positions can be traced back at least to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's observations on the discursive positions of the »subaltern«, and certainly further back to Antonio Gramsci or other intellectual delineations of the socially ›marginalized‹. Surely, the various social movements of the 20th century – such as the American Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement, the movements of ›indigenous people‹, the Gay and Lesbian movements up to present-day queer positions – provide impressive examples of this and are undoubtedly justified in their concerns.

In this context, speaking of »mimicry« refers precisely to the fact that the relatively successful discursive history of this speaking position in contemporary discourse fields can lead to its strategic use by speakers who simulate, imitate, or appropriate their ›marginality‹ in a form of pretence to derive discursive ›profit‹. This is exactly what the guest editors' introduction to the topic and the six very different contributions by the authors address. We consider this approach promising, not least because it moves somewhat away from concrete, empirically focused discourse studies and looks for specific structural features of the current reordering of discourses. Thus, a current mechanism of discourse structuring comes into view, which, beyond individual case studies, may point to general, possibly fundamental, transformations of discursive orders, while at the same time this approach is capable of inspiring various current and future case analyses.

In their introduction, the guest editors not only introduce the thematic focus excellently. They also introduce the individual contributions, so we can forgo doing so here. We would therefore like to conclude by warmly thanking Ingo H. Warnke, Silvia Bonacchi, and Charlotta Seiler Brylla for their initiative on the special issue and the excellent collaboration. This thanks naturally also extend to the authors of the contributions for their efforts and patience with the various review stages that the issue has gone through. We wish you a stimulating read and gladly extend an invitation to propose and edit further special issues.

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Ingo H. Warnke/Silvia Bonacchi/Charlotta Seiler Brylla

Mimicry of Marginality – On Masking Hegemonic Positions Through Discourse

1 When Mimicry of Marginality comes apparent

In recent decades, the history of social movements has been characterized by discursive struggles for the attention to (intentionally) overlooked social positions of subjects and their actual or imagined membership in groups marginalized by and in mainstream discourses.

This focus is motivated by demand that marginalization must and should be recomposed in the general public sphere. This is important not least against the backdrop of questions concerning the legal recognition of, and equal rights for, marginalized positions in a constitutional state founded on the rule of law. We can speak here of discursive practices of demarginalization. However, in crises of democracy and in a situation of the precariousness of normative (b)orders, such as those dealt with globally in their many forms in Shalini Randeria's podcast *Democracy in Question*,[1] these discourse practices shift.

Times of new nationalisms and the rebirth of the strongman in light of *the new despotism* (Keane 2020) go hand in hand with a reversal of the notion of center and periphery. The spatial order of marginality seems inverted: in practices of discursive self-positioning, the unmarked center, endowed with privileges, claims to be at the margins. Whereas in the struggles for recognition of the past, when the non-privileged fought for visibility (e.g., workers, Blacks, women, LGBTQIA+), it is now (also) the highly visible, the majority population, who in part claim marginalized positions by staging them in discursive arenas. Those who are already hegemonically secured, the recognized, now paradoxically fight for recognition. As an expression of their fear of losing a privileged position, centered subjects position themselves discursively on the fringes of power.

This has given rise to the effective discursive practice of securing privileges by individuals and groups who (self)position themselves as marginalized. We call this *Mimicry of Marginality* (see Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla 2022). Mimicry of Marginality is a reactive discursive practice by which those who speak from within normative orders and the privileged positions associated with them respond to the precariousness of these very orders as if they were not rooted in them. Mimicry of Marginality as a reactive practice includes (i) the strategic assertion and (ii) the staged appropriation of a position of marginality in linguistic practices that react to the precariousness of normative (b)orders.

1 https://www.ceu.edu/democracy-in-question <Nov 29, 2023>.

Mimicry of Marginality can be found where marginality seems hardly credible and must therefore be declared all the more loudly. Mimicry of Marginality works with assertions, such as that of no longer being seen or heard. There is a strategic moment in this assertion of those who protect themselves against their feared loss of significance in the face of diverse democratic societies. In this respect, Mimicry of Marginality is a practice of self-victimization by those who stage their own supposed marginality. Ultimately, and paradoxically, this is about discursively taking up a place of marginality effectively, and therefore denying the marginalized a place at the margins. The assumption by those who practice Mimicry of Marginality is that they will make themselves even more visible. In this respect, Mimicry of Marginality is also an echo of a broad social interest in marginal positions.

However, the interest of mainstream societies in marginalized positions has emerged slowly. It is associated historically with lengthy processes of emancipation and painful struggles for recognition. The inversion of this history through Mimicry of Marginality, in contrast, is a staged fast track: nothing more, ultimately, than a masking and stabilizing of hegemony and thus at the same time its manifestation – without pain and without protracted struggles for emancipation.

In the canonical form we propose here, Mimicry of Marginality is characterized by a bundle of eight deductive features or functions that are to be understood as a research heuristics. We summarize the plot structure and the heuristics of the research topic of Mimicry of Marginality in the following layout:

Fig. 1: Canonical form of Mimicry of Marginality

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Mimicry of Marginality</td><td>plot structure</td><td>strategic assertion
staged appropriation
} of a position of marginality as masking and stabilization of hegemony</td></tr>
<tr><td>heuristics of the research topic</td><td>(i) existence of normative (b)orders;
(ii) hegemonic, privileged positions within these (b)orders;
(iii) constellations of questioning these positions and thus evidence of the precariousness of hegemony;
(iv) practices of a (linguistic) reaction to the precariousness of hegemony from privileged positions;
(v) assertion of marginality and possibly also the staging of vulnerability;
(vi) strategic interest in securing privileges;
(vii) interpretable as a staged overwriting of factual marginal positions and thus
(viii) as a masking and stabilization of privileged positions.</td></tr>
</table>

Mimicry of Marginality is a discourse-analytical concept that facilitates the precise description of a type of current discursive inversion – of overwriting and masking – that is enacted on the stage of contemporary political struggles. We provide three examples from various national and communicative settings, also showing that Mimicry of Marginality is a transnational discursive practice that encompasses not only the positioning of discourse actors but also their perception in media scripts. Furthermore, our examples show that Mimicry of Marginality is not limited to (right-wing) populist discourse arenas; it also includes privileged left-wing self-marginalization, as well as it scripts journalistic perceptions, for example of institutionalized academic discourses. Our three examples make no claim to address Mimicry of Marginality as a whole but should be considered as spotlights illustrating various expressions that Mimicry of Marginality can take.

1.1 A Marginalized Bestseller – The German Case of Thilo Sarrazin

Discursive negotiations of centrality and marginality in public discourse are not new. In 2010, some central claims in this respect were brought to the forefront in a discourse-shaping manner by the German politician, economist, and author Thilo Sarrazin. With his million-copy bestseller *Germany Abolishes Itself. How We're Putting Our Country in Jeopardy* (German titel: *Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen*), Sarrazin, a social democrat, shifted the racist and ethnocentric discourse from the far right to the center of society. Summarizing his core theses would exceed the scope of this introduction, but the following focal points can be considered significant for discourses on centered and marginalized positions:[2]

First, according to Sarrazin, a majority in Germany is in danger of becoming a minority, marginalized.[3] In his book, he puts forth the thesis that Germans are slowly but surely becoming fewer because they have fewer children than the immigrant Muslim population which continues to have more. This thesis can be linked to the conspiracy theory of the so-called *Great Replacement* (cf. Renaud Camus' *Grand Remplacement*), which is regularly repeated by the Identitarian Movement (Identitäre Bewegung) and the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Second, and related to this, is the question posed by Sarrazin: Who is actually being discriminated against in Germany? In his apocalyptic portrayal of a society in decay, Sarrazin sees the danger of over-foreignization, where Germans become fewer and foreign

2 For a linguistic analysis of Sarrazin's theses and the debate it provoked, see for example Stein 2012 and Seiler Brylla 2013.

3 A similar argumentation is conceptualized by the social anthropologist Shalini Randeria as *population panic* https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/event/shalini-randeria-population-panic-ethno-nationalism-and-anti-feminist-backlash <Jan 15, 2024>.
See also Arlie Russell Hochschild 2018, who departing from sociological fieldwork in Louisiana, US, describes the phenomenon of her informant feeling like »a besieged minority« (p. 221): »Economically, culturally, demographically, politically, you are suddenly a stranger in your own land« (p. 222).

culture becomes more omnipresent. Consequently, Germans are ostensibly losing their privileged positions if politics continues as usual.

Third, Sarrazin laments the supposed prevailing compulsion for political correctness in Germany and a subsequent tyranny of virtue that allegedly leads to the fact that one (he) can no longer say anything: his voice is purportedly marginalized. Sarrazin has since then repeated this position countless times in interviews and talk shows, and in 2014, he followed it up with an entire book on the subject: *The New Tyranny of Virtue: On the Limits of Freedom of Speech in Germany*. (German title: *Der Tugendterror. Über die Grenzen der Meinungsfreiheit in Deutschland*)

Common to these three areas is the construction of a marginalized and vulnerable position. Sarrazin apparently did not see the almost humorous contradiction in his own situation when, as the author of a bestselling book with millions of copies sold, sold-out readings all over Germany, and appearances on numerous talk shows, he nevertheless drew the sad conclusion: »Keiner hört auf mich.« [›Nobody listens to me.‹] Certainly, this was partly related to the political elite rejecting him, as Angela Merkel stated that the book was »nicht hilfreich« [›not helpful‹].[4]

Sarrazin's book sparked a heated debate about immigration, multiculturalism, and the future of Germany: the debate was conducted in a variety of forums, including newspapers, talk shows, and online discussion groups; even books about the debate were published (Sezgin 2011; Deutschlandstiftung 2010). At large, this paved the way for the AfD and shifted the boundaries of what can be said in public discourse. We argue here that the discourse-analytical concept of Mimicry of Marginality can enable an analysis of such discourses and discourse actors.

In the case of Sarrazin, the canonical form of Mimicry of Marginality enables an accurate description of discursive practices of (de)marginalization that are enacted on the stage of contemporary political struggles. Sarrazin stages himself as marginalized from a privileged position, clearly enacting and demonstrating the plot structure of Mimicry of Marginality. In his book, Sarrazin presupposes the normative order of a German mainstream society by highlighting its fragility and suggesting that it is under threat. As a representative of this majoritarian society, Sarrazin turns the social order upside down and finds himself marginalized, both because he purportedly belongs to this threatened majority and his voice is not being listened to. The perceived threat stems from both a supposedly strengthened minority and a political elite, which consistently advocates for marginalized positions, thereby neglecting the German majority. Consequently, by denying the marginalized their place, Sarrazin wants to claim this position for himself. What we see here is a struggle for recognition as marginalized by asserting an unprivileged position, which is indeed about securing a hegemonic order and the privileges established by it.

4 Der Spiegel. 2010. Merkel entrüstet über Sarrazin, der Spiegel 25.8.2010, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/umstrittene-thesen-zu-migration-merkel-entruestet-ueber-sarrazin-a-713752.html <Jan 15, 2024>; translation by ChSB.

1.2 Personalisation and Self-Victimization – The Italian Case of Giorgia Meloni

The second example takes us to Italy, where the post-fascist party *Fratelli d'Italia,* led by Giorgia Meloni, came to power in 2020. Experts believe that Meloni's success is due to very effective social communication, which is characterized by adaptability to changing situations, but also by a strong personalization of the female leader who stages herself as opposing a dark power that organizes plots to her detriment. Meloni became the symbol of a struggle for an *apoliticality*, embodied in a person who purports to remain true to herself and fight titanically for her country. We apply the heuristic model of Mimicry of Marginality to analyze this phenomenon, reconstructing moments that highlight the personalizing narrative in what the journalist Massimo Giannini has called a *sindrome vittimistico-complottista* (a ›conspiracy-victim syndrome‹) in the podcast *Circo Massimo*[5].

Meloni's personalizing narrative found her first full expression during her election campaign in 2020. Until the year 2000, Meloni's party *Fratelli di Italia* was considered an extremist and dangerous party, historically linked to far-right terrorist activities and serious social unrest. For this reason, it was tolerated as a marginal political position by the political mainstream but, even though representing a certain electorate, excluded from power. Giorgia Meloni had to manage the difficult task of presenting the *Fratelli di Italia* as a party, lead by a female leader, that was qualified to govern a democratic country. In order to gain the trust of Italians and convince them of her aptitude to govern, Meloni managed to insert herself – through a skillful practice of self-positioning – into discursive processes hitherto dominated by the left: social equality, immigration, and gender politics. Concerning issues related to the country's national sense of self and to immigration, her narrative was similar to the one of Sarrazin in Germany, but more than in Germany, Meloni's democratic accreditation of *Fratelli d'Italia* occurred through a process of appropriating a gendered discourse by personalizing it (in fact emptying it out) and – in a further step when she had already become head of the Italian government – representing herself as a person who is a putative victim of a political *dark power*.

Before Meloni's election, many wondered whether a woman would be capable of leading a post-fascist party to power in a nation such as Italy, where gender tensions are felt to be strong and where they were renewed by a wave of neo-sexism resulting from the so-called »Berlusconi effect« (Bonacchi 2020, pp. 137–139). During her election campaign in 2020, Giorgia Meloni's slogan *Io sono Giorgia* turned out to be decisive. The slogan also featured in the title of her book *Io sono Giorgia: Le mie radici le mie idee [I am Giorgia. My Roots and My Ideas]*, published in 2021 by Rizzoli, and went viral in an effective social media campaign and public appearances. ›I am Giorgia‹ is a *strategic assertion* which inaugurates the plot structure that we develop here. This strategic assertion is also a *staged appropriation* (through media amplification) of a position of apolitical marginality which made it possible to mask politicality through a mimicry of apoliticality, hitherto excluded

5 https://www.repubblica.it/podcast/storie/circo-massimo/stagione1/, 5.1.2024, time: 07.34 <Jan 15, 2024>; translation by SB.

from governing the *res publica*. ›I am Giorgia‹ thus allows an evasion of the mechanisms that govern the discursive dynamics of political discourse, of discourses on the values of solidarity, national self-identification, exclusionary politics, and gender politics. No discussion and no argumentation, the assertion *Giorgia is Giorgia* is merely tautologically motivated and therefore effective.

Over the course of her first three years in power, Meloni clashed not only with the opposition – also led by a woman, Elly Schlein, leader of the Democratic Party – and her own party, but was increasingly criticized for her actions, unmasked by many as a *deception device*, to which she in turn responded by invoking her integrity and courage as someone who is not frightened and conditioned by unnameable powers. As an example, we can quote her declarations during an official press conference on January 4, 2024: »someone in this nation thought they could deal the cards […]. I think that let's say in a normal state there should be no such conditioning […] But I've seen it happens […] I see attacks […] I see some people who think that you're going to get scared […] I am not a person who is easily frightened […] don't ask me more […]«. Invoking »dark power« wanting to »deal the cards«, she makes a reference to the very existence of democracy without giving any clarification: »I am not a blackmailable person, but […] I don't have to give information. […] I am not conditionable, this is my manifesto«.[6] From these fragments, we can see that the initial personalizing plot structure is modified through allusions to hidden structures of power that would distance her from a legitimate exercise of power. Meloni creates smokescreens, in which accusations get veiled and become reversible.

The strategic appropriation of mainstream discourses reveals its limits in light of events in the third quarter of 2023: Meloni and her right-wing government failed to react strongly to the numerous cases of violence against young women and sexual minorities, the dramas related to Italian immigration policy, and the tragic social repercussions of the economic policy of her government. All these aspects show the tensions between the *absolute adaptability* of discourse (Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla 2022) on the one hand and every-day experiences on the other.

1.3 Elite Universities in the US Talk Back

On April 16, 2023, the *New York Times* published an opinion piece by David French, opinion columnist, about the fight for academic freedom at US universities. It scripts current debates about academic freedom in the media. We certainly do not question that academic freedom is a key asset that must be defended, and we know that academic freedom is repeatedly and currently under threat. However, the way French writes about it, namely applying the logic of Mimicry of Marginality, does not correspond to a necessity, but utilizes a possibility: he perceives facts according to a certain discursive logic of inversion and organizes them accordingly. The topic of the article is already outlined in

6 https://tg24.sky.it/politica/2024/01/04/giorgia-meloni-conferenza-stampa-oggi-diretta <Jan 5, 2024>; translation of fragments of the interview by SB.

its title: *The Moral Center Is Fighting Back on Elite College Campuses*. The piece is about safeguarding academic freedom, especially free speech at US universities in the face of threats to it.

Analyzing the text, it becomes apparent that the canonical form of Mimicry of Marginality functions here entirely as a journalistic practice of representation. The institution of US elite universities appears to be pushed into positions of marginality, their stable hegemony is not problematized; there is talk of *fighting back*.

The existence of a normative order, which is a prerequisite for Mimicry of Marginality, is initially emphasized by a large number of formulations: there is talk of *American democracy* with its values of *free speech* and *freedom of speech*, of a *[m]oral [c]enter*, an *ideological core of a nation and its people*; this is about nothing less than the *nation*, about *the American idea*, as manifested above all in the *First Amendment*. This normative order harbors the hegemonic idea of the elite university, which the text emphasizes with reference to *Stanford*, *Cornell*, *Harvard*, *Vanderbilt*, and the *University of Chicago* as *some of the most elite campuses in the country*, as *America's most elite academic institutions*. Reference is also made to positions within these institutions and persons, all of which are outstanding and therefore undoubtedly privileged: the *dean of Stanford Law School*, *Cornell's president* and *provost*, as well as *Steven Pinker* and *Bertha Madras*. In this respect, this list represents a bastion of academic hegemony. And it is precisely this hegemony that is narrated in a logic of a vulnerability that aims to demonstrate the fragility of a privileged position: French talks of *tyranny*, *the center finds itself under siege*, he emphasizes *we do live in a precarious place in our national life*, the elite US universities find themselves in a *battle for free speech on campus* in *[a]ttempts to suppress ideas and stifle speech* in a state of *partisan divide*. This is about universities reacting as privileged actors: *the center is fighting back*, French writes about *veto[ing]* a *resolution* by an *undergraduate student assembly*, about *stepping up* and about *combating tyranny*. But the privilege itself is, as we mentioned, not elucidated. As the conflict is discussed, it seems that the institutions, however powerful, have become marginalized; they would have to join forces to defend themselves: *American academic institutions that have doubled down on free speech*. In this respect, the text actually implies a marginalization of universities when it speaks of them *doubl[ing] down* on their actions. The aim is to secure the central position of those in the guise of distress. Their reaction can be read as strategic: *announced the creation of the Council on Academic Freedom, a coalition of 50 faculty members and several other Harvard employees*.

Of particular interest in French's narrative is the position of those who question academic freedom. There is a downright obfuscation of the concrete criticism voiced against the educational institutions here. The text tends to blur the actual balance of power between billion-dollar research and educational institutions with invaluable symbolic capital on the one hand and activists on the other. The dangers to academic freedom are de-specified in strongly generalizing formulations. There is generalizing talk of *angry left-wing students*, of *vengeful right-wing legislators*, as well as *left-wing protests and right-wing lawmaker*s of *online activism* and *law students*. We read about *a student disruption*, *the extremes*. In this way, the author outlines the mise en scène of a threat without going into

more detail concerning criticism of the university, which is also voiced by groups and people who are likely de facto marginalized. The *New York Times* article masks hegemony when it speaks attentively of the *democratic experiment*. The plot of the article also stabilizes the hegemony of elite institutions in the formulation of *sustaining that freedom* of the elite. Elite universities appear as agents who have to write back; of course, the privileged/marginalized dichotomy can also be problematized here on an individual level due to the wealth and high social background of some students at US elite universities.

To be clear once again, we are not in the least questioning the necessity of academic freedom and the fight for it at universities. But we want to emphasize that the discursive debate about this is emplotted in this article of the *New York Times* in the layout of Mimicry of Marginality.

2 Mimicry of Marginality and Its Anchors

2.1 Mimicry as a Scholarly Concept

Mimicry is a well-known concept for describing adaptations to and imitations of a role model – the literature on mimicry is extensive and multidisciplinary. What is fundamental about mimicry is, first of all, the advantage associated with it, in particular the function of individual defense against danger. We know mimicry as such from the biological field, for example as the ability to avoid attacks. Ruxton et al. (2018) devote an entire book to this topic: *Avoiding Attack: The Evolutionary Ecology of Crypsis, Aposematism, and Mimicry*. But mimicry does not only occur in the event of danger: a distinction has long been made between *protective* and *non-protective mimicry*, among other things (see Pasteur 1982). Vane-Wright (1980, p. 1) already distinguishes between *mimicry* and *crypsis* that, while originating from the field of biology, is also highly useful in a sociolinguistic context:

> »An operational distinction between crypsis and mimicry is made in terms of the cognitive and perceptual systems of ›signal-receivers‹. Cryptic organisms specialize in generating information of the type not attended to or filtered out (reference frame) by the receivers, whereas mimetic organisms specialize in producing information (signals) of the type sought out by and of interest to a receiver. Mimicry is defined in terms of a system of three living organisms, model, mimic and operator (signal-receiver), in which the mimic gains in fitness by the operator identifying it with the model.«

Mimicry here creates attention, which is also crucial to note for Mimicry of Marginality and its intention of shaping discursive visibility/audibility. This is about Mimicry of Marginality enabling a discursively audible voice (see Blommaert 2005, pp. 22, 25).

However, we do not want to make the obvious mistake to suggest a metaphorical reading of Mimicry of Marginality based on its biological meaning. This would lead to describing a discourse formation as an organism and thus obscure the sociality of the described phenomenon with its particular dynamics of reversal and specific socio-po-

litical functions. What is more relevant than biological references as a referential context for Mimicry of Marginality therefore is the differentiated research of psychology in particular. The comprehensive article by Chartrand and van Baaren (2009) provides an excellently systematized overview. This research is based on an essentially interactional concept of mimicry, which focuses on the mimicry dyad between mimicker and mimickee. Based on types of mimicry (facial, emotional, verbal and behavioral; Chartrand/van Baaren 2009, pp. 222–226), the discussion here primarily revolves around the question of functions. The function of positive bonding is important in this context: »the presence of mimicry has an effect on the dyad (i.e., the mimicker and the mimickee), leading to more rapport, empathy, and liking between them« (ibid., p. 227). It is noticeable that this does not match Mimicry of Marginality – at least at first glance. However, this observation certainly draws attention to the social relationship between mimicker and mimickee in the discourse of Mimicry of Marginality. It is equally important to note that interpersonal mimicry often takes place unconsciously, »outside conscious awareness« (ibid., p. 233).

Another aspect from the perspective of psychological research opens up questions for Mimicry of Marginality, as mimicry often has the goal of belonging: »participants with an affiliation goal mimicked more« (ibid., p. 233). Overall, the emphasis on the positive functions of mimicry in psychology is evident: »liking, empathy, helping, and smooth interactions« (ibid., p. 249). A linguistic phenomenon related to mimicry is *interactive alignment* (Garrod/Pickering 2009) or the alignment or synchronization of interaction partners in *lexical entrainment* – »[w]hen people in conversation refer repeatedly to the same object, they come to use the same terms« (Brennan/Clark 1996, p. 1482) – or in *prosodic entrainment*, when »speakers match […] their prosodic features during a conversation« (Michalsky/Schoormann/Niebuhr 2018, p. 389).

Rohr, Salazar Kämpf and Kunzmann (2022, p. 1210) also point out that *social mimicry* as »the tendency to imitate one's conversation partner automatically […], including echoing facial expressions, gestures, and emotions« is an important factor in successful relationships. It can therefore be stated that social mimicry is a skill for shaping social relationships. Stel and Vonk (2010, p. 311) express it this way: »Mimicry has benefits for people in social interactions.«

What conclusions can be drawn from this for the concept of Mimicry of Marginality? First of all, it must be noted that Mimicry of Marginality is not about building positive relationships, but about discursive displacement. This opens up the question of intentionality, which still needs to be researched empirically. Is Mimicry of Marginality a discursive practice of reversal that is intended or merely an imitation of many similar practices in milieus to which one assigns oneself? And what about sympathy? The strong evidence of the shaping of sympathy through mimicry leads us to assume that a very hidden relation of sympathy also plays a role in Mimicry of Marginality or, as a flip side, also envy – for those who have fought for recognition, resources, and representation in long processes of emancipation. It is worth taking a closer look at another quote from Chartrand and van Baaren (2009, p. 251): »Interactions between individuals with different amounts of power may also be guided by mimicry schemas. Those individuals with relatively more power are mimicked more than those with relatively little power […].« This interactional

psychological statement can be transferred to a central research question for the further study of Mimicry of Marginality: how can it be explained that someone aims to be marginal? We surmise that the assumption of a success story of formerly marginalized people is essential here. The pain and costs that marginalized groups and individuals bear and possibly continue to bear, especially in struggles for recognition and access to institutional and political power, are thereby ignored. The central premise of Mimicry of Marginality, that as a privileged demographic group or person, one has moved out of the center, presupposes that others are (now) unjustifiably at this center and therefore have power. There is then talk of perceived elites, the privileged, etc., to whom discursive power is attributed. The imagined power of the formerly marginalized as today's elites or privileged presumably awakens the desire to imitate them as the formerly marginalized in a dynamic of discursive self-marginalization. This is a central dimension of Mimicry of Marginality, which we call the discourse-psychological proposition.

2.2 Mimicry and Power Dynamics

As discussed earlier, Mimicry of Marginality points to a strategic interest in securing privileges. This highlights the key role of Mimicry of Marginality in (re)distributing power, as emphasized by Chartrand and van Baaren in the quote above (2009, p. 251). In addition, the mimicry dyad between mimicker and mimickee discussed by Chartrand and van Baaren should be conceptualized as a power imbalance. Since mimicry encompasses power and powerlessness as well as domination and subjugation, it can also be helpful to conceptualize the concept from a postcolonial perspective.

Mimicry in a postcolonial context, explored by theorists like Homi Bhabha, examines the dynamics between colonizers and colonized peoples. Here, mimicry denotes the act of another group imitating or adopting cultural habits, language, mannerisms, or values due to power imbalances.[7] Importantly, this notion transcends straightforward imitation; it encompasses ambivalence and resistance. Mimicry can create hybrid forms, blending elements of both colonizer and colonized cultures, thereby resisting complete assimilation. While it can express submission and acceptance of the colonial power structure, mimicry can also inadvertently expose its flaws and artificiality by highlighting the constructed nature of cultural hierarchies. In his essay *Of Mimicry and Man*, Bhabha argues that mimicry can be unintentionally subversive, acting as a performance that deconstructs the artificiality of symbolic power expressions.

Of course, Mimicry of Marginality differs significantly: when those who are already privileged mimic a marginalized position to gain further advantages, we are dealing with a reversed phenomenon. Despite this distinction, some aspects of Bhabha's postcolonial critique remain highly relevant. Firstly, his concept of mimicry as a power-exposing

7 We find this perspective in research studies that deal with the German reunification or the transformation in Eastern Europe after 1989. See, for example, Kubiak 2019 and Krastev/Holmes 2018, where the term *imitation game* is used.

performance is also applicable to Mimicry of Marginality. Secondly, Bhabha's notion of mimicry as »resemblance and menace« (Bhabha 1984, p. 127) resonates with the potential of Mimicry of Marginality to disrupt egalitarian discourse through a staged precariousness that, intentionally or unintentionally, ridicules the very idea of recognition and redistribution.

By mimicking the same discourse (what Davies calls *politics of recognition* (2021, p. 85)), the notion of center and periphery is reversed in order to gain rights, power, status, or resources:

> »›identity politics‹ is denounced for depriving white men, the working class or the nation-state the recognition that is rightly theirs. The struggle for recognition has turned into an arms race, in which majority cultural identities deploy the language of minority rights in their defence.« (ibid.)

Arlie Hochschild makes similar observations in her fieldwork on Tea Party supporters in Louisiana. During the 1970s, social movements shifted their focus from the social and legal system to personal identity. This shift gave prominence to groups like Native Americans, women, and LGBTQIA+ individuals as subjects seeking recognition, leading to their gradual inclusion in affirmative action policies after years of struggles for emancipation. However, Hochschild argues that these movements for social change eventually contributed to »a certain culture of victimization«, where especially white, native-born, heterosexual men felt excluded and surpassed. And it was precisely this group that found restitution and their advocate in Donald Trump (Hochschild 2018, p. 229).

We have argued that Mimicry of Marginality is about securing privileges by strategically asserting a marginal position. In this setting, *the strong* disguise themselves as weak to circumvent and overpower *the weak*, which can be seen as a disruptive challenge of the normative order; however, this takes place in order to mask and stabilize hegemony. But how does this work? How can the privileged simply appropriate the role of the marginalized? The answer is simple: language is an essential tool for individual orientation in the world; social positions as well as subjectivities and identities are constructed through language and understood as performative and social constructs, in Blommaert's words: »identities are constructed in practices that produce, enact, or perform identity – identity is identification, an outcome of socially conditioned semiotic work« (Blommaert 2005, p. 205). The same applies to how we perceive the reality around us, as Hannah Arendt concisely summarizes in an essay on lying in politics: »the ability to lie – and the capacity to change facts – the ability to act – are interconnected; they owe their existence to the same source: imagination. […] We are free to change the world and to start something new in it« (Arendt 1971/2022, pp. 63–64).

In essence, language transcends its role as a mere tool. Its unparalleled adaptability empowers individuals to make strategic assertions and adopt diverse positions. As an ever-evolving source of expressions, language continually adapts itself, shaping not only permissible discourse but also the very boundaries of permissible utterances within specific temporal and contextual constraints. Consequently, the power and performativity

of language become the vehicle for mimicking practices while masking hegemonic positions within discourse.

3 Contributions to the Special Issue

The contributions in this issue investigate dynamics of Mimicry of Marginality in different discourse fields: in political discourses (Steinhauer and Trochemowitz/Herford), language policy (Meier-Vieracker, Mattfeld), gender identitarian tensions (Aiston) and cultural hegemony (Markewitz). The contributions show possible fields of applicability, as well as potentialities and limitations of the proposed heuristic model in Fig. 1.

The article by **Hagen Steinhauer** focuses on discursive practices that are used by members of the French political elite (president Macron, high-ranking members of the French government, civil society actors) in order to illustrate the process of reversing the discursive positions of the margins and the center, thus highlighting the large ideological intersections of far-right positions and official government rhetoric, which lead to the so-called *normalization* of the far-right. Mimicry of Marginality is shown as a defining feature of soft-authoritarian identity politics, which creates an opposition to left-wing emancipatory political projects to harness what Steinhauer describes as the *authority of victimhood*.

Jonas Trochemowitz and Lara Herford analyze mimicry processes in *Change my Mind* by Steven Crowder and its adaptation by Martin Sellner, the former spokesperson of the right-wing extremist group *Identitäre Bewegung* in Austria. Two performance cycles are considered as two *genres of dissent*, a communicative framework in which discursive actors enter into conflicting communication as representatives of different discourse positions. In the cases analyzed, genres of dissent are strategically instrumentalized for anti-democratic purposes in order to neutralize democratic dialectics.

The contributions by Mattfeldt and Meier-Vieracker focus on discourses related to language policy and language ideologies in Germany in light of migration phenomena. As **Simon Meier-Vieracker** demonstrates, the pressure on foreigners to acquire language skills as close as possible to a native speaker turns out to be dense with ideological implications. Mimicry of Marginality is embraced by the extreme right, which sees the emergence of new linguistic ecologies related to migration as a threat. National language and culture, i.e., monolingualism and monoculturalism, central to the constitution of the country's identity according to the extreme right, are presented as something fragile and threatened, which justify the introduction of gatekeeper measures that sanction inclusion and exclusion.

Through the analysis of didactic materials (handbooks and multimedia internet tools), **Anna Mattfeldt** shows that even in progressive tools, the focus remains on norms (e.g., correct, perfect, without accent) that need to be learned rather than on the participation of learners. New speakers who should be in the center of the language acquisition process are othered and ultimately get marginalized. Analyzing discourses about language acquisition in German corpora in a further step, Mattfeldt shows that the depiction of the

process of learning a language alternates between a skill that offers many chances on the one hand, and a necessity on the other hand without which one may not be able to stay in the country or will be excluded from social and economic life.

The contribution by **Jessica Aiston** is dedicated to the so called *manosphere*, a loose network of men's social media communities united by an antifeminist ideology and antifeminist backlash. With reference to the platform *Men Going Their Own Way* (MGTOW), in which men represent and construct themselves as marginalized or oppressed, Aiston identifies four salient discursive strategies: appropriation of feminist discourse; role reversal; statistics; and self-presentation as suppressed or unpopular. Aiston analyzes how these men appropriate a feminist discourse through a strategic self-positioning as members of a persecuted group. This staged position of weakness aims to affirm the primacy of *white masculinity* at a moment in which the definition of social (b)orders seems precarious to them.

The article by **Friedrich Markewitz** addresses the way in which Martin Heidegger uses strategies of Mimicry of Marginality (self-victimization, self-stigmatization, and self-marginalization) as a means of self-presentation and self-positioning in order to divert attention from his own mistakes and thus to pre-empt the evaluation of his person by others to establish his intellectual hegemony. It is Heidegger's intentional staging of a position by which he aims to accumulate *victim capital* for his own goal to (re)gain discursive sovereignty over his person and work.

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Mimicry of Marginality in Soft Authoritarian Identity Politics

Intersectional Configurations of the ›Menaced Majority‹ in France

Abstract: This study examines soft authoritarian identity politics, a political phenomenon which portrays struggles for minority rights as a threat to the majority population. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis and focusing on the mainstream discourse in France, this article analyzes presidential speeches, discourse from high-ranking government officials, and media. It reveals the normalizing effects of reversing discursive positions and the growing ideological convergence between far-right stances and government rhetoric.

Keywords: Far-right ideology, mainstream discourse, normalization, soft authoritarianism, identity politics, France

Zusammenfassung: Diese Studie untersucht soft-autoritäre Identitätspolitik, ein politisches Phänomen, das den Kampf für Minderheitenrechte als Bedrohung für die Mehrheitsbevölkerung darstellt. Aus Sicht der Critical Discourse Analysis und mit Fokus auf den Mainstream-Diskurs in Frankreich werden Reden des Präsidenten, Äußerungen französischer Regierungsvertreter:innen und Medien analysiert. Darin zeigt sich die normalisierende Wirkung der Umkehrung diskursiver Positionen und die wachsende ideologische Konvergenz zwischen rechtsextremen Positionen und Regierungsrhetorik.

Schlagwörter: Rechtsradikale Ideologie, Mainstream-Diskurs, Normalisierung, soft authoritarianism, Identitätspolitik, Frankreich

1 Introduction

In the past few decades, far-right parties have successfully implemented their authoritarian and nativist ideologies in the center of public discourse (Krzyżanowski 2020; Wodak 2021; Krzyżanowski/Ekström 2022). In this process of normalization, the lines between far-right and mainstream discourse have been blurred (Brown/Mondon/Winter 2021) to the point that »ideas and viewpoints once considered deviant and morally repugnant« are »confidently asserted as the new common sense« (Cammaerts 2022, p. 731).

The subversion of the mainstream by the far-right counter-hegemonic project benefits from discursive practices of reversal in which majorities are depicted as threatened by minorities and struggles for equality are presented as oppressive. These discursive operations of reversing the roles of victimhood are used to gain political capital. They are part of what I

call soft authoritarian identity politics – a discursive dynamic that pits emancipatory claims for equal representation and participation, as well as struggles against structural discrimination, against a supposedly threatened national identity. In this process, those who oppose racism, nativism, sexism and fascist ideologies are being abnormalized, their ideas depicted as harmful, deviant, or ›woke‹ ideologies (Cammaerts 2022).

This article focuses on discursive practices that are used by members of the political elite to present their own powerful position as marginal. Drawing on examples from France, I show how this ›mimicry of marginality‹ (Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler-Brylla 2022) is used to foster a nativist, exclusive idea of national identity. Methodologically, my approach is rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis and especially studies on normalization of the far-right. Instead of analyzing the discourse of the far-right party *Rassemblement National* (RN) exclusively, however, I will look at what can be considered the center and mainstream of political discourse. Soft authoritarian identity politics effectively redraws the lines of what is acceptable. The interventions of the far-right have caused elements of this identity politics-turned-upside-down to be present in the very center of French public discourse. I thus analyze presidential speeches, interviews and utterances of high-ranking members of the French government but also discourse fragments from civil society actors and academic research as well as media regarding their softauthoritarian contents. This focus illustrates the powerful normalizing effects of reversing the discursive positions of the margins and the center. It also highlights the large ideological intersections of far-right stances and official government rhetoric.

I start off with an example from Macron's first election campaign in 2017 to point towards the political and representational crisis in France. After that, I will analyze discourses on memory politics and anti-intellectualism. I will conclude by shedding a light on the role of softauthoritarian identity politics within the larger scale discursive change that is currently subverting the idea of what democracy ought to be.

2 A Child of Provincial France

In the 2017 presidential elections, France witnessed the success of Emmanuel Macron, a self-declared political outsider challenging the established conservative and socialist parties. During a campaign rally in Lyon, Macron stated: »I'm a child of provincial France [...]. Nothing pre-destined me to be here today« (Chrisafis 2017). Apparently, his story of a self-made political challenger, someone from outside the system and decidedly not part of the old encrusted elite, proved popular with the voters. After defeating Marine Le Pen in the second round, Macron ultimately entered the presidential office. His self-depiction as someone from the societal margins, the province of rural France, who worked his way up not only serves the narrative of the meritocratic republic where anyone can make it to the top; it also points to a discursive constellation that is all the more surprising when Macron's career up to this point is considered.

As a child of a neurologist and a pediatrician, Macron attended some of the best educational institutions in France. After graduating from the prestigious École nationale

d'administration (ENA) at the age of 27, he took a high-ranking position as a finance inspector – a job widely considered as a massive career booster.[1] After that, he became a successful investment banker. In 2012, he took the job of deputy secretary-general, a high-ranking position in the staff of president Hollande. Before running for president, Macron served as minister of economics and industry from 2014–16.

Macron is clearly a product of the most prestigious institutions of France. He used his excellent education and considerable professional networks for an impressive career. If this is the case, why does he style himself as an outsider? Apparently, being perceived as marginalized, disadvantaged or even excluded adds to a form of political capital that can be used to gain the voters' support. What makes Macron's case special is the persistence of his outsider nimbus despite all indications to the contrary.[2] Ultimately, he succeeded in convincing the electorate that he could subvert and renew the established system – thereby tapping into an anti-elite and anti-system appeal that is often used as a mobilizing strategy by populists (Marchart 2017, pp. 11-12.). Macron, however, was able to position himself as anti-system as well as anti-populist and thus solidified his status as the only candidate to prevent a possible far-right president Le Pen. Macron's ›neither-left-nor-right‹ positioning additionally attracted former socialists as well as conservatives who joined the ranks of his party. Thus, his challenger party *La République en Marche*[3] effectively subverted the existing system consisting of the conservative and the socialist parties. This political constellation left France with two self-proclaimed anti-system candidates – Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen – who are both decidedly part of an economic and political elite.

This example showcases the considerable power effects that can be achieved by positioning oneself as marginal. Warnke, Bonacchi and Seiler-Brylla (2022) call this phenomenon ›mimicry of marginality‹, a defining discursive practice of reversal in our polarized times. It entails the appropriation of a position of marginality in order to distract from one's own hegemonic status (2022, p. 507).

In the following section, I will give a short overview of the notion of soft authoritarianism and its corrosive effects on France's democracy. A special focus will lie on the role of (inverted) identity politics in this process of de-democratization. Using Islamophobia, *séparatisme* and anti-intellectualism as examples, I will show how soft-authoritarian identity politics creates an opposition to left-wing emancipatory political projects to harness what can be described as the ›authority of victimhood‹. I argue that this opposition benefits from multiple factors of discrimination that are effectively reversed and depicted as threats to the majority – a process that I understand as ›intersectional‹. Intersectionality was originally coined as a term to make different and overlapping forms of discrimination visible (cf. Crenshaw 1989). In soft authoritarian identity politics, however,

1 Among his predecessors are former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the director of the World Trade Organization Pascal Lamy and the former president of the European Central Bank Jean-Claude Trichet, to name but a few.

2 As Kim (2018, p. 11) notes, Nicolas Sarkozy used a similar strategy in the 2012 campaigns, but was largely unsuccessful due to his position as the incumbent.

3 In 2022, the party was renamed Renaissance.

intersectional discrimination is weaponized and turned against marginalized groups or identities. Consequently, they are presented as a discursive counterpart to the majority national identity.

3 Soft Authoritarianism and the Democratic Crisis in France

Soft authoritarianism describes a global phenomenon of democratic decline (Randeria 2021; Adam/Steinhauer/Randeria 2022). Unlike historical fascism however, this modern anti-democratic development does not dismiss democracy altogether. On the contrary: politicians like Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan or Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orbán are continuously winning elections and parliamentary majorities. They use democratic institutions to win the power and then bend and twist their rules to perpetuate their electoral majority. Curtailing media freedom, rewriting constitutions, changing electoral laws or outright voter suppression are part of the arsenal of political means used in this process. Paradoxically, soft authoritarians are very successful in framing their ongoing attacks on democracy in democratic terminology. Behind the facades of these hollowed out institutions of democracy it is effectively becoming impossible for oppositional parties to regain power. In our days, democracy is being dismantled using democratic means. This insistence on the term democracy points to a key characteristic of soft authoritarianism: instead of opposing democracy overtly, it rather cunningly and slowly hollows it out from within.

This soft authoritarian logic of democratic decline is not confined to Hungary or Turkey. Authoritarian populist parties are gaining momentum all over Europe and are or have been part of national governments in countries like Poland, Italy or Austria. Their growing success, I argue, points to something that exceeds the initial appeal of anti-elite and anti-system rhetoric: soft authoritarians are currently succeeding in pitting their idea of a majoritarian democracy against the neoliberal status quo. What is being redesigned, thus, is the very notion of democracy and what it ought to be. The far right is channeling the resentment of large parts of the population. However, they do not offer progressive, emancipatory or anti-capitalist solutions to the democratic malaise that decades of neoliberal attacks on the welfare state entailed. The answer from the far-right is mainly a strengthening of ethnonationalism that goes hand in hand with anti-immigration stances and a backlash against feminism. The modus operandi of this authoritarian populist ›mimicry of democracy‹ is the production of media hypes and moral panics often centered around questions of national identity (see Demirović 2018, p. 29).

In France, this political constellation is currently playing out very effectively on different levels. The political dimension of this discursive shift is best illustrated by the results of the 2022 presidential and parliamentary elections. While the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen reached the second round of the *présidentielles* the second consecutive time, her party also celebrated the best result in a parliamentary election and now holds 89 seats in the *assemblée nationale*. This not only increases their 2017 result by a factor of 11, but also makes the RN the largest opposition party and thus a political power that cannot

be ignored by the government. As Macron's party lost its majority in the elections, the government now depends on votes from the opposition to achieve majorities. Members of the governmental faction already expressed that they would work with the RN if it served their purpose. Up until 2022, this was regarded a major taboo for the governing party.

At the same time, an unsettling percentage of the electorate decided not to vote at all or deliberately turn in blank ballots in the *présidentielles*. If one adds up the large number of invalid ballots, 34.4 % of the electorate voted for neither of the two candidates – thus making non-voters the second largest group, as Le Pen received 27,3 % and Macron 38.5 %.[4] This poor result not only points to Macron's historic unpopularity. It also attests to the slow but steady erosion of the French ›front républicain‹, the informal agreement of a large share of the electorate to vote for the republican, i.e. democratic candidate when it comes to a heads-up with a far-right adversary in the second round of an election. More than anything, French voters seem to be disillusioned with Macron's neoliberal, increasingly authoritarian politics, and the lack of a progressive democratic alternative.

The best example for this ongoing erosion of democracy is Macron's pension reform. The first attempt to reform pension laws was stopped by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Despite its notorious unpopularity, Macron made the project one of his top priorities after his re-election in early 2023. Due to the loss of its majority, the government did not have enough votes for the endeavor. Without the necessary votes, prime minister Borne had to use a combination of controversial constitutional articles which served to push the law through the *assemblée nationale* as well as the upper chamber of the parliament, the *sénat*. The whole process evoked outrage from the trade unions, who organized a general strike, and heavy criticism from a majority of the population. Even after the constitutional council declared the law constitutional and it was finally adopted, members of civil society continued to mobilize against the reform. In large parts of the population, it is perceived as an attack on the welfare state as well as an anti-democratic, even brutal procedure that only serves the economic elites.

Concomitantly to this erosion of democratic representation, soft authoritarianism also operates at an ideological or cultural level. The struggle for cultural hegemony from the far-right benefits from discursive and meta-discursive constellations that favor a majoritarian, illiberal and authoritarian configuration of democracy and make it seem increasingly appealing to the population. In order to subvert central notions of national identity[5], the far-right uses a mix of discursive strategies. Some of these are designed for a long-term change, while others benefit from disruptive events and corresponding media hypes. This shift is deliberately and strategically produced by far-right actors on various levels of society: party politics, civil society, political activism, intellectual life and privately funded think tanks, economic and media enterprises, as well as a growing num-

4 I am referring to the results of the second round of the presidential elections, according to the Ministère de l'Intérieur (2022).

5 For a detailed analysis of these hegemonic struggles around national identity, especially the notion of secularism (laïcité), see Lindner (2017).

ber of private higher education facilities. The aim is to produce a counter-discourse that opposes the liberal democratic status quo and in favor of a majoritarian, illiberal system (which nevertheless claims to be democratic). Identity politics play a major role in the process of normalizing this idea of ›democracy‹ devoid of its core.

4 Identity Politics and Its Reversal

Ethnic, sexual or political minorities often use individual or group identities as a platform to voice political claims within the framework of what Charles Taylor (1993) calls »the politics of recognition«. Identity positions are used here as a way to make structural inequalities and exclusion visible. This can take the form of political and legal actions that fight for equal representation, political rights and participation, which are supposed to be guaranteed within liberal democratic societies (Adam/Steinhauer/Randeria 2022, p. 17).

These left-wing identity politics are far from being welcomed by everyone. In France, identity politics and some of its accompanying phenomena are despised by large parts of the public. This opposition is often rooted in the republican configuration of belonging, which »officially detaches itself from any form of group-related differences or loyalties such as racial, ethnic, and/or religious identity«. Within this framework, »they are perceived as a threat to the universalist integrity of the French Republican nation« (Thompson 2020, p. 32). Sometimes, they are even framed as culpabilizations, reproaches or undue ethnicizations of social inequalities. In the framework of republicanism, calling out structural inequalities is seen as undermining social cohesion and the universalist ideals of the republic. According to this line of reasoning, the republic guarantees equality for all citizens and does so without regard for skin color, gender or sexual orientation. This framework also entails that crime statistics, for instance, are not differentiated by ethnicity. ›Color-blindness‹ is seen as a way to overcome racial divides by not even acknowledging differences, despite the deep contradictions this non-recognition of racism entails (Fassin 2001; Beaman/Mondon 2023).

Additionally, recent claims for social and racial justice are seen as ideological imports from the United States and therefore incompatible with the French configuration of society, as i.e. state secretary Sarah El Haïry maintains in a parliamentary debate on the topic of » Menaces que les théories du wokisme font peser sur l'université, l'enseignement supérieur et les libertés académiques« [›threats to the university, higher education and academic freedom posed by theories of wokism‹] (Vie publique 2022). Wokism, here, serves as a shorthand for postcolonial, decolonial, and intersectional research. Right-wing actors but also members of the government used this concept, as well the derogatory term ›Islamo-gauchisme‹, to create a moral panic centered around Islamism and its alleged allies in academia (Beaman/Mondon 2023; Dawes 2023).

These moral panic and pushbacks against politics of recognition and antiracist activism in France is inscribed in a broader global backlash against minorities speaking up and pointing out racist divides. Existing lines of discrimination, such as race or religion, are highlighted and reinforced to strengthen an exclusive view of who belongs to the

nation. Randeria and Karagiannis (2020) argue that the discursive position of migrants in Western societies is shaped by ideas of immutable alterity, incompatibility and cultural determinism of the behavior of racialized communities. This position of undesirable immigrants also shapes discourses about members of racialized communities inside of France. Therefore, soft authoritarian identity politics in France bear a strong (post)colonial dimension, which is illustrated not only by an often condescending and stigmatizing rhetoric regarding the so-called *banlieues* but also by the blatant police force routinely used against their (racialized) inhabitants (Fassin 2015; Rigouste 2012).

While police violence against minorities can be observed in many national contexts, there are nevertheless characteristics of soft authoritarianism that are specific to France, its republican universalism and its intellectual history. Criticism of Islam and outright Islamophobia, for example, are far from being rejected by a large portion of the French public. On the contrary, the use of the word Islamophobia is frowned upon or downright rejected because it allegedly hands Islamists rhetoric weapons, as philosopher Elisabeth Badinter maintains in an interview with *Le Monde* in 2016 (Truong 2016). This also affects the academic discourse on Islamophobia, which, according to Hajjat (2021, p. 626), largely takes place at the margins of the field, apart from prestigious journals, or in public discourse. Zia-Ebrahimi (2020) describes this pattern as a discursive practice in elite discourse effectively denying the existence of Islamophobia. As such, it is part of a larger practice of inversion positioning different groups in a competition of victimhood, pitting them against each other – as if discrimination were a zero-sum game in which victimhood is a privilege (Zia-Ebrahimi 2020, p. 340).

Due to France's intellectual and colonial history, specifically anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are considered as a dichotomy and often contrasted against each other, especially in publications by members of the so called *nouvelle philosophie*. Public intellectuals like Caroline Fourest or Pascal Bruckner are at the forefront of the anti-Islamophobia discourse. Even renowned academics like Pierre-André Taguieff or Bernard Rougier consider Islamphobia a misguided ideology that plays into the hands of Islamists. Rougier stated in an interview with *le Point* that some governments of Muslim countries, especially Turkey, were using the notion Islamophobia to weaken liberal democracies in Europe, particularly France (Mahler/Pétreault 2020). Taguieff, for his part, is a protagonist in the discourse surrounding the notion of *islamo-gauchisme*, which suggests an ideological collaboration of Islamist terrorists and left-wing academics and politicians. This derogatory, stigmatizing compound noun was at a center of a media hype after a series of Islamist terror attacks in 2020 (Smyrnaios 2021; Dawes 2023). The word, roughly translatable as ›islamo-leftism‹, was used by members of Macron's government, most prominently by the minister of education Jean-Michel Blanquer and minister of higher education, research and innovation Frédérique Vidal. Islamo-gauchisme can be considered an intensification of Islamophobic discourses, as it creates a new, amalgamized enemy figure that threatens the republic from the outside as well as from within – using terror and ideologies respectively (Adam/Steinhauer/Randeria 2022, p. 20). In this context, the notion of Islamophobia, as well as any other form of critique of identity-based discrimination, is considered incompatible with the French republican framework of universalist, secular and egalitarian values.

In an article for *The Atlantic*, French-American writer Thomas Chatterton Williams gives a vivid illustration of the effects that Islamo-gauchisme entails. During a conference on the crisis of democracy, he witnessed an »extraordinary exchange« between the French West African journalist and activist Rhokaya Diallo and three university professors. As Chatterton William reports, Diallo's argument to listen to voices of minorities, their critique and questioning of things that were considered unquestionable before was met with contempt by her interlocutors and especially the moderator. According to the latter, Diallo's »appeal to lived experience« is »not only misguided but a kind of ›domination‹. This intellectual war that's being waged is a threat to democracy […]. I feel threatened […] first and foremost [as] a citizen« (Chatterton Williams 2023). Stances like these can be found in very different discursive fields. They range from far-right conspiracy myths like Renaud Camus' (2011) idea of the ›great replacement‹ to academic publications that describe so-called ›woke‹ ideology as a totalitarian way of thinking (Hénin/Salvador/Tavoillot 2023). They all share the idea of a majority being threatened by minorities. In his writing, Renaud Camus envisions the mass immigration of people from the Global South who replace the white, European population. In academic discourse, theories of marginalization and discrimination are identified as a central threat to free speech, reason or enlightenment as such. Additionally, they are often disqualified as mere activism or ideology and subsumed under the derogatory term of *idéologies woke*.

Apart from more severe and consolidated far-right narratives like the ›great replacement‹, the idea of the ›menaced majority‹ is also apparent in the broader public debate. It appears in different forms in discourses on gender theory, same-sex marriage and adoption rights, secularism and Islam but also more mundane matters like the number of mosques or the percentage of halal food sold in Paris (Mondon 2015, p. 405). The bottom line in this cultural and ideological battle is the emergence of a configuration of the body politic, that is more and more being thought in ethnic terms. European, white, Christian or secular populations are pitted against racialized and Muslim groups, depicted as strangers, outsiders and incompatible.

This process of normalization is fueled both by a disruptive media hype and by long-term attempts to shift the discourse towards far-right ideologies. Thus, the current ideological battles and polarizations are a product of decades of theoretical work from the nouvelle droite, which has been influential in France at least since Alain de Benoist's think tank *Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne* (GRECE) was founded in 1968. Nevertheless, the current political and discursive constellation in France has reached a new quality regarding the strengthening of an exclusive understanding of belonging. Surveys show that an alarming number of people in France actually believe that the ›great replacement‹ poses an imminent threat to the existence of a white, European population in France (Levy/Bartoli/Gautier 2021). In this demographic anxiety, immigration poses a threat to the receiving country, as a supposed higher fertility rate of immigrant population would lead to a slow replacement of the white majority. As Shalini Randeria (2018, p. 12) points out, »linking the size and composition of the body politic to body politics« inextricably entangles »the politics of procreation in questions of

nationalism, migration, citizenship and gender relations«. The composition of the body politic plays a major role in soft authoritarian identity politics for ideological but also political reasons. Ideologically, de Benoist's idea of ›ethnopluralism‹ renews the fascist blood-and-soil ideology which presupposes that culturally determined people are only able to live in separation from others on their respective territories. In fact, it has been argued that the fear of white extinction, which is closely connected to ethnopluralism, is a »defining idea of the contemporary Western far-right« (Bhatt 2021, p. 28).

Politically, right-wing, and far-right parties also fear electoral repercussions from growing immigrant populations, which are usually more likely to vote for progressive political parties. This fear of losing political influence but also national identity plays out in conservative and far-right discourse. I argue that precisely due to the entanglement of body politics (race, gender, fertility) and the body politic (electoral arithmetic, majorities, immigration) soft authoritarian identity politics is creating intersectional – albeit reversed – threats to the majority.

5 ›Intersectional‹ Threats to the Republic

While intersectionality was originally used as a way to grasp overlapping and multidimensional forms of discrimination, it currently informs far-right discourse and politics in more than one way. Soft-authoritarian politics benefit from discourses of the looming marginalization of the majority. Thus, soft authoritarianism is mainly supported by members of the white middle classes and directed against migrants and lower classes, as well as sexual minorities and cultural elites like intellectuals. As Éric Fassin (2019) points out, the intersectional logic of resentment inscribed in soft authoritarian identity politics makes it possible to oppose and fight for equality at the same time: on the one hand, it uses the grievances and fear of devaluation in the (white) middle class facing growing inequality in neoliberal capitalism. On the other hand, it thrives on anger or even hate against minorities fighting for equality. The intersectional nature of these politics of resentment is also salient in the discourses accompanying and constructing it. Soft authoritarian identity politics can thus be described as a recombination of pre-existing topoi, enemy figures, ideologies or stereotypes. It is directed against racial and sexual minorities and lower classes as well as cultural elites. Yet despite its majoritarian, inegalitarian and illiberal nature, soft authoritarianism still claims to be democratic.

This intersectional logic of resentment, as well as the insistence on democracy, can be observed in its purest form in far-right discourse. In a speech entitled ›Alternance pour la France‹ (Alternation for France) given in September 2022, Marine Le Pen addresses what she calls ›immigrationisme‹. According to her, »[p]our Emmanuel Macron et ses amis, pour quasiment toute la classe politique, l'immigration n'est pas un probléme mais un projet« [›For Emmanuel Macron and his friends, for virtually the entire political class, immigration is not a problem but a project‹] (Rassemblement National 2022). After this allusion to the conspiracy myth of the ›great replacement‹ and outright anti-elitism, she proceeds with a rhetorical tour de force, combining several discursive strands:

> »Nous vivons, mes amis, un véritable soulévement démocratique contre le joug de ces idéologies corruptrices et destructrices: le mondialisme, l'affairisme, l'immigrationnisme, le wokisme, l'indigénisme, la dictature de groupes extrémisés parlant au nom de minorités qui ne demandent pas d'être instrumentalisées.«
>
> [›We are experiencing, my friends, a genuine democratic uprising against the grip of these corrupting and destructive ideologies: globalism, business, immigrationism, wokism, indigenism, the dictatorship of extremist groups speaking in the name of minorities who don't ask to be instrumentalized.‹] (Rassemblement National 2022)

Le Pen's quote epitomizes the dichotomies that soft authoritarianism creates: her idea of democracy, understood as the will of the majority, is pitted against economic and political elites on the one hand and immigrants and academic theories on the other. She even skillfully appropriates (originally left-wing) stances when she criticizes groups who claim to speak in the name of minorities. This allows her to depict her party's success in the elections as a democratic uprising, while liberal elites allegedly foster planned immigration and extremist ideologies. Framing liberalism and the protection of minorities as a ›dictatorship‹ is exactly the kind of reversal that soft authoritarianism produces. Although Marine Le Pens rhetoric still differs substantially from government discourse in its authoritarian quality, there are nevertheless clear signs of normalization. The mainstreaming of soft authoritarian identity politics helps facilitate a broad political alliance, from neoliberal to conservative to far-right actors, against a diffuse political but also ›cultural‹ enemy on the left.

6 Separatism – The ›Authority of Victimhood‹

While the far-right is clearly and decidedly pushing its majoritarian configuration of democracy towards the center of political discourse, the political elite in France has tried to avoid a clear positioning. Emmanuel Macron's rhetoric of being ›neither left nor right‹ and his ongoing use of the adverb *en même temps* ›at the same time‹ hint at his attempt to overcome contradicting political positions. One could argue that trying to reconcile conflicting political camps and ideologies is part of a progressive endeavor. On the other hand, this ambivalent discursive positioning can also enable and legitimize far-right discourse as it lacks a decided opposition to racist, anti-intellectual or anti-feminist stances. Over the course of Macron's presidency, the soft-authoritarian potential of this non-exclusion of far-right rhetoric has shown in various discursive areas. One striking example is Macron's discourse about memory politics and France's colonial past and especially the notion of *séparatisme* ›separatism‹.

The colonial past has been part of Macron's political agenda since the beginning of his presidency in 2017. However, his ambivalent positioning in this matter led to equally contradicting statements. In an interview with the station TraceTv in 2017, for instance, Macron stated that one has to talk about the »pages noires« [›dark sides‹] as well as the

»pages glorieuses« [›glorious parts‹] (Le Point 2017) of colonization. He promotes what he calls reconciliation of memories, while rejecting the idea of reparations for victims of colonization (Le Point 2017). A similarly ambivalent positioning can be seen in Macron's participation in a memorial event on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the 1961 police massacre of Algerians in Paris. After decades of silence and repression, president Hollande officially recognized this massacre in 2012. Macron is the first president to partake in an official event in memory of the victims. While his participation can be considered a milestone, he also earned criticism, especially from the political left, who lamented that Macron did not recognize the massacre as a state crime.[6] Meanwhile, the far-right attacked Macron for denigrating and damaging the reputation of France by showing remorse and repentance. Jordan Bardella, the president of the RN, even stated on twitter that Macron had spent his term »à genoux« [›kneeling‹] and that he (Bardella) had »ras-le-bol que la France passe son temps à s'excuser, à se repentir en permance« [›had enough of France spending its time constantly apologizing and repenting‹].[7]

The conflict evoked by the RN is obvious: apologizing for crimes of the past, committed in the name of imperialism against colonized people, is seen as a deep scratch in the national ego. The idea of national pride and strength, an unapologetic celebration of a glorious past, is favored over historical guilt or responsibility. The far-right thus reverses discourses of reconciliation by depicting them as reproaches of racialized minorities and liberal elites targeted at a white middle class dreading political, economic, and cultural devaluation. This is ultimately a question of historical distribution of power and privilege in which victimhood is instrumentalized and reversed. By virtue of fear and resentment, the far-right is able to make their electorate feel that they are the real victims of domination, and racialized minorities are enjoying an undue ›authority of victimhood‹.

This »renversement rhétorique de la hiérarchie des privileges« [›rhetorical reversal of the hierarchy of privileges‹] (Fassin 2019) creeps into official discourse as well. The best illustration for this ongoing normalization is Macron's rhetoric on the issue of separatism.[8] Starting in early 2020, the president promoted his project to put an end to what he calls Islamist separatism. In a speech given in February 2020, Macron describes his notion of separatism as a »volonté de quitter la République, de ne plus en respecter les règles, d'un mouvement de repli qui, en raison de croyances et d'appartenance, vise à sortir du champ républicain« [›will to quit the Republic, to not respect rules anymore, a movement of retreat for reasons of belief and belonging, aimed at stepping out of the republic sphere‹] (Macron 2020a). In separating oneself from the Republic, according to Macron, one also endangers the possibility of living together (*vivre ensemble*) on a societal level. He proceeds to list a number of types of behavior that he deems incompatible with the Republic: denying to shake a woman's hand, virginity certificates and home-schooling –

6 See, for instance, Yannick Jadot on twitter: https://twitter.com/yjadot/status/1449736327461752835?lang=de

7 See https://twitter.com/J_Bardella/status/1449736964865888259

8 A critical reading of the government's discourse on separatism can be found in Geisser (2021) who stresses the identitarian rhetoric and the ongoing discursive production of a »Muslim problem« in France.

all of which are specifically associated with anti-Muslim stereotypes. At the same time, Macron makes sure to state that he intends specifically not to discriminate against Islam: »Et une fois que j'ai dit tout cela, il ne s'agit pas de stigmatiser quelque religion. Et ce que nous avons à faire n'est pas, comme je l'ai parfois entendu chez certains, un plan contre l'islam« [›Having said all that, it's not a question of stigmatizing any religion. And what we have to do is not, as I've sometimes heard some people say, a plan against Islam‹] (Macron 2020a). Despite all assertions to the contrary, the government's discourse on separatism as well as the resulting law called »confortant le respect des principes de la République« [‹law consolidating the respect for the principles of the republic›], were perceived in large parts of the public as singularly directed at Muslim groups. Additionally, the separatism law, as it is commonly referred to, was criticized as a »une grave atteinte aux libertés associatives« [›grave attack on the freedom of association'] and as a stigmatization of »personnes de confession musulmane, en raison de leur croyance ou origines supposées, en laissant croire que ce texte de loi répondrait à des enjeux de sécurité ou de ›vivre-ensemble‹« [›people of the Muslim faith, because of their beliefs or supposed origins, by leading people to believe that this bill would respond to issues of security or ›living together‹‹] (Collectif 2021).

As Fatima Khemilat (2021) points out, separatism has a colonial genealogy and used to describe actual uprisings against French colonial rule. Using it for parts of the national population therefore implies that particular groups behave »like an enemy within who would like to see territories (mainly the banlieues) and institutions (such as schools and hospitals) governed by the particular laws of a religious group, and not the universal laws of the national community« (Khemilat 2021). The continuities of colonial thinking are even more pronounced in Macron's statements about postcolonial theory. In a speech given in October 2020, he laments what he calls the »surmoi post-colonial […], avec énormément d'ambiguïtés et il ne permet pas à la structuration de cette religion dans notre pays d'avancer comme il faut« [›post-colonial superego [...] that is enormously ambiguous and keeps the restructuring of this religion in our country from moving forward as it should‹]. In the same speech he speaks about France as a »pays qui a un passé colonial et qui a des traumatismes qu'il n'a toujours pas réglé avec des faits qui sont fondateurs dans notre psyché collective, dans notre projet, dans notre manière de nous voir« [›country with a colonial past and traumas it still hasn't resolved, with facts that underpin our collective psyche, our project, the way we see ourselves‹] (Macron 2020b).

Interestingly – and in agreement with the abstract universalist configuration of the republic – Macron does not distinguish between the historical victims and agents of colonization. The collective ›we‹ in his speech is supposed to be all-encompassing and inclusive. Macron thereby neglects the fact that it is precisely the history of this ›universalist‹ idea that underpinned French colonialism and made it not only a project of domination but also one of civilization, both of which were closely tied to national identity. Talking about trauma and collective psyche begs the question: whose trauma is he talking about when referring to colonial history? Here, we can witness the same rhetorical reversal that far-right discourse strategically uses to appeal to their electorate: the roles of domination are inverted to the point that postcolonialism is seen as a separatist discourse constructing a

division between those who colonized and those who were colonized. It is precisely this division that is regarded as an undue essentialization of identities and even as *racialisme*. French universalist republicanism is seen as a remedy for racism – even though it played a major enabling role in justifying colonialism and historical processes of exclusion in the first place. Macron even goes further in this mimicry of domination when he calls out a »forme de haine de soi que la République devrait nourrir contre elle-même, mais aussi de tabous que nous avons nous-mêmes entretenu et faisant miroiter leurs origines avec notre histoire, nourrissent aussi ce séparatisme« [›form of self-hatred that the republic should nurture against itself, but also taboos we ourselves have maintained that make their origins mirror our history and also fuel this separatism‹] (Macron 2020b).

In Macron's speeches, the French Muslim minority is identified with the harmful ideology called separatism. Separatism, in turn, emerges as the antithesis of republicanism, which requires national unity and universalist values like equality as well as secularism. Macron marks *séparatisme* and postcolonial theories as divisive ideas that threaten the republican *vivreensemble*. According to him, they promote identity-based communities that are condemned in France where no individual or group identity is supposed to trump French identity. From an abstract universalist perspective, denouncing structural exclusions is impossible as the very existence of race and racism within a universalist framework is unthinkable. As a result, the similarities between the presidential stance on memory politics and far-right allegations of damaging France's reputation through repentance and remorse are striking. Macron's attempt to position himself as neither left nor right, to reconcile but not repent, to talk about dark sides as well as glorious parts of colonization, produces a highly ambivalent positioning. It ultimately legitimizes far-right memory politics and nationalism, and instead of condemning, it fuels the dynamics of soft-authoritarian mimicry of marginality.

7 Anti-intellectualism – ›to Explain Is to Apologize‹

As mentioned above, soft-authoritarian identity politics not only benefits from consolidating racial divides but also thrives on anti-elitism. Producing and harnessing a sharp contrast between common people and common sense and elitist academics and theories plays a major role in this discursive shift. Opposing academic discourse and sociological explanations for social and political issues has long been part of political campaigns from the right and far-right; yet it is also incorporated by official government discourse in France. The former prime minister Manuel Valls, for instance, uttered the following statement in a senate debate regarding the terrorist attacks of 2015: »J'en ai assez de ceux qui cherchent en permanence des excuses ou des explications sociologiques ou culturelles à ce qui s'est passé« [›I've had enough of those who are constantly looking for excuses or sociological or cultural explanations for what happened‹] (Legrand/Parchliniak 2016, p. 279).

As early as 1999, Jacques Chirac's prime minister Lionel Jospin (PS) gave an interview with Le Monde in which he called for more rigor in dealing with social problems and

crime in France, especially in the so-called *banlieues*. He acknowledges that the problems are »liés à des phénomènes graves d'urbanisme mal maîtrisé, de déstructuration familiale, de misère sociale, mais aussi de défaut d'intégration d'une partie de la jeunesse vivant dans les cités« [›linked to uncontrolled urban planning, family disruption, social misery, but also to the lack of integration of some of the young people living in these neighborhoods‹] (Aphatie et al. 1999). According to Jospin, however, these social factors do not constitute an excuse for individual criminal behavior: »Il ne faut pas confondre la sociologie et le droit. Chacun reste responsable de ses actes. Tant qu'on admettra des excuses sociologiques et qu'on ne mettra pas en cause la responsabilité individuelle, on ne résoudra pas ces questions« [›Sociology and law should not be confused. Everyone remains responsible for his or her actions. As long as sociological excuses are allowed and individual responsibility is not questioned, we will not solve these issues‹] (ibid.). Here, Jospin equates sociological knowledge that attempts to understand crime in its social conditionality with excuses. This creates two separate domains: that of law, associated with individual responsibility, and that of sociology. Loïc Wacquant attributes division to the constructed opposition between the realms of the social and the economic: the social, in this conception, is »habité par l'arbitraire imprévisible des passions et des pouvoirs« [›inhabited by the unpredictable arbitrariness of passions and powers‹] and the economic is »(prétendument régi par le mécanisme neutre, fluide et efficient du marché)« [›supposedly regulated by the neutral, fluid, and efficient market mechanism‹] (Wacquant 2000, p. 16).

He sees this separation as a consequence of neoliberal ideology, which is used to justify individual punishment or sanctions. Crime and delinquency can thus be regarded as a personal shortcoming and individual phenomenon rather than the consequence of social misery.

The rejection that sociological theories received at the beginning of the 2020s can be understood in the context of the belated but nevertheless advancing neoliberal triumph in France. In the context of soft authoritarian identity politics, this discursive formation takes on an increasingly central role. In fact, its intersectional logic of creating new compound enemies also extends to anti-intellectualism. The neoliberal contempt of the social serves as a platform for an intensification of anti-intellectualism, which combines nationalism and racism with a backlash against intersectional theories. This increasingly radical discourse is not confined to the far-right. In 2019, the president himself accused universities of racializing social issues in an interview with the right-wing newspaper *Valeurs actuelles* (Fassin 2021, p. 144). In another interview with the magazine *Elle*, Macron even explicitly mentions intersectionality when he denounces that » la logique intersectionnelle fracture tout« [›the intersectional logic fractures everything‹]. He adds: »Je vois la société se racialiser progressivement. On s'était affranchis de cette approche et voilà que l'on réessentialise les gens par la race« [›I see society gradually becoming racialized. We had freed ourselves from this approach, and now we're re-essentializing people by race‹] (Djamshidi/Philipponnat/Werner 2021). Here, intersectionality is once more accused of racializing social issues that, in Macron's view, are long overcome. Soft authoritarian identity politics can therefore be regarded as a fortification of the neoliberal

opposition of the social vs. the law. In a reversed intersectional logic, this includes racist discourse. In an ironic twist, proponents of this stance skillfully accuse the very theories, approaches and actors that try to address systemic exclusions of producing them in the first place – by re-essentializing identities and racializing social issues.

The intersectional quality and the normalizing power of this soft-authoritarian logic is best illustrated in the discourse around *wokisme* ›wokism‹. In a speech on occasion of the foundation of a think tank called *Laboratoire de la République*, minister of education Jean-Michel Blanquer describes wokism as a »thought of fragmentation« that is contrary to the republican ideal, and is creeping into several fields: academia, where it is associated with the so-called cancel culture, as well as media and social networks, where it expresses its negative impact through growing aggressiveness (Archambault 2021). Not unlike the discourse on Islamo-gauchisme mentioned above, wokism targets academics preoccupied with matters of social injustice, race or postcolonialism. In an even more extreme form, it is even equated with totalitarian ideologies:

> »Concrètement, l'ideólogie woke fonctionne comme un totalitarisme : par le projet d'imposer une grille de lecture unique sur la totalité du réel ; de censurer et intimider les contrevenants, n'hésitant pas à encourager la délation ; de promouvoir un nouveau langage pour faire advenir une réalité nouvelle (ainsi de l'écriture inclusive), ou subvertir les mots pour leur faire dire le contraire de ce qu'ils signifient (l'égalité devient l'oppression, la laicité devient la tyrannie)«.
>
> [›In concrete terms, woke ideology functions like totalitarianism: by imposing a single reading grid on the totality of reality; censoring and intimidating offenders, not hesitating to encourage denunciation; promoting a new language to bring about a new reality (as with inclusive writing), or subverting words to make them say the opposite of what they mean (equality becomes oppression, secularism becomes tyranny)‹]. (Hénin/Salvador/Tavoillot 2023, pp. 9-10)

This quote from the conference volume of an event held at the prestigious Sorbonne University in early 2022 seems like an alignment of parts of the academia with right-wing or even far-right groups. In fact, the anti-genderist group *La Manif Pour Tous* (LMPT) uses a very similar wording in their account of wokism. On their website[9], they accuse wokism of »démolir ce qui structure notre société, y compris ce qui est fondé sur la réalité humaine: les sexes masculin et féminin, le mariage homme-femme et la filiation père-mère-enfant« [›demolishing everything that structures our society, including that which is based on human reality: male and female genders, male-female marriage and father-mother-child filiation‹]. They conclude: »Le wokisme est un nouveau totalitarisme« [›Wokism is a new totalitarianism‹] (La Manif Pour Tous 2023). Both of these texts can be read as a reaction to a perceived loss of power: the LMPT reacts to decreasing influence of heterosexual

9 The website cited here has been discontinued when LMPT changed their name to Syndicat de la Famille in 2023. A version from 13 January 2023 was downloaded and saved by the author.

and patriarchal views on family. Part of the academic world, meanwhile, is alerted by the advancement of ›new‹ theories in academia that also goes hand in hand with a loss of white privilege – be it on a theoretical level (considering the voice of the subaltern) or on a personal one (regarding hiring policies, i.e. affirmative action).

8 Intersectional Scenarios of Threat as a Soft Authoritarian Practice

Mimicry of marginality is a defining feature of soft authoritarian identity politics. By reversing existing hierarchies and creating intersectional scenarios of threat, the majority population is led to believe that it is about to be replaced. The most extreme forms of this identity politics turned upside down can be observed in far-right discourse. However, soft authoritarianism also entails a strong normalizing power, as can be observed in cultural and memory politics but also the growing anti-intellectualism in government discourse. In these discursive fields, the perceived loss of privilege and fear of devaluation is linked to a configuration of republicanism which is increasingly exclusionary. In the process, theories like intersectional feminism and postcolonialism are dismissed as incompatible with universalist ideals, while identity-based communities are considered separatist and harmful to national unity.

The neoliberal anti-populist politics of Macron's government were once regarded as the last bulwark against the looming possibility of a president Marine Le Pen. However, they implement increasingly authoritarian discourses and practices. Macron's ambivalent positioning, his disregard for public discontent with social inequality, the growing and often racialized police violence and adoption of far-right terminology by the government hint at an ongoing normalization of soft authoritarianism in France. His refusal to address racism, structural violence and growing class divide as entangled problems will only deepen the basis of resentment and hatred on which the far right thrives and celebrates electoral successes. Instead of progressive answers to this democratic crisis, intersectional scenarios of threat and moral panics are used to divert and divide the population from the neoliberal causes of their malaise.

At the same time, sociological explanations for social misery are opposed by a neoliberal ideology of individual responsibility. This, however, is only used against marginalized populations as can be seen in the latest nationwide riots in the so-called *banlieues*. In racialized discourses about the youth rebelling against systemic oppression and police violence, protesters are discredited as bandits and thugs. Macron even claimed that video games and bad parenting (Crisp 2023) – instead of decades of neglect, deficient urban planning and resulting disadvantages – cause their behavior. This blind spot for structural inequality leads the president to contemplate authoritarian measures like switching off social media rather than addressing the social roots of the problem (Leloup/Reynaud 2023). At the same time as dismissing marginalized experience, he celebrates his own rise to the top as overcoming obstacles from a supposedly marginal position. This epitomizes the double standards when it comes to marginality: overcoming structural obstacles is framed as heroic or proof of meritocracy in action when performed by wealthy, white

individuals. Speaking up against structural exclusion from a marginalized position, in contrast, is seen as a separatist threat to the republic and its unity.

Beyond the micro and meso level shifts in discourse, the growing predominance of soft authoritarian identity politics indicates larger-scale discursive and political changes. In the ongoing process of producing a far-right counter-hegemony, the idea of democracy and what it ought to be is being altered. Against the (still) hegemonic idea of liberal democracy closely associated with minority rights, constitutionalism as well as neoliberal capitalist economics, arises a majoritarian, illiberal and nationalist conception of democracy. Faced with this growing pressure from the far right, the neoliberal and centrist forces try to maintain their fading power options. Rather than addressing the socio-economic roots of this authoritarian populist reaction against the neoliberal status quo, however, they opt for implementing exclusionary rhetoric and policies in their agenda. The resulting transfer of far-right stances on to the discourse of liberal and centrist parties is at the core of soft authoritarian identity politics.

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Staged Dissent – »Change My Mind« as a Vehicle of Instrumental Deliberation within the Identitäre Bewegung Österreich

Abstract: In this paper we aim to analyze the talking format of *Change my Mind* by Steven Crowder and its adaptation by the former spokesperson of the right-wing extremist group *Identitäre Bewegung* in Austria. By employing the concept of ›genre of dissent‹ we ask the question how democratic values of deliberation are strategically used to gain legitimacy for far-right positions in discourse. A key aspect is how these strategies relate to practices of self-marginalisation in the sense of mimicry of marginality. As a model for dismantling and criticising these practices we suggest the concept of instrumental deliberation.

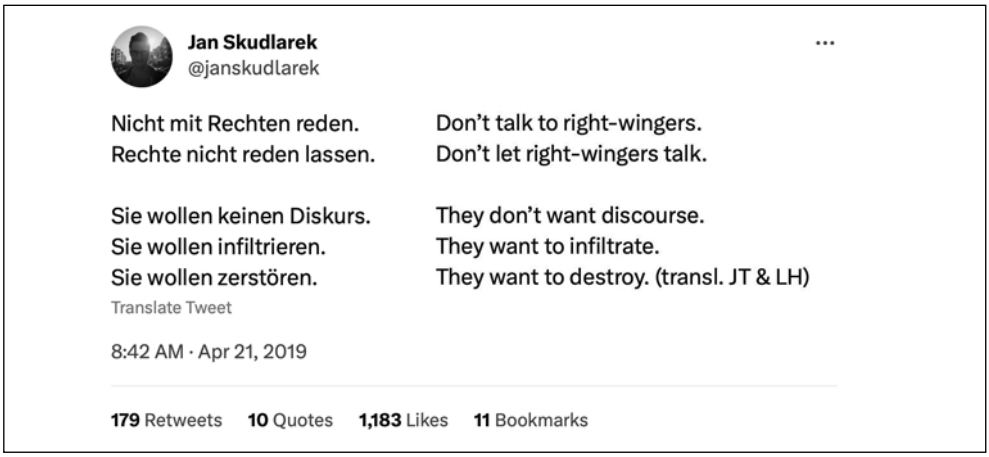
Keywords: Democracy, Deliberation, Dissent, Identitäre Bewegung, Discourse Linguistics

Zusammenfassung: In diesem Beitrag beabsichtigen wir, das Gesprächsformat Change my Mind von Steven Crowder und dessen Adaption durch den ehemaligen Sprecher der rechtsextremen Identitären Bewegung in Österreich zu analysieren. Anhand des Konzepts des ›Dissens-Genres‹ gehen wir der Frage nach, wie Werte eines deliberativen Demokratieverständnisses strategisch genutzt werden, um rechtsextreme Positionen im Diskurs zu legitimieren. Ein zentraler Aspekt ist dabei, wie sich diese Strategien als Praktiken der Selbstmarginalisierung im Sinne einer Mimikry der Marginalität artikulieren. Zwecks Dekonstruktion und Kritik dieser Diskursstrategie entwerfen wir hierfür das Konzept der instrumentellen Deliberation.

Schlagwörter: Demokratie, Deliberation, Dissens, Identitäre Bewegung, Diskurslinguistik

1 Introduction

Fig. 1: Tweet about the alleged unwillingness of right-wing actors to engage in discussion; TW, @janskudlarek, 04-19-2019, L: 1.183, R: 179



A common criticism from activists and public intellectuals directed towards right-wing populists and new-right actors is the accusation of narrow-mindedness and refusal to engage in discourse. This criticism is often based on a deliberative understanding of democracy, i.e., the idea that social as well as political values and norms must be justified in the process of rational, mutually acknowledged argumentation to gain legitimacy (cf. Schmidt 2019, pp. 233–235; Barišić/Ottmann 2015, p. 9). ›Deliberation‹ in this context can be understood as a public communicative practice aiming for a consensus-based collective will regarding political and social issues (cf. Barišić 2015, p. 22). This raises the question of how far this criticism falls short when the criticized political groups claim to be advocates or even defenders of deliberative democratic values and actively seek dialogue.

For example, right-wing critiques of so-called ›cancel culture‹ and the alleged limitation of what can be said are often based on the notion that political correctness threatens freedom of speech and thus democracy (cf. Knobloch/Deus 2021). On this basis they demand a more open and equal debate culture. As this criticism is not targeted at a specific political topic, these accusations of censorship and degeneration of debate and democracy can be understood as a means of propagating a broader, meta-discursive practice aiming to strategically influence notions of democratic dialogue (cf. Schröter 2019). In order to live up to their supposedly deliberative understanding of democracy and to engage in public dialogue, new-right actors have developed media formats such as *Change My Mind*:

(1) »We go out and set up in public and pick a topic. In this video, it's Second Amendment where I just say, Hey, listen, I'm pro-gun change my mind. And we actually allow people from other points of view to come up and proactively change my mind. [...] Also, it's important. This isn't about just a debate or a highlight reel. The point to this exercise is to actually get people to question their own point of view and see if their argument is rational and maybe at the end of it they'll end up changing their own mind.« (V1, 00:07–00:36 min)

This is how the conservative YouTuber Steven Crowder describes his self-developed format, which among others has been adapted in the German-speaking context by the former spokesperson of the *Identitäre Bewegung* Martin Sellner.

This advocacy for democratic deliberation goes against the commonly uttered criticism that right-wing actors refuse to engage in dialogue. This development raises the question of whether these formats require other forms of criticism and how a discourse analytical perspective can provide concepts for a better understanding of the phenomenon and a potential critique. For this purpose, we find it crucial to recognize a discrepancy in how right-wing actors are positioned in discourse and how they position themselves by self-proclaimed deliberative democratic practices. In the discourse around ›cancel cultures‹ this discrepancy becomes apparent in the fact that criticism of one's silencing is often given a lot of media attention and is frequently voiced by privileged, white, male actors. The contradiction of privileged positions claiming the status of marginalization of one's voice can thus be understood as a form of ›mimicry of marginality‹ (cf. Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla 2022). In this paper, we argue that there is a close connection between some right-wing understandings of deliberation and this practice of mimicry of marginality.

Although discourse-linguistic research in recent years has given many insights into the political-discursive strategies and linguistic tools of right-wing populists as well as right-wing extremist groups (cf. Niehr/Reissen-Kosch 2018; Niehr 2019; Wodak 2016; Reisigl 2002, 2012a, 2012b, 2020; Bendl/Spitzmüller 2016; Zimmermann/Resch 2017; Trochemowitz 2022), most of the time they have focused on monologic speech such as social media post or political speeches. With a few exceptions (see Deppermann 2015 and Roth 2017 or Borza 2023 et. al for interaction in social media) phenomena of political speech that are a matter of interaction such as deliberation and talking formats of new-right actors and how they are used strategically to gain authority in discourses have yet been neglected.

In this article, we want to utilize the concept of ›genre of dissent‹ to show how Crowder in the Anglophone context and Sellner in the German-speaking context attempt to enforce their ideas of deliberative democracy in discourse through *Change My Mind* as a format of dissent and thus legitimize and disseminate their discourse positions and ideologies. Following Zimmermann and Resch's (2017) paper *Protest als Eintrittskarte in den Diskurs* [›Protest as a Ticket to Discourse‹], we want to assume that not only protest, but also formats of dissent can be understood as a genre and thus a means to partake in discourse. In addition, we want to ask the question of what notions of deliberation and

democracy are formally, as well as explicitly, meta-discursively conveyed by *Change My Mind* and what a possible critique of these notions could look like. Thus, our approach can also be understood as contrastive adirectional discourse analysis where the tertium comparationis is the format of *Change My Mind* (cf. Czhachur 2020, p. 207). Even though our analysis cannot make more general hypotheses about right-wing populist metadiscourses about deliberation, as our data for Austria only contains of two videos, we will highlight the differences that come from the recontextualization and adaption of the format in a different discursive context.

2 *Change My Mind* as Meta-Discursive Format

The terms ›genre‹ and ›format‹ as well as the relationship between the two have long been discussed in linguistics as well as in media studies. We want to base our understanding of *Change My Mind* as a meta-discursive format as well as our conceptualization of the genre of dissent on ideas taken from linguistic anthropology as well as discourse linguistics in the tradition of Foucault. Here, we primarily base our discussion on the aforementioned paper by Zimmermann and Resch (2017), who fundamentally draw on Briggs and Bauman (1992) as well as Spitzmüller's (2013) thoughts in their understanding of the category of ›genre‹.

Essential for the concept of genre in the sense of linguistic anthropology according to Briggs and Bauman (cf. 1992, p. 141) is that genres cannot be understood as fixed categories of texts, films, and media in general, in the sense that they are classifiable by a set of inherently characteristic features. Rather, they are better understood as conceptual interpretive frameworks for communicative practices. Instead of characterizing and classifying media and communication as such, the focus is being shifted to the socio-cultural context, i.e., the conditions of production, its forms of reception as well as common patterns of interpretation and evaluation of media and communication in discourses. To put it more simply, the question is not which genuine characteristics medium X must have to be assigned to genre Y, but rather which forms and patterns of action associated with a medium X lead actors to classify it as part of a particular genre.

These judgements are grounded in a commonly shared and discursively shaped communicative knowledge, where ›knowledge‹ is not considered as neutral but as integrated into discursive orders as well as power structures and hierarchical discourse positions. One way to analyze this knowledge is to look at ethno-categories, meaning labels that speakers assign to text (cf. Luginbühl/Perrin 2011, p. 583; Meier 2016), or media and practices more generally. Communicative knowledge in this sense refers to different types of actors, forms of practice as well as contexts associated with them, whereby it is always also socially stratified knowledge (cf. Zimmermann/Resch 2017, p. 87; Spitzmüller 2013, p. 245). In this sense, because they depend on contingent orders of knowledge prevailing in a certain historical period, genres are to be regarded as genuine discursive phenomena.

How then does the concept of ›format‹ differ from this understanding of genres? In their discussion of different conceptualizations of formats, Paus-Hasebrink and Proc-

hazka (2014) point out that many attempts to define the term in media studies primarily emphasize the economic embedding and conditions of production of formats (especially in the context of television productions). Interestingly, their definition of formats orients itself to the sociology of knowledge by conceptualizing them as everyday knowledge patterns for communication (cf. Paus-Hasebrink/Prochazka 2014, p. 406) and is thus very close to the definition of genre given by Briggs and Bauman as well as Spitzmüller. Although the discourse-analytical dimension is omitted here, the common ground with the aforementioned notions of genre is that Paus-Hasebrink and Prochazka also focus on the socio-cultural interpretation of communication. Following this comparison, we would like to argue that the relationship between ›format‹ and ›genre‹ is conditioned in such a way that formats represent specific forms of communication embedded in concrete contexts of production, which make use of less specific communicative genres and associated genre indicators. *Change My Mind* is a format in the sense, in that it follows a specific procedure and is integrated into the show *Lowder with Crowder*, while its specific design is oriented towards what we argue can be understood as a genre of dissent.

In the following, we conceptualize the ›genre of dissent‹ as a communicative framework in which discursive actors enter into conflicting communication and are perceived as representatives of different discourse positions, which are asserted as mutually incompatible. Against this background, the genre of dissent testifies to a meta-discursive consciousness, insofar as it reproduces assumptions about conflicting (sometimes hegemonic) discourse positions that are commonly associated with the topic to be discussed.[1] Following Spitzmüller and Warnke (2011) as well as Schlieben-Lange (1996), we understand meta-discursivity as practices that reflexively refer to the discourses in which they are produced and thus indicate an awareness of how people think about discourses. In this sense, the discourse around ›cancel culture‹ is a good example of meta-discourse, as it references the supposed conditions of possibility under which statements can be articulated in discourse. In this regard, as Tereick (2016, pp. 103–104, pp. 277–282) points out, meta-discursivity is usually accompanied by interpretive struggles over meaning in discourse (cf. Felder 2006, 2013), i.e., it raises the question of to what extent a discursive practice ought to be interpreted as justified ›criticism‹, ›cancelling‹, ›silencing‹ or even ›censorship‹.

On a social and discursive level, the genre of dissent is associated with values of deliberative democracy, i.e., freedom of speech, diversity of opinion and the rational as well as factual exchange of arguments. It furthermore poses a normative framework of how rational argumentation between discursive actors should be carried out (for example when someone is being criticized for arguing aggressively or emotionally instead of calm and rational). An important genre indicator for the genre of dissent can be seen in the agonal distribution of speaker roles, which in the context of *Change My Mind* are distributed between proponent of the thesis (PP) and the participant (PT) arguing against that statement, whilst the agonal discourse positions result from discursive context given by the thesis to be discussed.

1 For a more detailed overview of the concept of positioning, see Spitzmüller/Flubacher/Bendl 2017.

Classic formats that make use of elements of the genre of dissent include expert discussions in talk shows as well as newer and more unconventional formats such as *13 Fragen* [›13 Questions‹], *Sag's mir* [›Tell me‹] and *Unter Anderen* [›Among Others‹] from the YouTube channel *unbubble* by the network *ZDFkultur* or *Middle Ground* on the YouTube-channel *Jubilee*. Against the background that the genre of dissent contributes significantly to political education and allows different voices to be heard in discourse, it can be argued that dissent formats have an immense influence on politics (take for example the Kanzlerduell in Germany or Presidential Debates in the US). This makes them, as one might argue, an important part of democratic societies. In the following, we would like to show that there is a critical consciousness to be maintained insofar as genres of dissent can also be strategically instrumentalized for anti-democratic purposes.

3 Discursive Actors

3.1 Crowder

Steven Crowder is a Canadian-American political commentator, comedian and YouTube creator. Crowder is the »host/creator/namesake«[2] of the conservative show *Louder with Crowder*, a daily political format which has been broadcast since 2017 and appears in both podcast and YouTube video form. With almost 5.5 million subscribers on YouTube[3], as well as over 2 million followers on X (formerly Twitter)[4] and over 1 million followers on Instagram[5], Crowder has a wide reach.

Crowder's long experience in the media and entertainment industry began when he started working as a voice actor as a teenager and later started performing as a stand-up comedian. From 2009 to 2013, Crowder worked for *Fox News* but was eventually let go from the network. In 2009, Steven Crowder released his first YouTube video *GO TEAM ISRAEL! (featuring Obama's moobs)*[6] and began his politically conservative content while still focusing on comedic content. As his channel became more prominent, he launched the aforementioned online talk show *Louder with Crowder* in 2014, which includes various individual formats such as interviews and comedy sketches. The show originally started as a podcast, but over time has become a more extensive production with specific video formats, most prominently *Change My Mind* – the format which tends to attract the most attention. His first *Change My Mind* video titled *I'm Pro-Gun | Change My Mind*[7] was uploaded in 2017 and his most viewed video, *There Are Only 2 Genders | Change My Mind*[8] has been viewed over 40 million times. Meanwhile, Crowder has more than 1.500

2 https://de.linkedin.com/company/louder-with-crowder <18.05.2023>.
3 https://www.youtube.com/@StevenCrowder <18.05.2023>.
4 https://twitter.com/scrowder <18.05.2023>.
5 https://www.instagram.com/louderwithcrowder/<18.05.2023>.
6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiBFdxdvn5M <18.05.2023>.
7 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APC2jnOSfhQ&t=16s <18.05.2023>.
8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtftZPL-k7Y&t=1976s <18.05.2023>.

YouTube videos, of which 63 videos are *Change My Mind* videos[9] – though not all of them can be viewed in Germany. A screenshot from the 2018 video *Male Privilege is a Myth | Change My Mind*[10], where Crowder is sitting in front of the campus of Texas Christian University, became a popular internet meme[11]. In the meantime, his show is no longer a one-man operation, as more recently an entire crew is involved in the production.

Due to his strongly right-wing political viewpoints, some of which contradict YouTube guidelines, Crowder's YouTube channel has been repeatedly demonetarized due to his use of racist and homophobic slurs.[12] In March 2021, he violated YouTube's presidential election integrity policy[13], and in October 2022, he violated its harassment-, threats- and cyberbullying policy[14]. The show is financed by merchandise, tickets for tour events and also by the monthly subscription-based *MugClub* which offers extended cuts of the daily episodes to paying members.

3.2 Adaptation within the Context of IBÖ

The *Identitäre Bewegung* (IB), is best understood as a transnationally operating new-right movement, which since its origins in France in the context of the *Génération Identitaire* had various offshoots in other European countries (cf. Pfahl-Traughber 2019, pp. 169–170). One of their key characteristics is that the IB consists primarily of younger people and tries to appeal to this demographic. This is achieved on the one hand through their formerly strong presence on social media[15] and on the other hand through various forms of tactics more commonly employed by left-wing movements such as Greenpeace or the 68' movement (cf. Pfahl-Traughber 2019, p. 178; Zimmermann/Resch 2017, p. 102). Examples include the occupation of the Brandenburger Tor, leaflet campaigns and the disruption of public events.

An ideological core of the IB is the concept of ethnopluralism, which is intended to distance the IB symbolically as well as ideologically from explicitly racist right-wing ideologies. Instead of dividing people into racial hierarchies, ethnopluralist ideology postulates a supposed benevolent equivalence of all ›ethnocultural communities‹ in the sense that each cultural community has its place in the world. Thus, ethnopluralists demand

9 Current Status 18.05.2023.

10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7fXAYcMIhQ <18.05.2023>.

11 https://rare.us/rare-humor/man-defending-male-privilege-just-became-the-intenets-newest-photoshop-battle/<18.05.2023>.

12 https://web.archive.org/web/20190611013313/https://variety.com/2019/digital/news/youtube-ceo-apologizes-over-handling-of-homophobic-content-1203238994/<18.05.2023>.

13 https://www.theverge.com/2021/3/30/22359191/steven-crowder-youtube-partner-program-suspension-demonetize-ads-strike-ban-misinformation; https://www.tubefilter.com/2021/03/29/youtube-demonetizes-steven-crowder-again/<18.05.2023>.

14 https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2022/09/rightwing-pundit-says-rape-victims-blue-haired-lesbians-proves-theyre-lying/<18.05.2023>.

15 Because of the classification as a right-wing extremist group by the Austrian and German Domestic Intelligence Service many of their platforms were taken down.

that this ›diversity‹ should be preserved through separation and recollection of one's own identity (cf. Marsovszky 2015, p. 112) which is why they even though they overtly oppose racial hierarchies, they very much rely on socially stratified and hierarchical categories such as ›the native‹ and ›the foreigner‹.

Moreover, another essential part of the IB's ideology is the narrative of the ›great exchange‹, which goes back to the French writer Renaud Camus ([2011] 2016) and according to which European peoples are to be exchanged through a migration of ›culturally alien people‹ from the southern countries. The IB takes up this concept in the context of ethnopluralism and claims that Europe's ethnocultural identities are being ›exchanged‹ and thus ›destroyed‹, which in turn is legitimized in the media and politically enforced by a supposed ›left-wing hegemony of opinion‹ (cf. Pfahl-Traughber 2019, p. 169).

In public discourse, the Austrian IB (IBÖ) is most prominently associated with its former spokesperson Martin Sellner, who was very active on YouTube until his account was taken down in 2020, and with more than 100,000 subscribers was able to gain considerable media attention for the IB. The first of the two *Change My Mind* videos he published were originally uploaded to his channel and can now be viewed together with the second video via Sellner's Telegram account. It is important to mention here that these are not simply videos by Martin Sellner as an independent YouTuber. Because other IB members are visibly supporting him in the videos and he repeatedly promotes the IB and speaks of ›we‹ rather than ›I‹, the videos represent the discourse position of the IB and not just Sellner.

Before we start with our comparative analysis, it is important to be aware that Sellner and the IBÖ hold a completely different discourse position than Crowder. Although Crowder has repeatedly complained that his videos are not shared by the YouTube algorithm and are not shown in YouTube searches, Martin Sellner's social platforms, as well as the platforms of his movement, have largely been deleted due to being classified as a right-wing extremist which is why he has much less media reach. Likewise, it should be added that especially since the presidency of Donald Trump, right-wing populist discourse positions also have a very different status in American political discourses compared to Austria and Germany. The respective actor roles in which Crowder and Sellner as former representative of the IBÖ operate are also to be contrasted, insofar as Crowder operates *Change My Mind* as part of his profession as a content creator, while Sellner operates as an agitator for a political movement. This must be taken into account not least because Crowder's economic interest is central as, unlike the IB, he is not primarily concerned with mobilizing people for specific political movements and actions.

4 Method and Results

For our analysis, we created two video corpora, one in English with eight videos by Steven Crowder and one in German with both videos by Martin Sellner. When selecting the sample of Crowder's videos, we took care to choose videos on different topics from different years to cover a wider range. We also made sure to include both the first *Change My*

Mind video and the most popular one in our sample. The table below gives an overview of the videos selected and the number of annotations we made.

Tab. 1: Overview of the analyzed videos

Video	Title	Upload	Duration	Annotations
	Crowder			
	Videos of full discussions			
V1	I'm Pro-Gun | Change My Mind	21.10. 2017	21:57 min	36
V2	Hate Speech Isn't Real | Change My Mind	28.10. 2017	17:57 min	43
V3	There Are Only 2 Genders | Change My Mind	06.12. 2017	50:19 min	125
V4	Hate Speech Isn't Real (2nd Edition) | Change My Mind	14.11. 2018	47:24 min	200
	Together		137:37 min	406
	Highlighted Segments			
V5	PROTESTER SCREAMS Then Rethinks : Change My Mind | Louder With Crowder	23.01. 2019	23:27 min	144
V6	Pro-Abortion SJW LOSES IT ON CROWDER! | Change My Mind	05.03. 2019	08:17 min	54
V7	WHEN TRANSGENDERS ATTACK! ›Change My Mind‹ Edition | Louder with Crowder	28.01. 2020	07:13 min	26
V8	ANTIFA Gets in Crowder's Face!! Gets Laughed Away... | Louder with Crowder	18.08. 2020	17:28 min	52
	Clippings together		56:25 min	276
	Both together		194:02 min	682
	Sellner			
V9	»Zuviel Einwanderung schadet« Change my mind auf Wienerisch [›»Too much immigration does harm« Change my mind in Viennese‹]	30.08. 2021[16]	33:58 min	159
V10	»ASYLVERFAHREN AUSLAGERN« - STRASSENDEBATTE IN WIEN [›»OUT-SOURCING ASYLUM PROCEDURES« - STREET DEBATE IN VIENNA‹]	07.03. 2022[17]	39:44 min	65
	Together		73:42 min	224
	All together		267:44 min	904

16 The video was uploaded several years earlier, but no first release date can be reconstructed due to the deletion of the channels.

17 In the video, one finds the information that the street debate was held on 29.06.2022.

Crowders videos must be differentiated into two types, the full segments, in which he uploads (according to him) uncut complete discussions, and the excerpts, in which he uploads selected parts of a video-shoot, mostly when there is verbal and physical aggression, separately and with commentary.

We transcribed the videos automatically with f4transcript, proofread the transcripts manually and then transferred them into MAXQDA. In the first phase of the analysis, we watched Martin Sellner's videos together and coded them exploratively at the same time to agree on basic upper codes for the analysis. In the second phase, each one of us chose a sample of videos which he/she analyzed with the previously developed code set, which we then compared and combined into a common code set. Subsequently, we reanalyzed Crowder's as well as Sellner's videos with the revised code set. After we finished the close reading phase of the analysis, we watched three more videos of full discussions without annotation and pausing. Since those did not differ significantly from the videos we had already studied and no significant new insights emerged from watching them, we concluded that our sample analysis gave insight into the most prototypical elements of the format.

Within the framework of our analysis, the following code set was developed:

- Meta-discursive reference (141 Annotations)
- Media production (62 Annotations)
- Metareference to the format (114 Annotations)
- Positioning techniques (105 Annotations)
- Conversation structuring elements (275 Annotations)
- Interpersonal level (168 Annotations)
- Place Making (39 Annotations)

The code ›meta-discursive reference‹ was used to tag segments in which the proponent of the thesis (PS) – i.e. Crowder or Sellner – or the participant (PT) explicitly referenced elements of discourses and thus index meta-discursive knowledge. ›Media production‹ refers to choices of music and editing. It must be emphasized that we did not conduct a detailed analysis based on methods of film or media studies, and only coded the elements that seemed relevant to the format. By ›metareference to the format‹, we annotated segments in which the PS or PT refer to the concept of *Change My Mind*. ›Positioning techniques‹ mean those practices with which the PS or PT position themselves to the respective thesis. For the ›conversation structuring elements‹, we have tried, following models of linguistic conversation analysis (cf. Couper-Kuhlen/Selting 2000), to code those elements of the conversation which coordinate interaction in speech (i.e. questions, disagreements, greetings etc.). It must be said here that we did not carry out a detailed analysis in this regard either but concentrated on the most common practices as well as those related to the other codes. ›Interpersonal level‹ refers to those practices and elements that concern the conversations on an interpersonal level (for example, aggression and appreciation). ›Place Making‹ means how elements of place are arranged and changed by the conversational format (for example, when the banner with the thesis is torn down by protesters).

As the categories ›meta-discursive reference‹ and ›metareference to the format‹ are the most important for our research question we will focus on this dimension and try to determine how the other levels of annotation relate to it.

4.1 Crowder's *Change My Mind* as Format of Dissent

Fig. 2: Crowder's Change My Mind (V5, 23:04 min)



The full videos, i.e. not the extracted, cropped excerpts, are usually between one and two hours long. The videos usually begin with a video montage of the set-up of the stand and banner, accompanied by music and brief impressions of the location, while Crowder describes off-camera where the video was shot, why he chose a particular location, which thesis he chose and why, as well as his general impressions of the discussions (cf. V4, 00:48–01:29 min). It should also be mentioned that Crowder occasionally does *Change My Mind* at specific events, for example at the fourth annual Women's March in Dallas, Texas, where he sat down next to the parade to discuss the thesis »Male privilege is a myth«. In a few cases, Crowder wears specific outfits, for example, pilgrim clothes to accompany the thesis »Thanksgiving isn't racist«. According to Crowder (cf. V2, 00:16–00:17 min), the conversations are uploaded uncut (in the sense that nothing has been edited out), although this only concerns the complete videos and not the videos with the specifically selected segments. The conversations usually begin with Crowder explaining in a few sentences what the format is about and justifying his thesis, after which he formulates the titular request: »Change my mind« (V4, 01:34–01:35 min; V3, 01:32 min).

In between the full, supposedly unedited segments with individual PTs, the conversations are commented on by Crowder, while footage of bypassing people and the sur-

roundings is shown. One change in the newer videos compared to the older *Change My Mind* editions is that the newer ones partly include visual sources in the video (cf. V4, 44:46 min, 45.15 min). The sources are only linked in the video but not in the information boxes. The videos usually end with an outro recorded in his studio, in which he advertizes his channel as well as his merchandise, in addition to a conclusion (cf. V3, 49:40–49:55 min).

The videos are uploaded to his YouTube channel *StevenCrowder* as well as his website. The information box of the YouTube videos contains links to his social media accounts, information on how to support him and his channel (donation links, etc.) as well as links to other videos of him. The comment section is always activated in his videos. The short videos are excerpts from the complete *Change My Mind* debates, most often showing aggressive behaviour towards Crowder and moments he finds particularly interesting. Accordingly, the thumbnails as well as the titles here are often very lurid and provocative to attract the audience's attention.

Quite frequently and especially when he visits a university campus, Crowder attracts counter-protesters or is insulted by passersby and sometimes people even try to damage his stand, which can be interpreted as conflict about place making (cf. Busse/Warnke 2014). These practices are usually framed by Crowder as desperate actions of a childish left unwilling to engage in discussion, the antithesis of which is his rational willingness to talk. The following quote is taken from an off-comment from Crowder with which he introduces a segment featuring a PT who argues in a way that Crowder judges to be irrational and unobjective.

(2) »For those unfamiliar, this is a segment where I go on the street. We take one given topic and I just listen to people. Let them change my mind. We rationalize our positions and it's usually really productive. We attempt to have a civil dialogue. Sometimes people end up changing their minds and we'll show someone in just a few seconds here. But I do want to show you something. First, it's important to note that there are some people out there who have no interest in a rational discussion. They will be angry and volatile no matter what.« (V2, 00:17–00:58 min)

Against the background of this dichotomous positioning of self and others, a series of meta-discursive values that Crowder claims for himself can be identified. (1) openness to other political views, (2) valuing diversity of opinions, (3) the willingness to engage in discussion, (4) listening to each other, (5) keeping the discussion open-ended as well as (6) allowing controversy. Furthermore, on a level of epistemic values (cf. Albrecht et al. 2016, p. 138), it can be observed that Crowder emphasizes the relevance of truth (7), objectivity (8) and rationality (9).

An important result of our analysis was that Crowder does not merely try to advocate and claim those meta-discursive values for himself but also tries to exemplify them in the manner he interacts with the PTs. This becomes apparent in the way the conversations are structured as well as on the interpersonal level. On the level of how the conversations are structured, it should be noted that Crowder places a lot of importance on giving the

PT as much speaking time as possible while letting them finish what they have to say and asking them questions to ensure that they can present their arguments in a way that is appropriate for them. Crowder understands his discussion in terms of the Socratic method (cf. V1, 18:52–19:04 min). This understanding manifests in the many questions asked by Crowder, his attentive gaze and his posture which is turned towards the PT to signal that he is listening attentively to his counterpart. Interestingly, Crowder often addresses this dimension of listening meta-discursively by saying that although people of different opinions disagree, it is important that they listen to each other. In contrast, he often accuses the protesters and people who insult him of being aggressive and unwilling to listen (cf. V2, 00:17–00:58 min; V8, 12:17–12:28 min).

On an interpersonal level, it can be emphasized that, unless the PTs introduce themselves, Crowder always asks for their names (cf. V4, 34:24 min; V8, 14:00 min) and generally shows them a great deal of appreciation by, among other things, thanking them and shaking their hands (cf. V1, 7:35 min; V3, 48:41 min), as well as by praising their willingness to participate (cf. V4, 40:31 min; 43:00 min). Furthermore, Crowder also shows a general interpersonal interest in the PTs, for example, when he engages with them in small talk apart from the actual discussion (cf. V2, 02:40–3:10 min; V8, 11:04–11:15 min). Apart from a few sarcastic comments, Crowder himself shows almost no signs of disapproval towards the PT, which also fits into his image of the factually appreciative discourse participant. This dialogue-seeking attitude, which tries to endure different opinions, becomes particularly apparent in one segment, which we want to analyze in more detail.

In a video where Crowder discusses his demand »Build the Wall« on a college campus, his attention incites a counter-protest. Crowder then leaves his stand and seeks dialogue with the protesters. He tries to find out why they disapprove of his presence. While some of the protesters refuse to talk to him, one in particular is very willing to have a dialogue with him. It turns out that she does not condemn Crowder as a person or even his views, but only that his presence triggers a feeling of fear in her fellow students. The mutual esteem between Crowder and the demonstrator that develops in the conversation is particularly evident in the following sequence:

(3) »C: I think that if you would have sat down and had a conversation, you would have found that it's very similar to what we're doing right now. Right. It really is designed to evoke what's happening right now. It's not designed to insult anybody. I want people like you on this campus. I disagree with your points of view. Yeah, but I appreciate that you're respectful. I appreciate that you're willing to talk. I hope you understand that's the point to this. And I hope you don't feel like I've been an aggressor toward you at any point.«

PT: »Because (…) I think I was talking to my friends because I have a lot of friends who went over there (…) I think it's good that we're creating a dialogue and it's not inflammatory and there's not any punching or fighting or anything crazy like that« (V5, 10:46–11.32 min)

Afterwards, one of the protesters, who had previously been very loud and had a feeling of being misunderstood, accompanies Crowder to his stand to discuss his position. Although one might think that this is a positive example of open dialogue, the strategic framing of the video must be considered here. It places Crowder and the right-wing position he represents as the initiator of discourse who convinces the aggressive and irrational left-wing protestor of his way of having a civil discussion. This is made very clear not least by the title *PROTESTER SCREAMS Then Rethinks*, where the verb *rethinks* invokes an image of a formerly aggressive activist being educated in critically reflecting on his attitudes. Although Crowder appears to be appreciative here, the opposition between the ›unobjective left‹, who are unwilling to engage in dialogue, and the ›dialogue-seeking right‹, represented by Crowder, is reproduced here once again.

Another essential aspect of how Crowder positions himself is his extensive appeal to the meta-discursive epistemic values of truth, reason and objectivity. The following segment, where he criticizes the supposed fallacies and incorrectness of the participants' premises, gives a good example of how Crowder tries to claim truth as an epistemic value for his position:

> (4) »And I do think, especially in today's era, more important than political correctness, more important than sensitivity, more important than opinion is…. more important than even common ground is truth. And I think if you examine some of your premises, I say this respectfully, I think you'll find that they are incorrect.« (V1, 19:07–19:24 min)

By contrasting the value of truth against political correctness, Crowder creates a meta-discursive framework, in which supposedly politically correct practices take the counterpart to his ways of carrying out discourse. Thus, he tries to claim the epistemic value of truth for himself whilst denying it to those who are positioned as ›politically correct‹. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that Crowder also tries to exemplify his appeal to reason, truth and objectivity by trying to ground his arguments with legal and philosophical expertise or with previously researched studies, which he sometimes even brings along in printed form. This benefit against the PT remains mostly unaddressed by Crowder.

Another advantage is Crowder's rhetorical experience and competence. While his interlocutors often appear unprepared and have difficulties in expressing their arguments, he manages to develop very clear and precise arguments and react spontaneously thanks to his many years of experience as a moderator and media worker. A typical strategy which exemplifies his rhetorical skills on a meta-discursive level is that Crowder takes arguments associated with the political position of his opponent and directs them back at them, for example by accusing them of hate speech or mansplaining. In one segment that particularly illustrates this meta-discursive strategy, Crowder is discussing the thesis »Black Lives Matter is a domestic terrorist organization« with a Black woman when a white motorcyclist stops next to Crowder's stand and tries to stop the conversation by deliberately making a loud noise with his engine and thus disturbing the conversation. Crowder reacts spontaneously – unless the whole thing is rehearsed in advance – and

shouts repeatedly »Stop silencing Black voices« (V5, 06:46–07:05 min). The Black PT and the bystanders around join in, which results in the motorcyclist ending his interruption and driving away. Crowder then apologizes to the Black woman for his tokenism – a term commonly used by left-wing activists that criticizes the strategic appropriation of minority groups for one's position – and she excuses him as she is generally very much on Crowder's side during the conversation. What is remarkable about the scene is that, while being in a discussion about Black Lives Matter, Crowder is recontextualizing a slogan associated with that movement and using it meta-discursively to legitimize his position.

Generally, the issues of silencing and the tabooing of discourse positions are recurring topics in the conversations, which he tries to counteract through the format:

(5) »I think even more so when there's a culture of fear, as you see on college campus, where people are afraid of speaking out because they're admonished as a racist. [...] And that's the whole reason for this, as there are a lot of students there who've actually been othered who maybe agree with the point or maybe don't, but they want to see people have a dialog.« (V5, 12:05–12:24 min)

Crowder also criticizes YouTube as a platform for trying to prevent controversial views and dissent (cf. V8, 17:01–17:28 min). However, it is important to note that although Crowder criticizes the tabooing of discourse positions and laws prohibiting free speech, he rarely addresses the topic of silencing explicitly. In this sense, he does not claim his position to be marginalized which is why one cannot speak of an explicit but only of an implicit mimicry of marginality, since he does not criticize that he as a right-wing white man or right-wing discourse positions in general are silenced. Instead, he merely criticizes that there are certain places – such as universities or YouTube in which intellectual debate is unwanted and dialogue is made impossible. It should also be noted that the view that he is generally silenced would be difficult to justify with a YouTube channel with over 5 million views. The main point here is that the videos do not explicitly frame right positions as being marginalised but rather offer the people holding those positions a feeling of intellectual superiority against the uncritical left mainstream is which unable to reflect on their positions and think for themselves. As it will be discussed in the following section, this is a crucial point in which Crowder's version of doing the format differs from Sellner's.

4.3 Sellner's Adaptation of the Format

Fig. 3: Sellner's Change My Mind (V9, 16:19 min)



As already shown in the overview in table 1, with only two episodes the amount of Sellner's *Change My Mind* videos is rather small but nevertheless insightful. The first video was shot on the campus of the University of Vienna and the second at the *Platz der Menschenrechte* ›Human Rights Square‹, also in Vienna, which Sellner humorously refers to as the »Platz der rechten Menschen« ›Square of the Right-Wing People‹ (V10, 00:15–00:17 min).

Although Crowder and Sellner differ greatly in terms of their motivations as well as the condition under which they engage in discourse, many parallels can be found in the media design of the videos. As in Crowders Videos, the segments in between the conversations are filled with footage of the surroundings and bystanders accompanied by music. However, unlike Crowder, Sellner does not include any commentary at the beginning. Similar to Crowder, Sellner is careful to appear polite and to signal that he is listening carefully to the participants and shows interest in their opinions. Similarly, Sellner meta-discursively emphasizes that it is okay to hold different views and it is important to foster dialogue. However, one key aspect in which Crowder differs from Sellner is that Sellner very aggressively seeks dialogue with bystanders, often addressing them directly and inviting – even prompting – them to talk. While we cannot say that Crowder does not also address passersby, it is essential that Sellner does this extensively and also shows this in his videos.

What is essential in his invitations for discussion is that Sellner calls for people to have the courage to discuss with him. This dimension of courage is particularly relevant

because Sellner at many points refers to the fact that it would be socially undesirable to talk to the supposedly right-wing extremist IBs and thus meta-discursively addresses the discourse position of the IB:

(6) »Ich bin sehr gespannt, ob auch noch andere Leute bereit sind, hier mit mir über das brennende Thema der Migration zu sprechen und einfach mal, einfach mal diesen Schritt zu machen. Sich zu trauen mit den schrecklichen Identitären, den bösen, bösen Rechten mal offen zu reden, das wäre doch mal eine gute Idee.«

[›I am very curious to see whether other people are willing to talk to me about the burning issue of migration and simply take a step forward. Having the courage to talk openly with the terrible Identitären, the evil, evil right-wingers, wouldn't that be a good idea.‹] (V9, 12:07–12:24 min, transl. JT & LH)

The ironic formulation of the *bösen Rechten* ›evil right‹ here serves to present one's discourse position as nonthreatening, a practice that has no great importance in Crowder's work and, due to the legitimacy of right-wing positions in the USA, does not need to do so.

This figure of ›courage for discussion‹ also becomes important in a later key segment in one of the videos. Here Sellner is surrounded by a protest of masked people (described by Sellner as »Antifaschisten« ›anti-fascists‹ V9, 16:55 min) who block the stand with a banner that reads »Kein Raum für Nazis an der Uni – Sexismus und Rassismus bekämpfen« [›No room for Nazis at the university – fight sexism and racism‹] (V9, 16:38–18:10 min, transl. JT & LH). Sellner responds by inviting the protesters to have dialogue and criticizes their unwillingness to engage in a civil discussion. As with Crowder, the image of the rational right-wingers wanting to enter into a debate is set against that of the childish left-wingers who refuse to have their views challenged.

Another parallel between Sellner and Crowder is their competence of rhetorical framing. Take for example the thesis »*zu viel Einwanderung schadet*« [›Too much migration harms‹]. Phrased this way, it is hard to disagree with, as *zu viel* presupposes a negative connotation regardless of the proposition itself. At one point he even explicitly uses this to his advantage when he says »*aber zu viel schadet doch immer*« [›But too much is always harmful‹] (V9, 14:15–14:16 min, transl. JT & LH). In order to disagree with Sellner the participant would have to address the thesis not on the level of the proposition but rather its presupposition, which would require the rhetorical skill to dismantle this as an argumentative strategy.

Another point in which Sellner differs a lot from Crowder has to do with the question of to what extent they make use of the practice of mimicry of marginality. Whilst this dimension plays only a subordinate role in Crowder's work, this is a key topic in Sellner's videos. He is clearly aware of the lack of legitimacy of his discourse position and criticizes its marginalization on a meta-discursive level:

(7) »Und ich finde vor allem, und das ist der Hauptgrund, warum ich hier sitze, man muss frei und offen darüber reden dürfen. Für Migration. Gegen Migration. Refugees welcome. Grenzen dicht. Aber die Herrschaften, die hier hinter dem Transparent stehen, sind der Ansicht, dass man gar nicht mit mir reden darf. Das ist ihr Kerngedanke.«

[›And I think above all, and this is the main reason why I am sitting here, one must be allowed to talk about this freely and openly. For migration. Against migration. Refugees welcome. Close the borders. But the people standing behind the banner are of the opinion that you are not allowed to talk to me. That is their core idea.‹] (V9, 32:02–32:17 min, transl. JT & LH)

The point here is not just a locally situated unwillingness to discuss, as Sellner's criticizes that the supposed condonement of the IB's views is part of a larger strategy to silence right-wing voices, thus implicitly making use of the figure of the ›left-wing hegemony of opinion‹ (cf. V9, 29:57–30:27 min).

Another key difference compared to Crowder is that the unwillingness to discuss is explicitly condemned as undemocratic:

(8) »Und ich frage noch einmal, ob einer von euch den Mut und den Schneid hat, sich mit mir an diesen Tisch zu setzen und mit mir über ein politisches Thema zu sprechen. Wir sind noch eine Zeit lang hier und jeder von euch ist herzlich dazu eingeladen. Wenn nicht, dann seid ihr alle unfassbar feige und ich muss es leider sagen: demokratie- und gesprächsunfähig.«

[›And I ask again if any of you have the courage and the guts to sit down with me at this table and talk to me about a political issue. We are going stay here a little longer and each of you is welcome. If not, then you are all incredibly cowardly and I'm sorry to say it: incapable of democracy and conversation.‹] (V9, 21:38–22:00 min, transl. JT & LH)

This way Sellner tries to declare his willingness for discussion and his will for democratic deliberation while denying the protester and people who do not want to talk to him the capacity to act democratically. Although this element also implicitly plays a role in Crowder's work, it is not explicitly politicized and used instrumentally in a manner such as this. The main reason for this difference is that Crowder acts in the role of a media content creator and does not explicitly associate himself with a political organisation where Sellner primarily acts as a political activist where his role as a video creator is a means to the end of pushing his political agenda.

At this point, we would like to clarify why, against the background of medial de-platforming, we nevertheless in the case of Sellner speak of a form of mimicry of marginality and advise against interpreting Sellner's practices as a struggle for recognition in discourse. Although the Identitäre Bewegung Österreich has been classified as right-wing extremist by the Austrian and German Domestic Intelligence Services, the group has not yet been

forbidden, and although the IBÖ claims a restriction of freedom of speech, they are non the less constitutionally entitled to it. Furthermore, the fact that both instalments of *Change My Mind* were accompanied by police protection even after the IBÖ was classified as right-wing extremist shows that their right to freedom of speech is not restricted and even protected. Thus, the videos do not actually work to criticize a supposed danger for deliberative democracy, but rather to claim a supposed right to be heard in discourse and impose an obligation for deliberation onto others. The fact that the IBÖ now receives much less media attention does not change the fact that right-wing ideologies similar to the ideology of the IBÖ are still prominently represented in discourse and receive quite a lot of recognition (cf. Wodak 2022). This shows that the IBÖ's claim of social marginalization has little grounds in political reality but is rather to be seen as a discursive strategy of self-positioning in the sense of the mimicry of marginality.

An essential result of our analytical comparison of Crowder's and Sellner's *Change My Mind* videos is that, although the strategic construct of right-wing willingness to engage in dialogue and left-wing unwillingness to discuss is adopted by Sellner, the way in which they use it differs strongly. Crowder is more concerned with defending his position in discourse by disqualifying left-wing positions for the purpose of drawing in viewers and generating revenue. Put more generally, he makes profits by reassuring his viewers in their opinion while occasionally making fun of people who hold different opinions. Sellner on the other hand tries to legitimize the IBÖ as a participant in the discourse in the first place and tries to use *Change My Mind* to frame the IBÖ as democratic. Put succinctly, Crowder's self-proclaimed meta-discursive ideal of deliberation serves the purpose of giving his viewers a feeling of self-assurance, while the IB's aims to gather legitimacy in the first place. The self-marginalization of right-wing discourse positions in Crowder's case is primarily concerned with the field of university campuses, whereas, in the IB's case, it is a holistic construction which addresses the supposed marginality of right-wing position on a much broader level.

5 A Critique of Instrumental Deliberation

While the previous chapters were concerned with analytically capturing how *Change My Mind* is used by Crowder and Sellner as a meta-discursive vehicle for self-positioning, the final chapter is concerned with how to critically engage with this strategy and how to dismantle it.[18]

One of the main challenges that comes with criticising Crowder's and Sellner's way of doing *Change My Mind* is that it connects to a basic intuition about democratic societies which one does not want to question. One does not want to move to the position of questioning open and factual exchange, rational argumentation as well as critical discussion,

18 We want to leave aside the fact that Sellner, as an officially classified right-wing extremist, should be criticized on a different level than Crowder, for whom it is questionable whether his views should be classified as extremist, as this is more about a critique of the strategic use of the format rather than a critique of the actors using it.

i.e. all that *Change My Mind* claims to stand for. Nevertheless, it is precisely this inner conflict that represents a suitable starting point for understanding what makes *Change My Mind* so persuasive. The essential point, in our opinion, is that *Change My Mind* places participants in a dilemma where whether one chooses to participate or not is irrelevant since one is part of the meta-discursive narrative in both cases. If one decides to enter into the discussion, one is faced with the challenge of entering into a debate with someone who can draw on the advantage of rhetorical experience and had the opportunity to prepare for the discussion in advance. In turn, one's own lack of preparation and rhetorical skill can be framed as a general argumentative weakness of left-wing discourse positions. If one decides not to engage in a discussion or even protest against it, this is framed as a refusal of debate or a fight against democratic discourse. No matter what one decides, one unwillingly becomes part of the strategy.

A critique that attempts to escape this dilemma must, in our view, take into account the meta-discursivity of the format and expose it. One concept we propose for this is ›instrumental deliberation‹. By this we mean, following Horkheimer's (1991) concept of instrumental reason, a discursive practice that reflects deliberation merely as a means, but not as an end. More precisely instrumental deliberation is not concerned with actually enabling different voices to be heard in discourse, thus bringing different perspectives together. Its only concern is being heard rather than enabling others to be heard, as the latter would eventually require addressing power structures that influence the possibility of engaging in discourse. This is where the connection between instrumental deliberation and the mimicry of marginality lies, as the self-proclaimed marginality of one's voices is used to divert from actual marginalized voices and inequalities in discourse.

Ultimately, Crowder and Sellner seem not to be interested in changing their minds in a genuine way, and in one of his videos Crowder even admits that he has not once changed his mind because of a discussion in *Change My Mind*.[19] This attitude is furthermore demonstrated in one of his videos where he explains how to argumentatively dismantle commonly uttered left-wing arguments.[20] The title *Change My Mind* is not a serious offer from the PS to the PT, it is only meant as an invitation to participate in a strategically framed communicative setting.

This instrumental understanding of deliberation is particularly evident in a practice that we would like to call the ›production of meta consensus‹. What this means is that a consensus is created on the disagreement of the participants in the discussion, emphasizing that disagreement must be endured in a democracy. Eventually, the PS seeks the minimum common denominator that can be accepted by all participants in the discussion, so that it is practically impossible to disagree with the PT, thus creating a general meta-consensus, which is more often than not a pseudo-consensus which does not address the actual contentious point of the debate. This juxtaposition and construction of a consensus are intended to show that even democratically non-legitimized positions can be part of a consensus and that right-wing extremists can communicate with other actors on eye-lev-

19 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIuvaRLaOe0&t=82s, 00:30–00:55 min <18.05.2023>.
20 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xF2lFGyADtM&t=3664s, 58:53–1:05:51 min <06.08.2023>.

el.[21] The strategy diverts from the inequalities and power structures which result from the views those actors hold and which in actuality silence other voices in discourse. In this sense, the question could be asked to what extent *Change My Mind* belongs to a genre of dissent, insofar as it is only concerned with a pseudo-dissensus here.

When Crowder and Sellner argue that they stand for an open and free debate culture, this claim to deliberation is merely a means to an end, working to legitimize their position. In this sense, deliberation is presented as something to be defended for its own sake, whilst the question of to what end deliberation can benefit democratic societies remains unanswered. We do not want to speak against deliberation and diversity of opinion as such but rather argue that a critical and emancipatory understanding of democratic deliberation must address the danger of its instrumentalization and ask the question of how deliberation can achieve emancipatory goals such as equality and the prohibition of discrimination. In other words, it is not enough to ask for a more civil and rational discussion, as the question of what end we should discuss in the first place and who can participate in this discussion must first be addressed as well. A useful model of how to conceptualize this endeavour on a theoretical level while critically reflecting on intersectional inequalities can be found in the works of El-Mafaalani (2022, pp. 143–147) in which he uses the metaphor of the table to describe the conflicts that come along with different voices partaking in discourse and fighting for recognition. The benefit of this model is that it conceptualizes social conflicts and discussions not merely as a constitutive element of democracy for its own sake but rather as a tool of demonstrating social inequalities and enabling societal participation (ger.: gesellschaftliche Teilhabe).

To conclude, deliberation is not an ideal in itself but needs to be contextually assessed and protected against strategic attempts of appropriation for anti-democratic positions. The challenging questions of how this problem can be critically reflected in the development of dissent formats as well as the discussion of deliberative democracy in political theory must be answered elsewhere. A starting point may be of asking the question of how to rethink the table of change my mind in the sense of the table of El-Mafaalani.

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21 Building up on the political theory of Chantal Mouffe (2005) one might criticize this liberal understanding that democracy must resolve conflict in consensus is illusionary as unresolvable agonistic relations which are a constitutive part of the political and must be taken into consideration when theorizing democracy.

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Turning Recognition into Imposition

Standard Language Ideologies in Discourses About Cultural Identity

Abstract: In linguistics, the idea of a close connection between language and identity is widely accepted, conceiving language use and its metadiscursive negotiations as acts of identity to align with or distance from social groups. In what at first sight appears to be a similar argument but is mainly oriented towards national standard languages, conservative and right-wing political actors see language as the main foundation of cultural identity. This contribution shows how the language ideological linking of standard language and cultural identity is used to impose hegemonic notions of order in political discourse. By the examples of debates on migration politics and gender-sensitive language in the German-speaking countries, it is shown how in metapragmatic discourse a defensive stance is taken towards supposed attacks against standard language, so that standard language ideologies prove to be a driving force of the mimicry of marginality.

Keywords: standard language ideologies, language politics, metapragmatics, identity, right-wing populism

Zusammenfassung: Die Vorstellung eines engen Zusammenhangs zwischen Sprache und Identität ist in der Linguistik weithin akzeptiert. Sprachgebrauch und seine metadiskursiven Aushandlungen werden als identitätsstiftende Akte zur Zuordnung zu oder zur Abgrenzung von sozialen Gruppen verstanden. In einer scheinbar ähnlichen, aber vor allem auf nationale Standardsprachen ausgerichteten Argumentation sehen konservative und rechtsgerichtete politische Akteure die Sprache als wichtigste Grundlage kultureller Identität an. Der Beitrag zeigt, wie die sprachideologische Verknüpfung von Standardsprache und kultureller Identität genutzt wird, um hegemoniale Ordnungsvorstellungen im politischen Diskurs durchzusetzen. Am Beispiel von Debatten um Migrationspolitik und gendersensible Sprache im deutschsprachigen Raum wird gezeigt, wie in Metasprachdiskursen eine defensive Haltung gegenüber vermeintlichen Angriffen auf die Standardsprache eingenommen wird. Standardsprachenideologien erweisen sich so als treibende Kraft der Mimikry der Marginalität.

Schlagwörter: Standardsprachenideologien, Sprachpolitik, Metapragmatik, Identität, Rechtspopulismus

1 Introduction

On 2 February 2021, the member of Berlin City's parliament Thorsten Weiß from the right-wing populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) submitted an interpellation to parliament on the topic »Jugendsprache in Berlin: Kiezdeutsch« [›Youth language in Berlin: Kiezdeutsch‹].[1] In his interpellation, Weiß gives a question-shaped summary of the research of the renowned German linguist Heike Wiese on so-called »Kiezdeutsch«, a German ethnolect originally spoken by young migrants in urban spaces (Wiese 2012). The summary, which uses relevant technical terms from the field of sociolinguistics like »Soziolekt« [›sociolect‹], »Defizithypothese« [›deficit hypothesis‹] etc., is combined with a reproduction of some critical objections as quoted in various press articles.[2] Kiezdeutsch is said to be [›wrong and multilated german‹] »falsches, verstümmeltes Deutsch«, an expression of [›linguistic poverty‹] »Spracharmut«, [which ›ignores the rules of standard grammar‹] »Standardgrammatik ignorierend«. It is disparaged as a [›gutter staccato of young people unwilling to integrate‹] »Gossen-Stakkato integrationsunwilliger Jugendlicher«. Heike Wiese as a linguist who has documented this language variety is accused of having invented the term »Kiezdeutsch« in order to ennoble this defective German as part of her leftist ideology. Her analysis of the racist underpinnings of everyday reservations or criticisms against Kiezdeutsch (Wiese 2015) is reinterpreted as being racist itself. In his interpellation, Weiß asks the parliament to take a stand in this supposed controversy. Although the questions posed appear as open questions, there is an obvious misbalance between the reproduction of descriptive sociolinguistic accounts on the one hand and of opinion-based polemics on the other. The metadiscursive representations and enregisterments (Agha 2005) of Kiezdeutsch are thus turned into political acts.

What underlies this interpellation, is a long-held and, in its turn, ideologically charged assumption that the acquisition of standard language is a prerequisite for social integration. A sufficient mastering of the national standard language is supposed to be a necessary precondition for identification with the shared values of the national community (Lobin 2021). Conversely, too much linguistic variation, especially when it arises through language contact, is seen as a threat to the cultural integrity and identity of society. This language ideological framework links language and identity in a way that is well known in linguistic theory. In current political discourse, however, it is being reshaped by those in power to claim a marginalised position for themselves. As a result, this reshaping leads to a discursive constellation that can be referred to as mimicry of marginality.

In this contribution, I ask how the language-ideological linking of language and cultural identity is used by conservative and right-wing populist actors to impose hegemonic notions of order in political identity discourses and at the same time to make this imposition invisible. To this end, I will first discuss some theoretical accounts of the relation

1 Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin, Drucksache 18/26 473 (pardok.parlament-berlin.de/starweb/adis/citat/VT/18/SchrAnfr/S18-26473.pdf). All translations are my own.

2 E.g. www.shz.de/deutschland-welt/schleswig-holstein/artikel/kiezdeutsch-ein-neuer-deutscher-dialekt-40906616.

between language and identity. Then I will show how standard language ideologies fit in with this and how they can be analysed from a discourse analytical perspective. I will then focus on two different domains of current language ideological debates especially by right-wing populist actors, i.e. debates about migration politics and debates about political correctness. As a conclusion, I will show how the demand for recognition of heterogeneity and diversity, as it underlies many sociolinguistic approaches, is turned into the imposition of hegemonic norms of language and of social order, so that standard language ideologies prove to be a driving force of the mimicry of marginality (Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla 2022).

2 Language and (Cultural) Identity

In sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, the idea of a close connection between language and identity is widely accepted. Both the use and the discursive negotiation of linguistic repertoires are described as practices of identity construction, which allow to align with or to distance from other groups. As Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) put it, every speech act is an »act of identity«, »revealing through their personal use of language their sense of social and ethnic solidarity or difference«. In line with this, Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 585) define identity as a »product of linguistic and other semiotic practices« especially of constructing differences and similarities and therefore as »a social and cultural rather that primarily internal psychological phenomenon«. While some branches of linguistic identity research focus on the construction and performance of social roles of individuals e.g. through membership categorisations (Psathas 1999), acts of stance taking (Ochs 1993) or narrations (Bamberg 2011), sociolinguistic approaches are more focused on group identities and varieties. Linguistic choices are perceived as »identity practices« (Bucholtz 1999, p. 209), which link individuals to social groups. Similarly, Agha (2005, p. 24) conceives registers and individual register ranges as »portable emblems of identity, sometimes permitting distinctive modes of access to particular zones of social life«.

In what at first sight seems to be a similar argument, political actors from the right see language as the main foundation of so-called cultural identity (Trochemowitz 2022, p. 10). For example, the basic program of the mentioned right-wing populist party AfD contains a chapter headed with the conceptual triad [›Culture, language, and identity‹] »Kultur, Sprache und Identität« (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 45), which is even further sharpened into the call for the preservation of German culture, language, and identity [»Deutsche Kultur, Sprache und Identität erhalten«] (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 47). Through an existence presupposition (Gazdar 1979), this call for preservation implicitly states that the German culture, language, and identity do exist and are clearly definable. In a similar vein, the program also states: [›We want to preserve our Christian culture, our language and tradition‹] »Wir wollen […] unsere abendländische christliche Kultur, unsere Sprache und Tradition […] erhalten« (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 6). Since [›identity is primarily culturally determined‹] »Identität ist vorrangig kulturell determiniert« (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 46), language as the mainstay

of culture is constitutive of cultural identity, and the German language is thus explicitly defined as [›the center of our identity‹] »Zentrum unserer Identität« (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 47) based on shared moral values as sedimented in in the German language, which has evolved over centuries.

As becomes clear from these examples, these statements are less descriptive accounts of language but rather abstract metadiscursive representations of language, which is ideologically charged as an index of national belonging as well as cultural and even moral integrity (Woolard/Schieffelin 1994, pp. 56–57). In that sense, the statements are manifestations of a language ideology, the study of which can be defined as the investigation of

> »how linguistic phenomena are invested with meanings and values through the production, reproduction and/or contestation of conventional indexical ties between (i) perceived or presumed features, genres, styles or varieties of language and (ii) broader cultural representations of their purported speakers in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, aesthetics, morality and so forth.« (Milani/Johnson 2010, p. 4)

Language ideologies as metapragmatic conceptions of language are not limited to politically charged concepts like that of cultural identity in the AfD's basic program. The core principle of language ideologies, the linkage between (perceptions of) varieties of language and representations of belonging holds for any kind of social identity construction, which, as Ochs (1993, p. 289) points out, are mediated by epistemic and affective stances to be displayed in discourse. However, there are also crucial differences. Sociolinguistic accounts are typically constructivist accounts and take identities as interactional products as fluid and linked to overlapping and even fragile linguistic repertoires (Benor 2010; Becker 2014). In contrast, the right-wing view of the culture-language-identity-nexus is different. It is clearly oriented towards a national standard language, which appears to be monolithic and stable over time, just as culture is hypostasised and essentialised as homogeneous as it becomes clear by the rejection of the [›ideology of multiculturalism‹] »Ideologie des Multikulturalismus« (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 47). Therefore, it is primarily standard language ideologies that are at work here.

3 Standard Language Ideologies

As shown by works from diachronic sociolinguistics, this view of standard language as monolithic and stable traces back to the rise of the European national states on the 18th and 19th century (Durrell 1999, 2017). A single common language was considered as a necessary unifying feature of a nation, which at the same time enabled a clear demarcation from other nations. Especially in Germany, a strong ethnolinguistic nationalism and purism emerged (Eisenlohr 2006; Stukenbrock 2005, p. 6) so that Standard German became a »potent symbol of national and cultural unity« (Durrell 1999, p. 304; my translation). To achieve this, it was necessary for the educated elite to establish Standard German as the only valid norm, while competing varieties were marked as wrong and bad (Durrell 2017).

This view proves to be stable until today's metalinguistic discourses. In the 20th century, languages are mainly conceived as standard languages (Hüning 2013, p. 106), which are invested with highest prestige and are seen as a central cultural achievement of enlightened societies. Moreover, monolingualism has been established as a de facto norm. As Wiese, Tracy and Sennema (2020) show, a limitation to and the preservation of the supposed monolingual standard serves as the cardinal act of cultural identity. In her essay »Von der Hegemonie des Hochdeutschen« [›On the Hegemony of High German‹], Müller (2022) paints a detailed picture of what this means for the educational careers of dialect speakers. It results in classist or even racist power relations, which stabilise themselves by marginalising other varieties and their speakers (Hüning 2013, p. 120).

Many of the sociolinguistic works on language and ethnic or other types of social identity result in a criticism of standard language ideologies and their marginalizing or exclusionary implications on the one hand and the demand for recognition of linguistic diversity, of minority languages and subcultural codes on the other (Androutsopoulos 2019). Fruitful objects of research have been minority communities in the diaspora, which acquire end negotiate multiple identities through certain linguistic choices (Auer 2008; Edwards 2010; Dekeyser/Puschmann/Agirdag 2020). The same holds for works explicitly dealing with standard language ideologies. They typically take a critical stance towards their hegemonic implications and their tendencies of perpetuating social power relations at the expense of minorities (Hüning 2013; Wiese 2015; Androutsopoulos 2019, p. 363). At least implicitly, these critical stances result in the demand for recognition of non-standard language varieties and their speakers.

In the right-wing identity discourse, however, this demand for recognition is transformed into the demand for preservation of the supposed monolingual standard, which is said to be threatened by too much variation, by a fateful weakening of the rules, by foreign influences and so on. Although standard German is the de-facto standard provided with positions of power, most effectively through the educational system clearly oriented towards the teaching of standard language, the right-wing actors still try to paint a different picture. Standard language is presented as being threatened, marginalised or even oppressed. Traditional regional dialects as supposed indexes of autochthonous regional identities and as folk-cultural foundations of standard language still enjoy high prestige on an abstract level (Wiese 2015, pp. 326–327; Trochemowitz 2022, p. 11). But more recent and socially attributed varieties are imagined as a threat to the inherited language as the mainstay of cultural identity. This serves to make the powerful imposition of hegemonic notions of order in discourse appear defensive, i.e., to perform mimicry of marginality.

In contemporary politics, this translates into multiple, but interdependent political claims. Two of them shall be discussed in greater detail, one in the context of migration politics and one in the context of so-called political correctness. As data, I will refer to a variety of political genres authored by parties or party politicians from the action fields of public opinion making and political advertising (Reisigl 2011, p. 461). These genres represent the strategic-ideological aspects of political language in its purest form. As will be shown later, the two strands of discourse of migration politics and political correctness often fold into one just because they both exploit the exclusionary implications of standard language ideologies.

4 Case Studies

4.1 Migration Politics

In conservative and even more so in right-wing political views, the notion of integration is at the core of discourses on migration. If, as the former Interior Minister of Germany Horst Seehofer once put it, migration is the mother of all problems,[3] then integration of migrants into the local society is regarded as the most important remedy. Again, the basic program of the right-wing populist party *AfD* provides an example of this view when it presents integration as a necessary alternative to the allegedly failed multicultural society (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 63). From this perspective, language is crucial. It is claimed that language acquisition is an indispensable prerequisite for integration and for being and feeling part of the local society:

(1) »Gelingende Integration fordert von Einwanderern jeden Alters nach einer angemessenen Zeit die Beherrschung der deutschen Sprache in Wort und Schrift, die Achtung und gelebte Bejahung unserer Rechts- und Gesellschaftsordnung sowie den Verdienst des eigenen Lebensunterhalts.« (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 63)

[›Successful integration requires immigrants of all ages to master the German language in speech and writing after a reasonable period of time, to respect and live our legal and social order and to earn their own living.‹]

In this snippet, the juxtaposition of ›to respect and live our legal and social order‹ on the one hand and of ›master[ing] the German language in speech and writing‹ on the other is revealing. Moreover, by speaking of ›the‹ German language, it presupposes that there is indeed one language to be acquired.

A similar argument can be found in a position paper of the Swiss right-wing party *Schweizer Volkspartei* (SVP) entitled »Integration is not a self-service shop« from 2013:

(2) »Integration heisst, dass ein Zuwanderer die Sprache des Wohnortes lernt, wie auch die geltenden Gesetze, Sitten, Bräuche und Regeln kennt und respektiert. Wer sich weigert, dies zu tun, muss sich fragen, wieso er denn überhaupt in diesem Land leben will, wenn er die Gepflogenheiten nicht akzeptiert. Er sollte folgerichtig das Land verlassen.«

[›Integration means that an immigrant learns the language of the place of residence, as well as the applicable laws, customs and rules. Anyone who refuses to do this must ask himself why he wants to live in this country at all if he does not accept the customs. He should consequently leave the country.‹][4]

3 www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/horst-seehofer-chemnitz-1.4118883.

4 www.svp.ch/wp-content/uploads/10AF8C13-AB4B-4FC5-90B9610EABD7A631.pdf.

Again, the equation of ›the language of the place of residence‹ and of ›laws, customs and rules‹ is significant. The phrase ›language of the place of residence‹ is due to the multilingual situation in Switzerland as well as the diglossic situation in the Germanophone part with Swiss German dialect being the oral variety and Swiss Standard German the written variety (Stępkowska 2022). But still it is presupposed that there is *one* language. In an earlier SVP press release from 2008, it is even stated that integration by [›learning the language‹] »Erlernen der Sprache« is a necessary part of [›accepting the Swiss rules‹] »die Schweizer Regeln […] zu akzeptieren«, the refusal of which should be a reason for the withdrawal of the residence permit and for deportation.[5]

In Germany, a similar argumentation can be found on the part of conservative and right-wing parties. In a speech at the German parliament in 2019, the AfD politician Thomas Ehrhorn called on the government [›to make sure that integration-resistant people who do not learn our language leave our country‹] »sorgen Sie dafür, dass integrationsresistente Menschen, die unsere Sprache nicht lernen, unser Land wieder verlassen«.[6] Less aggressive and direct, but similar in content, the conservative party *Christlich Demokratische Union* (CDU) states in a press release from 2016:

(3) »Integration […] ist angewiesen auf die Bereitschaft derer, die zu uns kommen, unsere Art zu leben, unser Recht, unsere Kultur zu achten und unsere Sprache zu lernen – die Leitkultur in Deutschland weist dabei die Richtung.«

[›Integration […] is dependent on the willingness of those who come to us to respect our way of life, our law, our culture and to learn our language – the Leitkultur in Germany points the way in this respect.‹][7]

The term »*Leitkultur*«, roughly translatable as ›guiding culture‹, was termed by Ṭībī (1998) and usually is considered as a set of commonly called values of Western society and Germany in particular, which shall serve as guiding principles for the integration of migrants. As such, it is typically seen as opposed to the concept of multiculturalism (Pautz 2005). By putting language in a row with way of life, law, and culture, which together will form a German »*Leitkultur*«, language is invested with nationalist political values. In a similar vein, a 2020 press release quotes as follows: »Den Neuankömmlingen werden unsere Sprache und unsere Werte vermittelt. Sie sollen wissen, was uns leitet und wie wir leben.« [›The newcomers are taught our language and our values. They shall know what guides us and how we live.‹][8] Again we find the presupposed equation of language and values, which in both press releases are deictically marked as ›our language and our values‹, our law and so on. Such possessive constructions are potent discursive means for

5 www.svp.ch/news/artikel/medienmitteilungen/zwangsheiraten-bundesrat-schlaegt-scheinloesung-vor/.

6 https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/19/19104.pdf.

7 archiv.cdu.de/fragen-zur-asyl-und-fluechtlingspolitik.

8 https://archiv.cdu.de/artikel/nap-i-integration-im-herkunftsland-beginnen.

nationalist inclusion and exclusion (Meier-Vieracker 2022; Müller 2013) by both constituting and indicating a collective, from which the demand for integration is addressed to outsiders. Moreover, the normative implications of this language-value-nexus is overtly marked by the deontic modal verb ›shall‹. Although there is no specification of which variety of language these demands refer to, the reference to ›our language‹ in the singular suggests that there is indeed one common language. And through the moral loading, the non-acquisition of language is not only framed as an impairment of communication, but as a moral failure and as disrespect. This is what connects the CDU with the AfD, which is much further to the right and states in a press release from 2016: »Integration – insbesondere das Erlernen der deutschen Sprache – ist eine Bringschuld der Migranten.« [›Integration – especially learning the German language – is the migrants' responsibility.‹].[9] And they become even more explicit when they claim that Turkish as a language of instruction will create »Parallelgesellschaften« [›parallel societies‹],[10] a catchphrase in conservative and right-wing discourses referring to a dystopian version of a pluralist and diverse society (Pautz 2005, p. 43).

In these metadiscursive representations of language, the linking of language, culture, and identity results in a mostly implicitly stated, yet powerful imposition to migrants. The cultural dimension of languages is reduced to some kind of fitting in with the common customs and rules of the local society as defined by the imagined majority. As a consequence, any multiplicity of varieties, in particular those deriving from language contact in contexts of migration, will appear as a threat. Such metadiscursive representations of language with their reference to customs and values may seem harmless. But as it can be seen from the discourse on the ethnolectal variety *Kiezdeutsch* in particular (cf. the examples quoted in the introduction), they still are effective power means, since they implicitly marginalise deviant linguistic behaviour. As Wiese, Tracy and Sennema (2020, p. 11; my translation) put it: »By valorising and devaluing linguistic practices of others, those who are ›in charge‹ exercise power, ›silence‹ others and (re)produce power relations«. They draw attention to »how closely our attitudes towards our own linguistic repertoire and that of others are linked to our values and determine who belongs to ›us‹ and who does not« (ibid.), which invests language attitudes and ideologies with effectful exclusionary power. By the example of attitudes towards *Kiezdeutsch*, Wiese (2015) has shown in great detail how the reproduction of such »us/them« dichotomies and the politics of exclusion and of unbelonging (Hark 2021, p. 60) rest upon standard language ideologies. These ideologies effectively delineate the speakers of *Kiezdeutsch* from the in-group and portray those speakers as potential threats to the integrity of the German language and thereby also to national cohesion (Wiese 2015, p. 353). A central element of this language ideological pattern, the linkage between mastery of standard language und legitimate belonging from a majority's perspective, still has an impact on political debates about language and integration.

9 www.afd.de/alice-weidel-nein-zu-staatlichen-wettbewerbsverzerrungen-zulasten-von-arbeitnehmern/.

10 https://www.afd.de/steffen-koeniger-integration-ist-von-der-politik-nicht-gewuenscht/.

While in the official press releases and party programs there are no explicit references to Kiezdeutsch, a vivid discourse on ethnolects can be found in far-right blogs including the comments sections (Meier-Vieracker 2020, 2023). Two examples from the blog *pi-news.com* can give an idea of how the exclusionary effects of standard language ideologies, which are widespread in politics, are radicalised into undisguised enmity. In the comment section of an article about asylum seekers who allegedly subscribed to porn for a fee out of taxpayers' money instead of, as the author states, visiting language courses, a user writes:

(4) »Ich bin absolut dafür, daß diejenigen, welche kein Bleiberecht erhalten […] KEINE Sprachkurse bezahlt bekommen. Wozu soll die Affenbande unsere schöne deutsche Sprache erlernen und in türkendeutsch umwandeln, wenn die wieder Richtung Heimat müssen? Und bis dieser Tag (hoffentlich bald!) kommt, ist es allemal sicherer, wenn die UNS nicht verstehen können!«

[›I am absolutely in favour of those who do not get the right to stay […] NOT getting their language courses paid. Why should this gang of monkeys learn our beautiful German language and convert it into Turkish German, if they have to go back home? And until that day comes (hopefully soon), it is safer if they can't understand us.‹][11]

The user argues that migrants, racially degraded as ›gang of monkeys‹, should not get the language courses paid (as suggested by the conservative parties as an integration measure) because this would give them the opportunity to turn ›our beautiful German language‹ into Turkish. The own German language in opposition to foreign languages is thus depicted as a homogeneous entity that must be kept pure and is already threatened by the attempt of migrants to learn it.

Under another article about the proposal to make use of plain language in schools in order to address the needs of migrants and to increase the accessibility of teaching, a user comments:

(5) »Wenn man bedenkt zu welchem dekadenten Dreck die Migranten in ihrem alltäglichen Slang, […] die deutsche Sprache herabgewürdigt haben, wäre es besser zu überlegen die Neu-Siedler von Schulzwang u. Deutschunterricht überhaupt gänzlich zu befreien.«

[›Considering the decadent filth to which the migrants have degraded the German language in their everyday slang, […] it would be better to consider exempting the new settlers from compulsory schooling and German lessons altogether.‹][12]

11 www.pi-news.net/2016/06/illegale-in-ahlen-lieber-pornos-als-sprachkurse/.
12 www.pi-news.net/2016/05/schule-sprachvereinfachung-wegen-migranten/.

The racial degradation of the migrants is justified by accusing them of degrading the German language, which is thus personalised as a victim. The goal of keeping the language pure and protecting it from supposed violent attacks from the outside leads directly to socially exclusionary and thus racist and inherently violent positions.

4.2 Political Correctness

Next to migration politics, there are other branches of metadiscourse on language where standard language is framed as being threatened or even oppressed. One is the wide field of antidiscriminatory language policy, in which in the German-speaking countries gender-sensitive language is a particularly strongly debated topic (Kasper 2022). On the part of its critics, gender-sensitive language is often presented as part of Political Correctness, which, as Hall (1994) and Auer (2002) have shown and has also been demonstrated for the related term *woke* (Bettag et al. 2023), is a metadiscursive stigma-word of the political right to delegitimise and defame antidiscriminatory interventions.

An example for this can be found in the basic program of the *AfD*, which in a chapter headed »German language as the centre of our identity« reads as follows:

(6) »Im Inland sieht die AfD mit Sorge, wie die deutsche Sprache im Sinne einer falsch verstandenen ›Internationalisierung‹ durch das Englische ersetzt oder ›gegendert‹ wird. Politisch ›korrekte‹ Sprachvorgaben lehnen wir entschieden ab.« (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 47)

[›Domestically, the AfD is concerned to see how the German language is being replaced by English or ›counter-gendered‹ in the sense of a misunderstood ›internationalisation‹. We firmly reject politically ›correct‹ language specifications.‹]

A few pages later, it continues with the following paragraph:

(7) »Die deutsche Sprache wird abstrus umgestaltet, damit sich die Geschlechteraufhebung auch im alltäglichen Sprachgebrauch wiederfindet. Die AfD lehnt die behördlich verordneten geschlechterneutralen Worterfindungen als Eingriff in die natürlich gewachsene Kultur und Tradition unserer Sprache ab.« (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 55)

[›The German language is being abstrusely reshaped so that gender abolition is also reflected in everyday language use. The AfD rejects the officially imposed gender-neutral word inventions as an intervention in the naturally grown culture and tradition of our language.‹]

This paragraph paints a picture of ›the German language‹ as ›naturally grown‹ so that any intervention appears as a threat of the linguistically sedimented culture and tradition.

The biologistic-botanic metaphor of naturally grown language, which has been pervasive in nationalist language reflexion since the 17th century (Stukenbrock 2005, pp. 102–107) and is also a signature of debates on gender-sensitive language (Kasper 2022, p. 30), is employed to frame any ›officially imposed invention‹ as an intervention both against nature and culture. Although standardisation of language is itself the result of explicit regulation, this regulation is downplayed by the myth of a naturally grown national language on the one hand and explicitly rejected when serving the supposed leftist ideology of gender-neutrality. Note that in the first excerpt, also the use of square quotes (Dreesen 2019; Bubenhofer/Scharloth 2014) rejects the measures at issue (of counter-gendering, internationalisation and correctness) themselves by framing the labels as misleading.

The supposedly damaging influences of gender-sensitive language are described as twofold. First, political correctness as any other alleged form of dictating opinions in public discourse is said to be damaging to society (Trochemowitz 2022, p. 15). For example, the AfD speaks in its basic program of the [›society-damaging political correctness and opinion dictation in all public discourses‹] »gesellschaftsschädigenden Politischen Korrektheit und des Meinungsdiktats in allen öffentlichen Diskursen« (Alternative für Deutschland 2016, p. 11). Second, it is said to be damaging to individual thinking and reason. An example can be found in a 2018 press release of the *AfD* in reaction to the German Orthographic Council (*Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung*) not to include gender-inclusive typographic means like the gender star into the official regulations, but to monitor actual language use to get a more detailed impression of its functions and effects:

(8) »Es darf nicht sein, dass Gender-Gagaisten mit Geschlechterstern, Binnen-I, Gender-Gap und anderen absurden sprachpolitischen Vorschlägen unsere deutsche Sprache vergewaltigen. Gewalt an der Sprache ist immer auch Gewalt an der Kultur und der Freiheit des Denkens. Wir werden nicht zulassen, dass die Verfechter einer vorgeblichen politischen Korrektheit unsere Muttersprache zugrunde richten und die Schönheit und Vielfalt unserer Sprache zerstören.«

[›It must not be allowed that gender gagaists rape our German language with the gender star, the inward I, the gender gap and other absurd language policy proposals. Violence against language is always violence against culture and freedom of thought. We will not allow the advocates of a pretended political correctness to ruin our mother tongue and destroy the beauty and diversity of our language.‹][13]

In this excerpt, the metaphorical representation of language is taken to another direction when it is personalised and even implicitly gendered as a victim of violence and rape and thereby as exposed to abuse of power. This also holds for the following press release quoting the party chairwoman Alice Weidel:

13 www.afd.de/joerg-meuthen-vergewaltigung-der-deutschen-sprache-verhindern/.

(9) »Die sogenannte ‚gendergerechte' Sprache ist ein Orwell-Projekt. Sie vergewaltigt nicht nur unsere Muttersprache und zertrümmert Texte bis zur Unlesbarkeit, sie will über die Manipulation der Sprache auch unser Denken im Sinne der Gender-Ideologie beeinflussen und kontrollieren[.]«

[›The so-called ›gender-inclusive‹ language is an Orwellian project. It not only rapes our mother tongue and smashes texts to the point of illegibility, it also wants to influence and control our thinking in terms of gender ideology through the manipulation of language.‹][14]

The awareness-raising functions of gender-sensitive language, which in fact is explicitly intended by its proponents, are reframed as ›influence and control [of] our thinking in terms of gender ideology‹ similar to the brain washing techniques in the George Orwells dystopia »*1984*«. The empowering impact of inclusion and greater visibility of marginalised groups is distorted into imagined oppression and control, which is a case in point for the mimicry of marginality.

While antidiscriminatory activism would try to reveal the implicit violence and marginalising effects of, say, hypermasculine language, the right-wing actors try to convert this by ascribing the violence to the reformist efforts. ›Our language‹ as the basis of culture and reason is presented as something that has to be preserved, and although its ›beauty and diversity‹ are emphasised, no doubt is left that this will not include nonstandard varieties beyond supposedly autochthonous dialects.[15] In another press release the AfD portrays itself [›as the only defender of the German language against anglicisms, brutalisation and gender experiments‹] »zur einzigen Verteidigerin der deutschen Sprache gegen Anglizismen, Verrohung und Genderexperimente geworden«.[16] Here, the purist attitude becomes most explicit. It suggests a close relation between induced language change, both by foreign influences through anglicisms (Spitzmüller 2005) and by supposed gender ideology, on the one hand, and brutalisation (»Verrohung«) as a key term in public discourse on the normalisation of extremist positions (Marx 2019) on the other.

That gender-sensitive language is framed as being opposed to and even threatening standard language can also be demonstrated by the example of the Hamburg-based public initiative [› Stop gender language in administration and education!‹] »Schluss mit Gendersprache in Verwaltung und Bildung« launched in 2023 by the language purist association *Verein Deutsche Sprache*, which was officially supported by the local branch of the conservative party *CDU*. The initiative calls for the consequent [›use of Standard High German in public communication‹] »Gebrauch des Standardhochdeutschen in der öffentlichen Kommunikation«, which is said to be incompatible with so called gender

14 www.afd.de/alice-weidel-die-sogenannte-gendergerechte-sprache-ist-ein-orwell-projekt/

15 On this language ideological concept of dialects as folk-cultural foundations of standard language cf. Wiese (2015, pp. 362–363).

16 www.afd.de/stephan-brandner-deutsche-sprache-schuetzen/

language.[17] Note that the term ›gender language‹ itself insinuates that it is a language of its own, which for that reason alone is delineated from conventional German. This variety alone could secure democracy and is thus invested with positive political values:

(10) »Eine Demokratie braucht den gewachsenen (Sprach-) Standard, die Einheitssprache, deren wichtigste Kriterien Verbreitung, Verständlichkeit und soziale Übereinkunft sind. Die Standardsprache ermöglicht es, allgemeine Aussagen zu treffen und sprachliche Vielfalt lebendig zu erhalten.«

[›A democracy needs the grown (language) standard, the uniform language, whose most important criteria are dissemination, comprehensibility and social agreement. The standard language makes it possible to make general statements and to keep linguistic diversity alive.‹][18]

Here, too, the standard language is presented as something that has grown and therefore must not be interfered with. There is space for ›linguistic diversity‹ as diversity is a signature of democratic societies. But since ›gender language‹ is said to [›deface language‹] »verunstaltet die Sprache«, to [›blur clear thinking‹] »verwischt klares Denken« and to [›make understanding difficult‹] »erschwert die Verständigung«, it is explicitly excluded from this commitment to diversity and is rather portrayed as a threat to both reason and democracy. And even more, gender-sensitive language as an attempt to reduce structural linguistic sexism is itself rejected as [›discriminating‹], [›sexist‹] and [›anti-human‹] »diskriminierend, […] sexistisch und menschenfeindlich«. Already in 2021, the Hamburg branch of *CDU* had decided at the regional party conference [›to speak out against discrimination and exclusion of people who do not want to use gender-sensitive language‹] »spricht sich gegen jede Diskriminierung und Ausgrenzung von Menschen aus, die keine gendergerechte Sprache verwenden möchten«[19].

On this topic, too, the comment sections of the far-right blog *pi-news.com* shows how these views are even radicalised. One commentator complains about the supposed coercion to [› philantropic xenophilia‹] »philanthropischen Xenophilie«, which would stigmatise its critics as Nazis and burdens everyone to be open to the

(11) »für das Verhunzen der deutschen Sprache mit einem grammatikalisch falschen Neuschrieb, mit dem Ausmerzen Tausender unschuldiger Wörter, mit einer nur noch als irrsinnig zu bezeichnenden gendergerechten Schreibweise und Sprache.«

17 vds-ev.de/aktionen/aufrufe/hamburger-volksinitiative-schluss-mit-gendersprache-in-verwaltung-und-bildung/.

18 vds-ev.de/aktionen/aufrufe/hamburger-volksinitiative-schluss-mit-gendersprache-in-verwaltung-und-bildung/.

19 cduhamburg.de/fuer-die-deutsche-grammatik-gegen-gender-zwang/.

> [›ruining the German language with a grammatically incorrect newwrite, with the eradication of thousands of innocent words, with a gender-equal spelling and language that can only be described as insane.‹][20]

The wording of the ›eradication of thousands of innocent words‹ reminds of critical representations of warlike acts that require retaliation or at least self-defence. Like in the excerpts from pi-news.com on the topic of *Kiezdeutsch* discussed above, the aim of preserving language from supposed violent attacks is used as a legitimation for by themselves violent counter-attacks, and thus appears as mimicry of marginality.

5 Conclusion: Standard Language Ideologies and the Mimicry Of Marginality

In this paper, I have started from the idea of a close connection between language and identity, which is widely shared in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. While in these fields identities are taken as fluid and as linked to multiple and fragile linguistic repertoires, the right-wing adaptations of this idea target national standard languages as supposed bearers of culture, cultural identity and even reason. In line with standard language ideologies as described in historical sociolinguistics (Durrell 1999, 2017), language is presented as stable and monolithic and as to kept pure and preserved against bad influences from outside. Therefore, linguists should be aware of the fact that established analytical categories like identity are far from being neutral but are ideologically contested and can easily be appropriated for political purposes.

In the context of right-wing political discourses, the demand for recognition of minority groups and minority languages, which is often linked to linguistic notions of the language-identity-nexus, is turned into imposition on the supposed contesters of standards language. In that view, Migrants must adopt German language and culture in order not to be suspected to undermine the national and cultural integrity of the local society. With respect to gender-sensitive language, for example non-binary people would have to fit with the hegemonic and heteronormative gender norms of society. However, standard language ideologies as employed in the metadiscursive representations do not only set the standards and target norms of these impositions. They also frame these impositions as mere reactions and defences against supposed attacks from outside. Those in power and representing the privileged majority claim to be continuously marginalized by the ongoing societal changes and the raised voices of the subaltern. This claimed defensive stance legitimises and at the same time conceals the violent and exclusionary implications of the impositions of hegemonic notions of order. For the mimicry of marginality as the »strategic assertion and staged appropriation of a position of marginality in society and discourse as a masking of hegemony« (Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla 2022, p. 513), standard language ideologies thus turn out to be a driving force.

20 www.pi-news.net/2015/07/polizei-nrw-bestaetigt-no-go-areas-im-ruhrgebiet/.

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»Everything a Learner Needs« – Constructions Of Linguistic and Social Marginality/Centrality In Discourses about (German) Language Learning and Multilingualism[1]

Abstract: The paper deals with discursive portrayals of language learning and language learners. In a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, it asks whether the status of the language learner is constituted as a phenomenon of marginality or of centrality in current discourses in Germany, and whether this may in some instances be seen as a mimicry of marginality. The qualitative part of the analysis takes positionings by learners and native speakers into account, considering linguistic ways of constituting both the self and others with regard to language(s) and learning. The paper also discusses whether the status transition of a person from learner to language »expert« is depicted as possible, and whether learning a language offers a form of prestige.

Keywords: Language learning discourses, language learner, native speaker, positioning of self and others, language ideologies

Zusammenfassung: Der Beitrag befasst sich mit diskursiven Darstellungen der Sprachaneignung und von Sprachenlernenden. Er untersucht in einer Kombination quantitativer und qualitativer Ansätze, ob der Status von Lernenden in aktuellen Diskursen als marginal oder zentral konstituiert wird und ob dies in einigen Belegen als Mimikry von Marginalität gedeutet werden kann. Der qualitative Teil der Analyse berücksichtigt dabei Selbst- und Fremdpositionierungen durch Lernende und Menschen, die Deutsch als Erstsprache erworben haben, mit Blick auf Sprache(n) und Lernen. Der Beitrag diskutiert auch, ob ein Übergang vom Status des Lernenden zum »Expertentum« im Diskurs als möglich dargestellt wird und ob auch dem Sprachenlernen eine Form von Prestige zukommt.

Schlagwörter: Sprachlerndiskurse, Sprachlerner:in, Muttersprachler:in, Selbst- und Fremdpositionierung, Sprachideologien

1. Introduction

Throughout Germany, a variety of languages is spoken, including not only German and autochthonous languages such as Frisian or Sorbian, but also languages such as Turkish, Arabic, French or Italian that are spoken in other countries as well where they form the majority language. In such a multilingual society, a lot of people in Germany have ac-

1 I thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. I also thank Ramona Kreis for her corrections, comments and suggestions.

quired more than one language, be it due to first or second language acquisition, e.g. in their families or in preschool, or due to institutionalised language education. Nonetheless, German is still a widely spoken language, both worldwide[2] and specifically in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein.[3] However, in a *mimicry of marginality* (Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla 2022), it is still sometimes depicted as a language that is losing its prevalence and importance, for example in online discussions in which multilingualism is in some instances constituted as a threat or at least as undesirable. Negotiations and claims concerning the hegemony of languages may also be observed in discussions about language tests, which may determine whether someone may join their spouse in Germany, or in the practice of teaching refugee children who are still acquiring German in separate classes without any classmates whose first language is German. Learning a language, it seems, is constituted as something that sets you apart from others, namely the knowledgeable native speakers (cf. Holliday 2017) – a status of marginality. This may be even more true for learners outside of Germany and their status with regard to the language; as Kramsch (1996, p. 1) points out, the native speaker, not the learner and their reflection on language, has always been »das Fundament jedes Deutschunterrichts, die unerschöpfliche Quelle stets korrekter grammatischer Intuition, die letzte Instanz in puncto Sprachgebrauch«. [›the foundation of all German classes, the unfailing source of ever correct grammatical intuition, the last resort concerning language usage‹[4]]. All of this suggests the discursive hegemony of German as a language but also of the native speaker and their intrinsic authority. Still, the fact remains that there is a large group of people in Germany who regularly use more languages than just German, and who may have different language biographies, motives for studying the language from abroad, and individual expectations, hopes, and fears.

This paper deals with the following questions: Is the status of the language learner constituted as a phenomenon of marginality or of centrality in current discourses in Germany? Is the transition of a person from one status to the other – from learner to language expert – depicted as possible, and could learning a language also offer a form of prestige? How is the status of German as a language portrayed and do we find traces of what Warnke, Bonacchi and Seiler Brylla (2022) describe as *mimicry of marginality*? In order to discuss this last question, namely to evaluate whether a claim to be marginalised is just a mimicry that ignores the actual power relations, it is necessary to look at the different ways learning a language is portrayed in German discourse. This is why the focus of this paper is not just on mimicry of marginality in (German) language learning discourse, but on discussions and constitutions of centrality and marginality in general.

2 See Statista (2023): The most spoken languages worldwide in 2022 (by speakers in millions). https://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide/(accessed on 08.05.2023)

3 See Statistisches Bundesamt (2023) on Germany: 80 % der Bevölkerung sprechen zuhause ausschließlich Deutsch. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/Zahl-der-Woche/2023/PD23_08_p002.html (accessed on 08.05.2023)

4 All quotes are translated by the author (in a few instances with the assistance of Deep L (https://www.deepl.com/de/translator)).

In order to deal with these questions, current research regarding language ideologies online and depictions of centrality and marginality shall be discussed (section 2). Particular attention shall be paid to the specific role of the disciplines *DaZ/DaF* (German as a Second/Foreign Language) and current discussions within these research areas concerning power and language.

In order to analyse the place of multilingualism in discourse and the status of the learner and the native speaker (section 3), data from the *Deutsches Referenzkorpus* (DeReKo, Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache (2023)) and two exemplary adult language learning workbooks shall be analysed as well as online comments on newspaper articles concerning multilingualism. In order to include voices from learners as well, exemplary data from the comment sections of Youtube videos by the channel *Easy German* shall also be analysed. As far as the research method for these comments is concerned, I choose an adaptation of Ulla Fix' (2015) *EIN-Text-Diskursanalyse* (›one text discourse analysis‹), which deliberately focuses on a small data set in order to gain nuanced insights into a discourse. Finally, the findings from the analysis shall be discussed with regard to marginality and centrality in order to see how and why a position at the linguistic margins might be constituted in this discourse domain (section 4). With regard to the focus of this special issue, particular attention is paid to the aforementioned mimicry of marginality; however, various linguistic forms of shaping a centre or a margin in this discourse domain shall be analysed as well in order to see how and where the concepts of centrality and marginality generally become relevant in this discourse.

2. Research on Language Ideologies and Online Language Learning Videos

The special issue in which this paper appears deals with linguistic means of positioning oneself or others in the centre or margin of an entity, be it a debate or a group. Especially positioning oneself in the margins of society despite belonging to a rather powerful group may serve a specific purpose in a discourse: »Mimicry of Marginality is a discourse strategy of a claimed position of social marginality as a masking of hegemony« (quoted from the call for papers for this special issue, cf. also Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla 2022 and their introduction to this issue for a detailed explanation). While it may be relatively clear why a positioning in the centre is advantageous and offers chances to shape society (cf. Mattfeldt 2022, pp. 530–531), a position at the margin may at first glance appear to be powerless per se. However, in some contexts this marginality may be beneficial as well, for example to show oneself as belonging to an elite, such as a cultural avantgarde (cf. Mattfeldt 2022, p. 536). Meier-Vieracker (2022) analyses the construction »die schon länger hier leben« [›those who have been living here longer‹], a phrase used by Angela Merkel among others. He discusses how it was later taken up by right-wing communities that criticise it, but also use it in order to depict themselves as a marginalised group which, according to them, should have more rights than migrants, who are referred to with slurs and discriminatory language. This strategic distortion fits in with Markewitz' (2022) analysis of a right-wing

blog and his observation that right-wing circles use language deliberately in order to manipulate others, while claiming that other parties are the ones using language manipulatively at the same time. In the introduction to this special issue, a so-called »canonical form« of mimicry of marginality is presented, which shows how prevalent this strategy actually is (see Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla in this volume).

This paper looks at language ideologies in the context of language learning and specifically aspects of centrality and marginality in language learning discourses. Silverstein defines language ideologies as »sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use« (Silverstein 1979, p. 193). Krumm (2021) describes language ideologies in international discourses that have shaped views on multilingualism negatively in the past, especially in societies that perceive themselves as monolingual: »Mehrsprachigkeit gilt in diesem monolingualen Verständnis als Zeichen mangelnder Loyalität gegenüber der Gemeinschaft der Nation« [›Multilingualism is considered to be a sign of a lack of loyalty towards the community of the nation in this monolingual understanding‹] (Krumm 2021, p. 164). This may also result in a negative attitude towards English as a perceived ›killer language‹ (see Krumm 2021, p. 167), even though other languages are more widespread in everyday usage in Germany. Busch points out that language ideologies often serve a particular group in power whose variety is accepted as a standard norm (Busch 2021, p. 91). Building on Althusser, she regards this norm as the centre individuals try to come close to in their individual practices. Languages, according to Busch, have their own ideological apparatus, consisting of grammar books, dictionaries, schools, and the domain of academia (cf. Busch 2021, pp. 99–100), which may contribute to notions of centrality and marginality with regard to languages. Hornsby (2015) distinguishes between »new« and »traditional« speakers in communities, pointing out how boundaries are established both by native speakers and by new learners of minority languages such as Yiddish and Breton (cf. Hornsby 2015, pp. 116–119). This could also play a role in this analysis despite the fact that German is far from a minority language.

In concrete interactions, language is used to position oneself and others in a discourse. In their discussion of so-called social positioning, Spitzmüller, Busch and Flubacher (2021) emphasise that language ideologies are not constituted freely and spontaneously at the micro level of a single conversation, but that the macro level of discourse plays a considerable role:

> »[I]t is apparent that language ideologies do not come out of nowhere. They manifest in (meta)linguistic practices, but they obviously also emerge […] from concrete (meta)linguistic or discursive practices. That is to say, it is the actors and their actions that constitute, maintain and change language ideologies, even if processes of constitution, maintenance and change exceed individual interactions by far. Although this has never really been denied in language ideology research, it still seems fair to diagnose that the influence of local practices on trans-local social structures (i.e., ideologies) is far less clear than the reverse process, i.e., the impact of ideologies on practices.« (Spitzmüller/Busch/Flubacher 2021, p. 4)

Two particular approaches to language ideologies that deal with the domain of (language) learning shall be mentioned in more detail here. The first is a comprehensive study by Akra Chowchong (2022) in which the author analyses language ideologies in language learning videos, also paying attention to some of the comments on these. There are several channels by non-linguists in which they give advice from the perspective of German native speakers (Chowchong 2022). The authority behind the linguistic advice, e.g. on how to pronounce the phoneme /r/ in order to sound like a native speaker (clearly positioned as an ideal!), is derived from their own status as native speakers. The tone of the videos is often rather prescriptive, including dramatic gestures when referring to non-standard forms (cf. Chowchong 2022, p. 13), which are not recommended to the audience. Presenting yourself as an authority in language questions may have its very own appeal for the content creators, as Barton and Lee claim:

> »Many YouTube vloggers, for example, take on new roles as language teachers to offer language lessons for free to their viewers […] This is more than taking on a teacher discourse. This is also about people transforming their lay knowledge about language into a more authoritative discourse of competent speakers of a certain language.« (Barton/Lee 2013, p. 113)

Chowchong (2022) emphasises the growing relevance of such language learning videos and the influence of language attitudes they contain. Apart from the studies by Barton and Lee (2013) and Chowchong (2022), this private context of individual online language learning with options for participating and commenting is hardly ever focused on with regard to language attitudes (cf. Chowchong 2022, p. 15) despite the popularity of such content. This is why comments on such videos will be part of the data analysed in section 3.

The second study that shall be described focuses on language attitudes among teachers and their role in education. Referring to the Hattie study, Karakaşoğlu (2021, pp. 1–2) points out the vital role of the teacher. According to the author, language attitudes of teachers in a multilingual society shape the education domain and should thus be analysed in detail, with the aim of raising teachers' awareness for research on multilingualism in education. She refers to devastating experiences made by students at schools in Bremen, who were for example confronted with insulting stereotypes about Turkey (cf. Karakaşoğlu 2021, p. 3). Changing these attitudes in accordance with current research might lead to a fairer education system. Karakaşoğlu demands a restructuring of education and of teachers' language attitudes, for example with regard to such terms as *Brennpunktschule* [›school in neighbourhoods facing challenges‹] that contribute to the othering of children attending the school and their perception as marginalised. This is particularly interesting for this study as it shall also take private language learning settings into account where the learning process is more individual and the role of the teacher is taken up by a video channel.

Before the analysis, the role of the research domains *Deutsch als Zweitsprache* (German as a Second Language, *DaZ* in the following) and *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (German as a Foreign Language, *DaF* in the following) shall be briefly discussed in this context. Dirim

and Pokitsch (2017) point out a central dilemma of migration pedagogy and specifically the term DaZ: While a lot of approaches in the field value the learners' individual experiences and try to reduce power differences (e.g. the research in Busch 2021), the very terms used in the names of these approaches (such as *second language*, *foreign language* or *learner*) may differentiate them from native speakers when the terms are applied to people and used to constitute a different, marginalised status (see also Dirim 2013). The term *second language* often refers to the acquisition of a language in an environment where the language is frequently spoken, e.g. after migrating to Germany, whereas the term *foreign language* often refers to learning contexts in an environment where other languages are spoken, e.g. when English is learned as a foreign language at a German school (cf. e.g. Kniffka/Siebert-Ott 2012, p. 28). However, as Zabel and Simon (2022, p. 81) point out, these very terms imply rather monolingual contexts and a clear-cut differentiation between countries. In teaching material such as schoolbooks, cultural issues are often brought up in the context of so-called *Landeskunde* (which might be best translated as ›regional studies‹) in DaF (to a lesser extent in DaZ) and shown as something distinct that can and needs to be learned. Zabel and Simon demand a more participatory approach that enables students (independent of the language learning context) to shape culture themselves and participate in society, e.g. to engage in economic discourses, fight for individual rights or discuss sports (cf. Zabel/Simon 2022, p. 83). For this reason, the videos and the more traditional workbooks that are discussed in section 3 shall be analysed with regard to the contexts and interactions for which they are supposed to prepare the learners.

3. Multilingualism, Language Learning and German – An Analysis Of Traces of Marginality and Centrality in Current Discourses

3.1 Data and Approach

In order to analyse discourses around multilingualism, the learning of languages and the role of German as a language in a multilingual society, a lot of different material could be discussed. For this study of marginality, centrality and language learning in particular, exemplary data from three domains were chosen:

1) *Constituting the learning process* (quantitative and qualitative approach, section 3.2): In order to see how learning and language learning are constituted in general, the German reference corpus *DeReKo* (Deutsches Referenzkorpus, Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache (2023)) is used in a quantitative approach. The corpus contains 53 billion tokens (as of 08.03.2023), with German language texts of different types.[5] The whole archive of written language is used in this study, including all subcorpora. This quantitative approach is accompanied by an example analysis of two different workbooks for adult

5 Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache (n.d.): Das Deutsche Referenzkorpus – DeReKo. https://www.ids-mannheim.de/digspra/kl/projekte/korpora/(accessed on 10.05.2023).

learners who are acquiring German as a foreign language. It shall be analysed how the learning process is viewed and what kind of participation is expected to be learned.

2) *The self-positioning of the learner* (qualitative approach, section 3.3): For this part of the study, I shall build on the research by Chowchong (2022) as presented in section 2 and focus on contexts of individual online language learning. I shall analyse comments on videos made by the channel *Easy German*, a channel that publishes videos and other material on grammatical and cultural questions, often using interviews with people the interviewers approach spontaneously on the street. Comments on four videos (*15 German expressions you should know!*,[6] *Wenn du keine Fortschritte beim Deutschlernen machst* [›If you don't make any progress learning German‹],[7] *10 Dinge, die nur in Deutschland passieren* [›Ten things that only happen in Germany‹],[8] and *How Germans define the word »Ausländer«*[9]) are analysed with regard to the construction of centrality and marginality. These videos address different areas of learning and include a video that deals explicitly with positioning by others as an »Ausländer« [›foreigner‹] and thus potentially on the margins. This is particularly interesting with regard to the overall issue of marginality and centrality of this paper.

3) *The native speaker and the role of German* (qualitative approach, section 3.4): The way speakers position native speakers and both German and other languages is also analysed with a more general focus in this study. This is done by analysing the constitution of positions in comments on several online newspaper articles.[10] The three articles themselves report on multilingualism in Germany and are commented on by anonymous users. While some users portray themselves as non-native speakers of German, others self-identify as native speakers at least implicitly. Whether this includes a claim to be a linguistic expert on the language and/or to be at the very centre of society – or even a mimicry of marginality – shall be seen with regard to some examples in the analysis.[11]

Methodically, this paper uses corpus linguistic approaches with regard to DeReKo, focusing mainly on collocations and keywords in context. The main focus, however, is on a qualitative reading of the other texts with regard to linguistic means of centralising or

6 Easy German: 15 German expressions you should know. Video published on 26.04.2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pR1s7duwLNM (accessed on 10.05.2023)

7 Easy German: Wenn du keine Fortschritte beim Deutschlernen machst. Video published on 05.03.2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EPS9xaTquI (accessed on 10.05.2023)

8 Easy German: 10 Dinge, die nur in Deutschland passieren. Video published on 07.08.2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQtPiclJPEU (accessed on 10.05.2023)

9 Easy German: How Germans define the word »Ausländer«. Video published on 29.12.2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cythVHoNxbA (accessed on 10.05.2023)

10 Kotsev, Maria (11.11.2020): »Wir tun so, als seien wir einsprachig.«. https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/petition-fordert-mehr-sprachvielfalt-auf-berlins-hauptstadtportal-6600262.html (accessed on 02.06.2023); ZEIT online/Reuters (21.02.2023): 80 Prozent der Bevölkerung sprechen zuhause ausschließlich deutsch. https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2023-02/sprachen-zu-hause-bevoelkerung-deutsch-tuerkisch#comments (accessed on 02.06.2023); Fokken, Silke/Reuters (21.02.2023): 80 Prozent der Bevölkerung sprechen zuhause immer Deutsch. https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/bildung/internationaler-tag-der-muttersprache-80-prozent-der-bevoelkerung-sprechen-zu-hause-immer-deutsch-a-d176e9fc-9f5c-4fce-9975-1cd802824aee (accessed on 02.06.2023).

11 See also Mattfeldt (2024) on discourse analysis and multilingualism.

marginalising oneself or others. The study builds on Ulla Fix' (2015) one-text-discourse analysis that allows for a deeper understanding of individual voices in a discourse. She argues that a single text can be analysed with all the methods that are usually reserved for big data in discourse analysis, and, when it comes to the choice of such a text, she distinguishes between key texts (»Schlüsseltexte«) and representative texts (»Repräsentanztexte«) that indicate how an individual or a collective constitutes their world, focusing on personal experience (cf. Fix 2015, p. 323). The latter is of high interest for a discourse that deals with marginality, centrality and experiences of both. The texts used here are treated as representative texts from different domains of the German language learning discourse and are analysed with regard to structures that are used for a positioning in the centre or at the margins of a group.[12]

3.2 The Status of the Learning Process

For the first part of this study, the entire archive of written texts in DeReKo was used as a starting point in order to see how learning languages and learning German in particular is depicted in a corpus that consists of a variety of different texts. The corpus was accessed via Cosmas II.[13] Since the data offers a broad perspective on different text types and domains, this may provide information about the general discourse concerning language learning in German publications. Occurrences of the terms *Deutsch* ›German‹ and *lernen* ›to learn‹ within the same sentence were searched for in the corpus, as well as *Sprache(n)* ›language(s)‹ and *lernen* ›to learn‹. The collocates of these combinations were then calculated (using the tool built by Belica (1995), copyright: Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache). The first 50 collocates respectively shall be shown in the following:

Sprache(n) + lernen:[14] *fremd, Kind, Englisch, Kultur, verschieden, ander-, leicht, Französisch, spielerisch, Schüler, Italienisch, Fremdsprache, kennen, Ausland, zwei, Latein, sprechen, spanisch, reisen, Dolmetsch* (Institut), neu, können, studieren, beherrschen, Muttersprache, Deutsch, Russisch, romanisch, Computer, früh, Kurs, viel, Reise, Mathematik, Schule, Naturwissenschaft, chinesisch, Sprache, Vokabel, Möglichkeit, slawisch, unterschiedlich, Arabisch, lesen (Buch), häufig, Volkshochschule, akzentfrei, täglich, gleichzeitig*

[›*foreign, child, English, culture, different, other, easy, French, playful, student, Italian, foreign language, (to) know, foreign country, two, Latin, speak, Spanish, travel, interpreting (institute), new, can, study, master, mother tongue, German, Russian, Romance, computer, early, course, much, travel, mathematics, school, science, Chinese, language, vocabulary, possibility, Slavic, differing, Arabic, read (book), frequent, adult education, accent-free, daily, simultaneously*‹]

12 For a reflection upon multilingualism discourse and Fix' one-text discourse analysis, see also Mattfeldt (accepted).

13 COSMAS II (Corpus Search, Management and Analysis System): http://www2.ids-mannheim.de/cosmas2/ © 1991-2022 Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache, Mannheim (accessed on 15.05.2023)

14 The list contains the first 50 collocates of the search for *Sprache(n)* und *lernen* within the same sentence. Frequent collocates of these words that were indicated as relevant are given in parentheses.

Deutsch + lernen:[15] *Englisch (Französisch, Mathematik), Kind, schnell (möglich), Fremdsprache, Schule, Mama (Sprachkurs, Sprachprojekt, Papa), Französisch, Muttersprache (beherrschen), Schüler, gut, Sprache, fleißig, Mathe, Ausländer, Mathematik (Fach, Erdkunde), Italienisch, Sprachkurs, Kurs, türkisch (zuerst), Russisch, wollen (unbedingt), richtig (nie, mal), müssen, Integrationskurs (besuchen), Zweitsprache (interkulturell), Kindergarten, Zuwanderer, Migrantenkind, erst (mal), integrieren (Lebensunterhalt), haben, Willkommensklasse, spielerisch (Halbtag), hier, Latein (Griechisch), Institut (Bopparder), perfekt, zuerst (dann), Mutter, intensiv, akzentfrei, sollen, rasch, Brocken, ausländisch (Fortsetzungskurs, Mitbürger), Unterricht, Fach, Klasse, Eltern*

[›*English (French, math), child, fast (possible), foreign language, school, mom (language course, language project, dad), French, mother tongue (master), student, good, language, diligent, math, foreigner, math (subject, geography), Italian, language course, course, Turkish (first), Russian, want (unconditional), properly (never, finally), must, integration course (attend), second language (intercultural), kindergarten, immigrant, immigrant child, at first, integrate (livelihood), to have, welcome class, playful (half day), here, Latin (Greek), institute (Bopparder), perfect, first (then), mother, intensive, accent-free, should, quickly, scraps, foreign (continuation course, fellow citizen), teaching, subject, class, parents*‹]

The collocates can of course only give a general insight into the way language learning is constituted; however, a few patterns might be seen in these terms alone.

Language learning in general is constituted as something that is done in an organised way (cf. words like *studieren, Kurs, Volkshochschule*) and leads to both formalised certificates and a widening of one's horizon (cf. words like *reisen, lesen, Möglichkeit*). The languages listed as collocates include mostly languages that can be learned at school in Germany, such as English, French, Latin or Italian. Languages that are more present as home languages in Germany (such as Turkish or Arabic) follow later in the list. Sometimes the cooccurrences refer not to the learning of Turkish as a foreign language, but to expectations of children who speak Turkish to learn German.

The cooccurrences with regard to learning German are similar, although some suggest a slightly different perspective. The collocates indicate that the focus is on concrete norms (e.g. *richtig, perfekt, akzentfrei*) that need to be learned rather than on participation, which may lead to a marginalisation of new speakers (see also Hornsby 2015). The groups that are referred to in these contexts are migrants or refugees, of whom this effort to learn a language seems to be expected. There is a tendency towards formalised learning environments with expressions like *Integrationskurs* ›integration course‹, *Willkommensklasse* ›welcome class‹ and the mentioning of an institute. Learning German seems to be constituted as obligatory for those who migrate or flee to the country, whereas language learning in general is more explicitly linked to concepts of participation and mobility. Thus, the depiction of learning a language may alternate between a skill that offers chances on the one hand and a necessity without which one may not be able to stay

15 The list contains the first 50 collocates of the search for *deutsch* und *lernen* within the same sentence. Frequent collocates of these words are given in parentheses.

in the country or be excluded from social and economic life on the other hand.[16] To sum up, language learning may be seen as a process towards centrality that itself positions the person who is learning the language at the margins. This is particularly important with regard to the first condition of mimicry of marginality: German native speakers are de facto depicted as the centre for language learners, meaning that an order seems to exist (see the introduction to this special issue by Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla) and that the privileged position within this order is generally indicated to be that of the native speaker.

This corpus data was taken as a first starting point and accompanied by more qualitative steps. Two exemplary workbooks for learning German directed at adult learners were also analysed with respect to aspects of centrality and marginality in the texts and exercises. *Aspekte neu: Mittelstufe Deutsch* (Koithan et al. 2017) is a workbook for DaF learners and explains a variety of grammatical features. *Mit Erfolg zum TestDaF B2-C1* (Fazlić-Walter/Wegner 2021) focuses on test preparation for an institutionalised test in order to gain access to a German university. While they differ considerably in their content and in their aims, they both focus not only on grammar and vocabulary but follow a more functional approach that shows how the acquired language skills can be used in contexts that are relevant in the domains in which the learners want to work or which they wish to study. The workbook *Aspekte neu* for example includes texts and exercises on online shopping, dealing with co-workers or exams as well as content which could be subsumed under the heading of *Landeskunde* (e.g. information on former chancellor Angela Merkel, cf. Koithan et al. 2017, p. 52). The content is always linked to the lessons on grammar and vocabulary. While these exercises aim at enabling the students to participate in German society and thus at enabling centrality, the ›otherness‹ of the learner and their marginal position are made explicit in some exercises that aim at a comparison or ask students to present songs or poems from their own country (»aus Ihrem Land«, Koithan et al. 2017, p. 57). Once again, a discursive order with established positions becomes visible.

The *TestDaF*-workbook aims at a particular test, resulting in a constitution of language as a precondition for participation. It is implicitly clear that as long as these formalised requirements are not met, a lot of opportunities remain inaccessible. Gaining access to the centre (in this case a university education) seems to be the main focus of this book as well, with exercises that resemble academic tasks, e.g. summarising a journalistic or short academic text. The learner is also expected to participate in situations where one's own culture comes into play (e.g. when students are asked to talk about typical food in their country of origin in German, Fazlić-Walter/Wegner 2021, p. 93). While such exercises constitute the learner as an expert (which might help with motivation), they also reinforce the otherness of the learner who, in that moment, seems not yet to be at the centre of the academic society they want to enter. It also suggests that the norms for performing certain tasks are unchangeable and are not to be questioned if the learners wish to be successful. Some of the exercises may suggest the expectation that learners will still have to face being perceived as an outsider even when they have

16 See also Mattfeldt (in prep.) on language images and language learning.

successfully completed the test, e.g. when dialogue scenes with other students are imagined and differences are focused upon. The hegemonic order (as a precondition for a possible mimicry of marginalisation, see Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla in this issue) once again becomes visible.

Learning a language, as we have seen from this first part of the analysis by looking at both big data and exemplary learning material, seems to be constituted as a formalised, norm-oriented process, not taking into account spontaneous or individual ways of learning and family contexts. A formalised language education is depicted as something that is necessary to gain access to participation in society. It remains unclear whether learning a language can ever be finished, i.e. whether the marginalised status of a learner can ever be left behind. This brings us to the (self-)image of the learner, which shall be analysed in section 3.3.

3.3 The Position of the Learner

How do learners of a language (and specifically of German) position themselves and their learning process with regard to centrality and marginality, and how is this manifested linguistically? In order to analyse this, the study returns to the aforementioned language learning videos on Youtube and specifically the comments on these videos.

The comments on the videos indicate appreciation for this more individualised learning material and acceptance of the expert status of the *Easy German* channel creators – specifically Kari and Janusz, who lead the interviews, act in small sketches or explain the meaning of particular expressions or behaviours that might be encountered in Germany.

In the comment sections of prototypical videos by this channel that deal with German expressions and their functions, we find examples of self-positioning as a learner of German. However, learning is constituted a little differently here than in the data analysed in section 3.2.

One similarity is the positioned aim of gaining formalised certificates (e.g. the C2 certificate in the following example) and thus access to further possibilities of participation:

(1) Mein Ziel ist mein Deutsch zu perfektionieren und C2Zertfikat zu bekommen. Easy German spielt eine große Rolle dabei, jeden Tag ein Video hilft mir am Ball bleiben. [17]

[›My aim is to bring my German to perfection and to get the C2 certificate. Easy German plays a big role in that, a video a day helps me to stay motivated.‹]

A lot of the comments point out the challenges of learning a language; however, being a learner is also constituted as something joyful and interesting. Several users position

17 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pR1s7duwLNM (accessed on 16.05.2023), comment section. All quotes are cited in their original spelling.

themselves as highly motivated due to the content in the videos they enjoy. The learning material is constituted as important, e.g. in (2):

(2) Almost 20 years ago I bought the Berlitz »Learn to Speak German« program and spent months learning the language. I got good enough to basically converse and read things, but I always struggled with hearing comprehension and more everyday stuff, especially keeping up to date. This Youtube channel is perfect; it's everything a learner needs.[18]

The user points out the relevance of learning material that enables them to understand »everyday stuff« and current topics (»keeping up to date«) and contrasts these modern and more individualised channels with the material that was available when they started learning German. While institutionalised learning is still mentioned in a lot of the comments, being a learner is also constituted as something more individual and with more agency than could have been expected from the results in section 3.2. In these self-positionings, the learner is not just a vessel for grammar and vocabulary (although this still remains important in the discussions), but has individual interests and actively seeks out learning material with which they wish to work. In this context, the users become experts of learning as well and may thus leave the marginal status behind, e.g. by giving each other advice like watching the videos at a slower speed if one finds them too fast.

Motivation in learning a language is portrayed as a key factor, partly because learning German is described as difficult (e.g. »You make German sound like a fairly simple and straightforward language that one could start speaking fluently in within a matter of weeks. But, Deutsche Sprache, schwere Sprache [›German language, difficult language‹]!«[19]). This is especially true for comments on the video that discusses a possible phase during which there is no progress. This video is particularly interesting in itself when it comes to the role of the learner: teachers of German as well as learners describe how they dealt with feelings of frustration when they were not progressing as fast as they would have wished. The learners constitute themselves as experts not only of German, but also and especially of language learning. The lines between expert and learner seem to become blurred or are at least not constituted as important; marginality and centrality are not as clear-cut as one might expect.

This possible divide however becomes especially interesting with regard to the video *How Germans define the word Ausländer*.[20] This video is an example of the formula often used in the videos of the channel, namely asking people a question in a public place (e.g. on the street) and recording their answers. Some interviewees seem hesitant to define the term *Ausländer*, which may be due to a perception of negative connotations and a reluctance to participate in a way of othering people. The expression *Ausländer* seems to potentially be a linguistic means of constituting marginality in this discourse domain.

18 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pR1s7duwLNM (accessed on 16.05.2023), comment section.
19 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pR1s7duwLNM (accessed on 16.05.2023), comment section.
20 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cythVHoNxbA (accessed on 16.05.2023)

When giving a definition, some point to the length of the stay as an indicator of when you lose the status of *Ausländer* (which implicitly constitutes it as a potentially transitory status at the margins that one may want to leave behind); others name acquiring proficiency in German as a factor or formalised processes such as gaining German citizenship as an endpoint to being a foreigner. Interestingly, one of the channel creators, Janusz, talks about his own experiences of living in Germany for a long time after growing up in Poland, coming to the conclusion »Ich bin ein Mensch mit allem, was dazugehört, auch mit meiner eigenen Geschichte« [›I am a human with everything that encompasses, with my own history, too‹].[21] Users in the comment section of this video like to refer to this quote which negates the whole term *Ausländer* and the implied idea of centre and margin. Marginality and centrality may be important ways of imagining the world, but in these very individualised learning contexts they may become less relevant for self-positioning. What seems to be more important in the data analysed here is the confident depiction of an individual biography.

However, several of the comments below the video also indicate for how long people are perceived as foreigners by others and how this has impacted them (mainly negatively):

(3) Some people in the video said that you're not an Ausländer if you're born in Germany and while that's a theoretically correct definition, that's not the reality in Germany. I'm 28 years old and was born in Germany, just as my parents were born in Germany. My grandparents immigrated from norther Italy (mother's side) and Croatia (father's side) but even they speak perfect German, just as myself. But I'm still called an Ausländer by the Germans.[22]

(4) I live in Austria and I have several ›Austrian‹ friends who were born in Austria but from different cultural backgrounds ranging from the Middle East to Africa. None of them said they are accepted as Austrians, but always get questions like why is your Austrian-German so perfect or the common where are you REALLY from.[23]

These users mention othering within German or Austrian society (for example with questions about the users' origins or compliments on a »perfect« accent), even though they fulfil all the criteria that people in the video name for not being a foreigner (e.g. »born in Germany« or »born in Austria«). Language, it seems, is just one factor when it comes to marginalisation by others in a multilingual society.

Others, however, adopt the term *Ausländer* or point out confidently how different personal language biographies can be, in a similar way to the video creator who was interviewed:

21 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cythVHoNxbA (accessed on 16.05.2023, minute 9:30)
22 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cythVHoNxbA (accessed on 16.05.2023), comment section.
23 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cythVHoNxbA (accessed on 16.05.2023), comment section.

(5) It's true; we're all just human beings on this earth. The idea of a country is a man made concept. I think you are how you perceive yourself to be.[24]

(6) Ich komme aus Brasilian, und wir sind ein Volk, das sich aus verschiedenen Völkern zusammensetzt, darunter auch Deutsche. Das Wort »Estrangeiro« (Ausländer auf Portugiesisch) hat aus meiner Sicht also keine negative Bedeutung.[25]

[›I am from Brazil and we are a people made up of several peoples, Germans among them. So the word ›Estrangeiro‹ (foreigner in Portuguese) does not have a negative meaning for me.‹]

The concept of countries as arbitrary constructs (»a man made concept«) is evoked in (5), inspired partly by the answers given in the video, partly by the users' own beliefs and experiences. Others reclaim the term *Ausländer* in order to define themselves with regard to their identity and roots. Language ideologies also play a role in this context; sometimes language is portrayed as a relevant factor when it comes to identity, sometimes other factors seem to be more important, such as where and how formative years such as the time of adolescence were spent.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that the native speaker ideal that often shapes language ideologies, specifically when it comes to teaching (see Holliday 2017, Kramsch 1996), is also present in the videos, since the interviewees and the interviewers are often implicitly or explicitly positioned as native speakers. However, learners of German are interviewed as well (or in the case of at least one interviewer, Janusz, are part of the channel's team) and position themselves as experts on German language questions. Interestingly, the channel is even used as learning material by people who position themselves as native speakers:

(7) Ich bin gebürtige Deutsche ohne jegliche Sprachprobleme, aber finde eure Videos SO SPANNEND und unterhaltsam! Ich liebe sie! :D Schon komisch wie wenig man sich bewusst ist, wie vielseitig manche Worte hier benutzt werden.[26]

[›I am German-born without any language problems, but I find your videos SO EXCITING and entertaining! I love them! :D Rather funny how little you realise in what a versatile way some words are used here.‹]

This brings a rather interesting perspective into the discussion of (language) learning: Learning a language, whether it is one's first language or a second or foreign one, could be seen as something that is never completed (which would make an imagined centre

24 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cythVHoNxbA (accessed on 16.05.2023), comment section.
25 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cythVHoNxbA (accessed on 16.05.2023), comment section.
26 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pR1s7duwLNM (accessed on 17.05.2023), comment section, highlighting in the original.

of language perfection unattainable for anybody). Native speakers may also learn more about their first language by using learning materials, and some seem to enjoy doing so (»unterhaltsam«). Language awareness in particular can still be increased at any point in language learning. The videos and the description of the usage by the viewers suggest that we need to see the concept of learners and learning as something far broader than just formalised courses and certificates, even though these remain important for participation in a society. This may indicate that there are parts of the discourse where neither a claiming of centrality nor one of marginality (mimicked or not) plays a role; if everyone is perceived as a lifelong learner, this may question traditional assumptions about language learning and its status at the margins.

3.4 The Status of German as a Language: Discussions on News Websites

After taking a look at the role of learning and focusing on how users position themselves as learners in online language learning contexts, a closer look shall be taken at positioning on news websites. While the comment sections of the videos attract people currently learning a language or at least interested in language learning (see section 3.3), the users here comment on articles that deal with statistics about language use, e.g. how widespread the usage of German is at home or in work environments. People commenting on news websites may identify as native speakers, multilingual and/or language learners, and they may also have internalised different language ideologies that they constitute in their comments. This part of the study is where constitutions of marginality which may not appear to be logical (and might be a mere mimicry) play a role, whereas other constitutions of marginality such as in section 3.3 are substantiated by what could be seen in the quantitative approach.

A lot of the users who comment on the three articles mentioned in section 3.1 do not explicitly position themselves as native or non-native speakers of German, even though sometimes this becomes implicitly clear. However, some of them refer to regional dialects when discussing the variety with which they feel most comfortable. Some users reflect on this, questioning a language ideology that regards language as homogeneous and static:

(8) DIE deutsche Sprache gibt es nicht. Es gibt ein hochdeutsch und allerlei Dialekte, welche teilweise sehr weit weg sind vom hochdeutsch. Zudem ist die Sprache durchsetzt mit fremdländischen Begriffen.[27]

[›There is no ONE German language. There is standard High German and all kinds of dialects, some of which are very far away from the standard. Furthermore, the language is full of foreign expressions.‹]

27 https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2023-02/sprachen-zu-hause-bevoelkerung-deutsch-tuerkisch#comments (accessed on 24.05.2023).

However, we do find comments that differentiate clearly between languages and, more importantly, regard German as threatened by other languages. Partly, this refers to English as a language that is considered particularly important in business contexts:[28]

(9) Ich glaube dass die Zeit abgelaufen ist in der Deutsch noch eine relevante Bedeutung hat. Selbst in meinem Berufsleben spielt sich überwiegend alles in Englisch ab.[29]

[›I think the time in which German still had some relevance has passed. Even in my professional environment everything happens in English.‹]

Here we see a first example of a positioning of German as marginal and no longer in the centre. With regard to language statistics, English has of course gained a lot of significance in the last decades. However, as could be seen in section 1, even in comparison to this world language, German still remains very widespread and, as we have seen, sought after as a language that can be learned.

Despite the articles' focus on the fact that German is spoken predominantly in a lot of households, some users still position German as a marginal language. For the most part, these comments broach the issue of family languages in a migration society, seeing German as marginalised or on the way towards the linguistic and social margins:

(10) Die deutsche Sprache ist auf dem Rückzug[30]

[›German is on the retreat.‹]

(11) Türkisch, Russisch, Arabisch kann ich aus meinem hessischen Lebensumfeld bestätigen – leider. Weil nicht nur die Sprache mitgebracht wird.[31]

[›I can confirm Turkish, Arabic, Russian from my own Hessian environment – unfortunately. Because it is not just the language that is brought along.‹]

»Rückzug« in (10) is used as a military metaphor which constitutes languages as conflicting and in war with each other. The concept of language in the second example is slightly

28 See also Mattfeldt (in prep.) on the image of English constituted in German-language media; mostly, English is characterised as a language that is of use with regard to a personal career and to business contexts.

29 https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2023-02/sprachen-zu-hause-bevoelkerung-deutsch-tuerkisch#comments (accessed on 24.05.2023).

30 https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2023-02/sprachen-zu-hause-bevoelkerung-deutsch-tuerkisch#comments (accessed on 24.05.2023).

31 https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/bildung/internationaler-tag-der-muttersprache-80-prozent-der-bevoelkerung-sprechen-zu-hause-immer-deutsch-a-d176e9fc-9f5c-4fce-9975-1cd802824aee (accessed on 24.05.2023), comment section.

different: Here, languages are portrayed as brought along (»mitgebracht«) when people migrate, like a piece of baggage, along with other things (»nicht nur die Sprache«).

In fact, while a lot of the users discuss issues of language and language learning, some focus on cultural aspects and constitute both the German language and specific cultural aspects such as German folk songs as marginalised and threatened by languages other than German. This seems to be a mimicry of marginality (see Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla 2022) when regarding the actual statistics quoted in the articles and the presence of German in everyday life and media (see section 1). German is in fact, as the articles that are commented on argue, very present in German families as well as in everyday public conversation. However, the presentation of data is also questioned: One user argues that the authors of the article could just as easily have written that 20 percent of people were not speaking German at home and that this depiction was an example of a tendency to ›see the world through rose-coloured glasses‹ (»viele sehen ja lieber durch die rosarote Brille«).[32] Mimicking marginality may constitute the speaker as more knowledgeable than others, which may contribute to a prestige of the marginalised position. Making German visible in this way may also inspire others to feel marginalised and thus willing to re-establish a linguistic hegemony that (especially with regard to the findings in section 3.2) never really seemed in danger.

It should be pointed out that a rather marginal part of social life – the private life of families, without any political or economic power in a narrow sense – is politicised in the news by looking at and reporting on the use of language in private environments. Migration is often discussed in the comments, sometimes with expectations towards migrants and their language habits both in private and public settings. The marginal and otherwise rather protected sphere of family is put in the spotlight here and thus rendered central (see also Mattfeldt accepted). Bringing up an aspect that usually remains within the private sphere in these public media articles may partly be what invites commentators to evaluate these choices and to see multilingualism as a threat to an otherwise rather undisputed hegemony in a mimicry of marginality.

The ideal of the native speaker (cf. Holliday 2017) remains very present in these comments but is also questioned in some instances. This becomes apparent e.g. when a user postulates:

(12) Und wenn viele Türken, Russen und Araber selbst in der zweiten Generation nicht akzentfrei Deutsch sprechen können, dann weisst du welche Sprache zu Hause die vorherrschende ist![33]

[›And when a lot of Turkish, Russish and Arabic people cannot speak German without an accent even in the second generation, you know which language dominates at home!‹]

32 https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2023-02/sprachen-zu-hause-bevoelkerung-deutsch-tuerkisch#comments (accessed on 24.05.2023)

33 https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2023-02/sprachen-zu-hause-bevoelkerung-deutsch-tuerkisch#comments (accessed on 24.05.2023).

The quote suggests that the learning process can only ever truly be over once a language is mastered without any accent (»akzentfrei«). From such a perspective, an accent seems to marginalise automatically even if all other aspects of learning such as vocabulary or grammar are mastered with proficiency on a high level (see also Hornsby 2015, pp. 110–112). Others, however, point out in replies to this comment that this would include dialects as well and take a more functional approach to learning a language and the status of the learner, focusing on understanding:

(13) »Entscheidend« ist doch, dass Deutsch so gut beherrscht wird, wie es durchschnittliche (!) Deutschmuttersprachler auch tun. So dass man einander reibungslos versteht. Dass der Akzent im Alltag eine Rolle spielen sollte, wäre für mich ein neuer Aspekt, um es nicht Spitzfindigkeit zu nennen.[34]

[›»Decisive« is still that people are as proficient in German as average (!) native speakers of German. So one can understand each other smoothly. It would be a new aspect, not to say sophistry, for me if the accent played a role in everyday life.‹]

All in all, the hegemony of the native speaker and of German as the most central language in Germany is presumed and portrayed in the news website comments as something to be expected, but under pressure and under threat of being marginalised, even though the data itself that is discussed in the articles suggest a very different situation. Still, marginality is claimed (or mimicked!) in some of the comments. This may have to do with the phenomenon which Warnke, Bonacchi and Seiler Brylla describe in the introduction to this issue, namely the wish to make one's own (central) position visible in the same way marginalised positions have become more visible recently, e.g. in contexts of postcolonialism. Some users view language as something that should be mastered according to a norm including standard pronunciation and grammar (in agreement with the language ideologies Busch (2021) describes), while others focus on a more functional approach and see efficient communication as key. Still, German seems to be the unquestioned central language that needs to be learned, which could also be seen in the positioning of the learner in the workbooks. However, making the language even more visible using the means of mimicry of marginality may actually mask its hegemony and thereby stabilise its status further (see Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla in this issue).

4. Conclusion – Learning, Multilingualism and Marginality?

In order to see whether a claim of marginalisation is a mere mimicry or not, several instances from different discourse domains have to be regarded, which is why this pa-

34 https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2023-02/sprachen-zu-hause-bevoelkerung-deutsch-tuerkisch#comments (accessed on 24.05.2023).

per focused on the image of language learning in German discourse as a whole by analysing representative texts from different areas. Overall, and specifically with regard to the quantitative part of this study, learning German is portrayed as something that is expected of migrants in Germany and as necessary for the integration into an assumed centre in order to overcome marginality. Learning, as it is depicted in the data in DeReKo and the workbooks, is constructed as a task done at the margins with the aim of entering the centre of society. Language learning seems to imply aiming at perfection in domains such as grammar or vocabulary and is constituted as restricted to specific institutions. By and large, language learning is positioned as more of a challenge to those who wish to integrate into society than something that might be relevant for an assumed majority of German native speakers. The native speaker ideal (see Holliday 2017) is very present in this discourse as a suggested norm set by institutions but also language users.

The qualitative parts of the study, however, also show the self-constitutions of language users in these contexts. A marginal status may be experienced by learners due to positioning by others but also be questioned or turned around: Terms like *Ausländer* can be redefined; complex cultural and linguistic biographies may be constituted as part of an identity that defies the notions of centre and margin. Language seems to be only one factor in marginalisation, which suggests that there is a variety of strategies for marginalising others. The reception of the videos and the popularity of the channel indicate both the ongoing desire of a lot of people to learn German and the role which individualised digital learning processes play. This is a domain in learning that will in all probability become even more important and more central to language education in the future.

On the other hand, the last part of the study indicates that by some users at least, German is perceived as on the verge of being marginalised. As we have seen in section 1, German is so prominent and widespread as a language that this claim could be seen as a mimicry of marginality (Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla 2022) with regard to the language situation as a whole. Constituting German as both integral to take part in society and threatened (which may be seen as contradictory, especially considering the quantitative findings of this study) may serve different functions. Doing so may increase the pressure on language learners or it may constitute the speaker as a realist who knows the ›real‹ language situation best. It might also serve to create a distinction between the self-positioning as a native speaker, who masters standard accent and grammar (and thus should be in the centre according to this constitution), and people who are constituted as permanently on the margins due to a language learning process that might never be over. As the introduction to this special issue points out, the mimicry of marginality may also have to do with wishes of the privileged centre to become more visible in discourse (see Warnke/Bonacchi/Seiler Brylla in this issue). The normative order of German as the prevalent language in Germany seems to be seen as precarious by some. By portraying German as a marginalised language (at least in some comments), such a strategic self-marginalisation may draw attention to German as a language, making it even more visible than it actually is in everyday practices and discourses. However, as the teaching material, the comments criticising accents and the discussions of othering in the context

of the videos indicate, the hegemonial order seems to be very present in language learning discourses, despite some claims of marginalisation.

Language learning itself is generally still constituted as a process on the margins, which contrasts with complex language learning biographies, the confident owning of the learning process by a lot of users, and the usage of learning materials even by native speakers. However, the perception of the learning process may shift due to the increasing usage of online learning materials that learners choose themselves and that allow them to communicate their individual needs and experiences. Maybe in some domains, (language) learning is on the way from being perceived as a transitional phase and a marked state to a central and ever-ongoing process in a multilingual society. The data analysed in this study however also suggest that the ideal of the native speaker and the perception of learning as a marginal process which aims at a hardly reachable centre are still very present in the current discourse.

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»My Wallet, My Choice« – Mimicry of Marginality In an Online Community of Male Separatists

Abstract: Backlash and hostility towards feminism are on the rise, as demonstrated by the growth of the ›manosphere‹: a loose network of men's social media communities who argue that men are the real victims of sexism and feminists conceal these facts (Ging 2019). One manosphere group, »Men Going Their Own Way« (MGTOW), argue that heterosexual relationships are oppressive to men and consequently should be avoided. In this paper, I take a discourse-historical approach to critical discourse studies (Reisigl/Wodak 2016) to examine how MGTOW construct themselves as marginalised or oppressed. I identify four salient discursive strategies: appropriation of feminist discourse; role reversal; statistics; and self-presentation as unpopular.

Keywords: manosphere, male separatism, antifeminism, sexism, discourse-historical approach

Zusammenfassung: Antifeminismus nimmt zu – besonders in den sozialen Medien. Die ›Manosphäre‹ ist ein loses Netzwerk von virtuellen Gemeinschaften für Männer, die argumenterien, dass Männer die eigentlichen Opfer von Sexismus sind und dass Feministinnen diese Tatsache verheimlichen. Eine Gruppe in der Manosphäre heisst »Men Going Their Own Way« (MGTOW), diese argumentiert, dass heterosexuelle Beziehungen repressiv für Männer sind und Männer Frauen dementsprechend meiden sollten. In diesem Artikel benutzte ich den »Discourse-Historical Approach« aus den »Critical Discourse Studies« (Reisigl/Wodak, 2016), um zu erforschen, wie MGTOW sich als marginalisiert darstellen. Ich identifiziere hierbei vier diskursive Strategien: Aneignung von feministischen Diskursen; Rollentausch; Statistiken und Selbstdarstellung als unbeliebt.

Schlagwörter: Manosphäre, männlicher Separatismus, Antifeminismus, Sexismus, Discourse-Historical Approach

1 Introduction

The feminist movement has always been met with forms of backlash, from anti-suffrage organizations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Kimmel 1987) to spectacular networked harassment campaigns directed at individual feminists on social media in the present day (Marwick/Caplan 2018). Men's rights advocates and antifeminists position masculinity, particularly White masculinity, as under attack due to feminist advancement and claim that White, heterosexual men are the ›new minorities‹ or the ›real victims‹ of racial and sexual discrimination (Kimmel 2013). The term *misandry* is used as an equivalent term to *misogyny* (Marwick/Caplan 2018). Such ideas are particularly gaining traction among young men. For example, surveys by UK charity *Hope Not*

Hate have found that 50 % of young men surveyed between 18–24 agreed that »feminism has gone too far and makes it harder for young men to succeed« (Carter 2020, p. 42), while 52 % of 16–17 year old boys surveyed reported a positive opinion of antifeminist influencer Andrew Tate (Hope Not Hate 2023, p. 40).

A key site for the contemporary mobilisation of antifeminist backlash is the so-called ›manosphere‹: a loose network of men's social media communities united by an antifeminist ideology (Marwick/Caplan 2018). Members of the manosphere claim to have taken the ›red pill‹ which allows them to see the ›truth‹ that men are oppressed in contemporary society, while everyone else remains ›blue pilled‹ and ignorant (Ging 2019). Academic research into the manosphere typically focuses on four major groups: men's rights advocates; involuntary celibates, or incels, who perceive themselves as unable to attract a romantic or sexual partner; pick-up artists, or PUAs, who share strategies for the seduction of women; and »Men Going Their Own Way«, or MGTOW, who are the focus of this paper. MGTOW, as male separatists, argue that heterosexual relationships are a site of oppression for men, for example due to societal expectations to be breadwinners in relationships and institutional bias against men during divorce hearings and child custody disputes, and consequently must be avoided (Lin 2017; Wright/Trott/Jones 2020). Separatism is practiced to varying degrees – while some MGTOW continue to pursue casual relationships but refrain from serious commitments such as marriage, others practice celibacy and avoid women as much as possible (Lin 2017). Although MGTOW position themselves as victims of women, the group do not campaign for institutional changes that would grant men more rights or protections in relationships or improve men's status as a social group. Rather, MGTOW are highly individualistic and pursue self-improvement and empowerment through minimising interactions with women (Koller/Krendel/Aiston 2023; Wright/Trott/Jones 2020). Despite their separatist aims, research finds that women are central to MGTOW discourse. For example, Wright, Trott, and Jones (2020, p. 920) found that the most frequently discussed topic on a MGTOW forum was women, with 59 % of posts mentioning women in some way. Moreover, the majority (61 %) of these mentions of women were misogynistic. In another study, the same authors studied tweets by MGTOW Twitter accounts and found that 29 % of tweets could be classified as harassing (Jones/Trott/Wright 2020). Of these harassing tweets, 38 % were coded as »sexist« which included tweets that depicted women as inferior to men, as selfish or manipulative, or as sexual objects (pp. 1911–1912).

Therefore, this paper will examine antifeminist backlash within the specific community of MGTOW, focussing on the discursive strategies used to mimic marginality, position men as victims of sexist marginalisation, and legitimise an antifeminist ideology. In section two, I provide the background to this study by reviewing literature on MGTOW and antifeminist backlash; in section three I explain the methods of data collection and the theoretical framework of the discourse-historical approach; section four discusses four chosen discursive strategies used by MGTOW to construct themselves as oppressed (appropriation of feminist discourse; accusation of double standards and engagement in role reversals; use of statistics; and self-presentation as suppressed or unpopular); finally, in section five I conclude by discussion the implications of these findings and proposing areas for further research.

2 Background

MGTOW and the broader manosphere must be understood as part of a longer history of men's movements and resistance to feminism. According to Messner (1998), the contemporary American men's rights movement has roots in feminism and movements for women's liberation. Feminist critiques of women's subordinate role in society resonated for some men, who formed their own men's liberation movement and posited parallel critiques of men's prescribed role as breadwinner and provider. However, feminists at the time critiqued men's liberationists for their individualistic focus, their positing of a false symmetry between men and women's roles, and lack of emphasis on men's exploitation of women (hooks 2015; Messner 1998). Eventually, the men's movement would split between a pro-feminist men's liberation movement and an antifeminist men's rights movement, who engaged in hostile backlash towards feminism and argued that men were more oppressed than women (Messner 1998). Men's rights groups mobilised around issues such as custody and alimony arrangements during divorce settlements, male victims of rape and intimate partner violence, and men's mental and physical health, and such issues remain core concerns for the present day manosphere (Hodapp 2017). For example, Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) discussed how men's rights websites presented men as in crisis yet ignored by mainstream society, delegitimised women's issues as trivial, and derogated feminism as the root cause of men's oppression.

Antifeminism is often conceptualised as reactive, functioning as a countermovement to feminism – as the popularity of feminism increases, as does the popularity of misogyny and antifeminist backlash (Banet-Weiser 2018; Blais/Dupuis-Deri 2012). In this sense, resistance to feminism may be indicative of feminist progress and success (Flood/Dragiewicz/Pease 2021), as it »only becomes necessary when feminism is strong« (Jordan 2016, p. 22). Feminism is thought to be undergoing a fourth wave marked by increased use of digital media (Munro 2013) and is increasingly institutionalised and incorporated into state governance and corporations (Halley et al. 2018; Lilja/Johansson 2018). However, this institutionalisation may enable new opportunities for backlash. For example, feminism may be accused of »being hegemonic… of having power while claiming to be powerless« (Lilja/Johansson 2018, p. 90). As feminism becomes more visible and popular, this generates further resistance against feminist resistance.

Backlash and resistance to feminism may also attributed to sociological and economic changes, whereby male rites of passage have been »fragmented« (Ward 2020, p. 201) and hegemonic masculinity has been »destabilized« due to factors such as deindustrialisation and decline of the single-income male breadwinner household (Messner/Montez de Oca 2005, p. 1882). Kimmel (2013, p. 18) argued that antifeminist backlash is motivated by feelings of »aggrieved entitlement« in other words »the sense that those benefits to which you believe yourself entitled have been snatched away«. When this entitlement (e.g., to jobs, to positions of power) is thwarted, men may respond with feelings of anger and resentment towards women and minoritised groups who are perceived as taking what does not rightfully belong to them and aim to reassert traditional, patriarchal ideologies of masculinity. Furthermore, media accounts of a »masculinity crisis« position men as

»under siege as a result of feminist reforms« (Flood/Dragiewicz/Pease 2021, p. 401) or as victims of »war« on men and boys (Ward 2015, p. 201). Gender relations are presented as a zero-sum game, in which positive developments for women and girls, such as increasing educational attainment, are used as evidence that men and boys are losing out (Kimmel 2013; McDowell 2000).

Regarding the empirical claims and normative positions of antifeminists, Jordan (2016, p. 32) distinguishes two main types, though both are »explicitly hostile« to feminism. The first strand posits that feminism has ›gone too far‹ and tipped the scales so that now it is men who face the majority of sexist discrimination and consequently collective antifeminist gender politics are needed to achieve ›true‹ gender equality. On the other hand, the second strand posits that gender equality is not a desirable goal and collective antifeminist gender politics are needed to achieve a society which is explicitly patriarchal, but better overall. Furthermore, Flood, Dragiewicz, and Pease (2021, p. 395) outline several typical forms of antifeminist backlash, including outright denial of male privilege and gender inequality, disavowal of responsibility for those issues that are recognised to exist, or refusal to make changes to address recognised issues. More relevant for this special issue, backlash may involve forms of appropriation and co-option of feminist ideas and claims of ›reverse discrimination‹. For example, opponents of affirmative action in male-dominated fields may argue that such initiatives undermine meritocracy and unfairly victimise men (Johansson et al. 2017; Richardson-Self 2023). Banet-Weiser (2018, p. 39) compared the strategies of men's rights advocates to a »funhouse mirror« in how they distortedly parallel feminist campaigns in order to address perceived injuries and injustices felt by men. For example, after #MeToo sought to raise awareness of rape culture and women's experiences of sexual violence and harassment, the parallel #HimToo hashtag was used to argue that men are victimised and have their lives »ruined« by false accusations of rape and sexual violence (Banet-Weiser 2021).

Finally, antifeminist discourse makes use of what Rothermel (2023) terms »evidence-based misogyny«. Evidence-based misogyny is a »micro-political discursive move whereby different forms of evidence are presented and linked to essentializing misogynist images about gender relations« (Rothermel 2023, p. 2). However, the evidence produced is often misleading and distorted, for example through the creation of false equivalences (e.g., between rape and false accusations of rape) or by presenting men as the only group suffering from problems such as loneliness and poor mental health. In addition, some men's rights advocates may correctly diagnose a societal problem, such as alienation and poor mental health among men, but disingenuously attribute the cause of these issues to women and feminists and falsely claim that feminists have never attempted to address these issues (Hodapp 2017). Kim (2023, p. 118) also explains that misogyny and antifeminism play a »critical role« in the spread of misinformation online and that this discourse has the power to »undermine feminism and feminist knowledge«. Her analysis of the Namuwiki entry on »Gender Equalism« revealed that the contents of this page were taken at face value and cited by users of other social media platforms as evidence of discrimination against men, even though the entry contained many fallacious arguments and fabricated references. Furthermore, part of the power of evidence-based misogyny is

due to the fact that patriarchal, antifeminist views are commonly taken as common sense or accepted knowledge, allowing for easy dismissal of feminist perspectives as irrational or illogical (Rothermel 2023). Indeed, Hanson, Pascoe, and Light (2023) sampled 500 posts about masculinity from the subreddit r/UnpopularOpinion and found that it was common for authors to position men (and other majority groups such as White people or heterosexual people) as the real victims of discrimination, which calls into question the extent to which beliefs of male marginality can be considered genuinely ›unpopular opinions‹.

3 Methods and Materials

3.1 Data Selection and Collection

The data discussed in this paper come from a larger research project which examined the legitimation of male separatist ideology and argumentation strategies used by MGTOW to convince others to reject feminism and abstain from relationships with women. The social news and content aggregation site Reddit was selected as the source of data, as previous research has indicated the prevalence of manosphere content on this platform (Ging 2019; Krendel/McGlashan/Koller 2022). Another reason for selecting this site was its mainstream popularity: the site is visited by over 57 million daily users and is home to over 100,000[1] communities known as subreddits. Reddit users must also abide by the platform's terms of service and content policies, including prohibition of content promoting hate »based on identity or vulnerability[2]«. This makes an examination of mimicry of marginality particularly interesting, as MGTOW must take extra care to ensure that their inherently exclusionary ideology and practices appear legitimate and socially acceptable.

Data collection took place between May–August 2020. I wrote a Python script using the PRAW wrapper (Boe 2020) in order to scrape threads from r/MGTOW that were designated as ›hot‹ by Reddit's sorting algorithm, in other words threads that were currently receiving engagement in the form of upvotes and comments. The script retrieved initial posts, comments submitted by other users as replies to these initial posts, and the ›karma score‹ of each post and comment (roughly the number of upvotes minus the number of downvotes). Five threads were scraped each week, until a total of fifty threads (including 1300 comments and approximately 46,000 words) were collected. This number of threads was chosen to ensure the sample remained large enough to draw conclusions, yet not so large that manual, qualitative analysis would be unfeasible. Overall, initial posts received a mean karma score of 314.42 (ranging from 41 to 1073) and 26.06 comments (ranging from 2 to 131). Furthermore, at the time of data collection, the subreddit had recently been placed in a ›quarantine‹ by Reddit administrators. While a quarantined subreddit is allowed to remain on Reddit, it is prefaced with a warning of potentially offensive materi-

1 https://www.redditinc.com/(retrieved 14.09.23)
2 https://www.redditinc.com/policies/content-policy (retrieved 14.09.23)

al and its contents are no longer available in search engines or to users who are not logged in to Reddit with a verified email address. In order to view the subreddit and scrape data, I created a new Reddit account though it was not necessary to officially subscribe to the community or ask permission from moderators.

The higher levels of privacy for this community would usually require stricter ethical considerations, such as asking for informed consent from users (franzke et al. 2020). However, MGTOW have been known to harass women online and the community ideology is highly misogynistic (Jones/Wright/Trott 2020). Given my identity as a female, feminist researcher, I had concerns that alerting the community to my presence could potentially trigger negative reactions. With the agreement of the ethical review board at Lancaster University, I did not make contact with nor seek informed consent from either the individual users or subreddit moderators (see Fuchs 2018 for further discussion of informed consent when studying hostile online communities), though I have anonymised the data by removing references to personal information and replacing the already pseudonymous usernames with generic labels such as ›User1‹. Such double anonymisation is already common practice in discourse analyses of social media data (Stommel/de Rijk 2021) but is particularly important in the absence of informed consent. Finally, apart from the anonymised usernames, all examples within this paper are presented as they were originally published on r/MGTOW, including spelling or formatting inconsistencies. Some researchers have expressed concern about the retrievability of verbatim quotes from social media and recommend paraphrasing or modifying examples to prevent reverse searching, however such practices are often ill-suited to linguistic and discursive research (Herring 1996). Moreover, in this case r/MGTOW was banned from Reddit a year after data collection and analysis took place, meaning that the contents are no longer available and so the users will be harder to find.

3.2 Theoretical Background and Methods

The analysis within this paper, and the larger research project, draws on the »discourse-historical approach« (DHA) to critical discourse studies (Reisigl/Wodak 2001, 2016). The interdisciplinary approach »attempts to integrate much available knowledge about the historical sources and background of the social and political fields in which discursive ›events‹ are embedded« (Reisigl/Wodak 2001, p. 35). Koller (2011, p. 123) argued that discourse-historical analysis need not be »diachronic« and the historical period can be the current period, as long as linguistic data are interpreted in their historical context. Furthermore, as demonstrated by Unger, Wodak, and KhosraviNik (2021) the approach can be suited for contemporary social media data. The DHA considers four levels of context: the immediate language or text-internal co-text; the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between texts; the social variables and institutional frames; and the broader socio-political and historical context (Reisigl/Wodak 2001, pp. 30–31). For this research project, the first level refers to the actual text and images collected from Reddit. For the second level, Reddit enables the embedding of hyperlinks, meaning that users are able to

directly link to other texts (such as academic papers) and hence recontextualise them. I also consider interdiscursivity, such as appropriation of feminist discourse. For the third level, I consider the infrastructure, features, and affordances of the Reddit platform, such as upvoting mechanisms. Finally, the fourth level entails consideration of the historical development of men's movements and the role of feminism and antifeminism within contemporary Western societies. The latter point is particularly important, as MGTOW and the broader manosphere must not be considered as a novel, unique, or an exclusively online phenomenon, but rather a part of a much older, longer history of antifeminist backlash (see section two).

There are three dimensions to analysis within the DHA. First, I identified the »specific content and topics« of the discourse (Reisigl/Wodak 2016, p. 32) by uploading each thread into ATLAS.Ti and creating codes based on the topics discussed, such as *women, marriage*, or *hobbies and lifestyle.* The second and third dimension involve the identification of discursive strategies and examination of the linguistic means and realisations of these strategies. For Reisigl and Wodak (ibid., p. 33), a discursive strategy is a »more or less intentional plan of practice (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal« for example nomination or reference (i.e., the labelling of social actors) and predication (i.e., the assignment of traits to social actors). In this paper, I primarily focus on strategies of *argumentation* in other words the strategies used to advance the position that men are an oppressed and marginalised group. To analyse argumentation, I identified and coded the *topoi* underlying arguments. In the DHA, a *topos* is typically a causal or conditional »if X, then Y« (Reisigl 2014, p. 75). For example, the *topos of finance* can be paraphrased as »if an action is too expensive or causes a loss in revenue, the action should not be carried out«. *Topoi* justify the link from supporting evidence (e.g., marriage is too expensive) to the controversial claim in need of justification (e.g., men should not get married). I began with the list of *topoi* identified by Reisigl and Wodak (2001) in their examination of immigration discourse, though there were some differences in the *topoi* identified, and in their realisations, due to differences in context and topic. For example, I found that many arguments employed a *topos of freedom*, i.e., if an action increases, or infringes, upon another person's freedom, then the action should (not) be carried out.

As a result of analysis, the researcher can produce »detailed case studies« and descriptions of the discourse in question, such as salient topics and discursive features, contradictions in the argumentation or ideological orientations, and interdiscursive relationships with other discourses (Reisigl/Wodak 2016, p. 55). Furthermore, the researcher may engage in three types of critique: text-immanent critique of the text or discourse itself, for example by identifying fallacies or logical inconsistencies; socio-diagnostic critique of the potential manipulative or problematic character of the text or discourse; and prospective critique seeking to improve future communication and contribute to solving social problems (ibid., p. 25). In doing so, the researcher should make clear the ethical norms and principles upon which their critiques are based, which in this case are feminist principles.

4 Analysis

This section presents my analysis of how MGTOW community members present themselves as marginalised or oppressed. First, I consider how MGTOW appropriate and recontextualise feminist discourse, including direct intertextual references to feminist slogans and more implicit parallels with older feminist arguments. Second, I consider the use of the *topos of justice* and use of hypothetical or ›role reversal‹ arguments. Third, I examine the *topos of numbers* and *topos of authority* in the citation of statistics and academic studies. Finally, I consider how MGTOW present themselves as representing suppressed or unpopular forms of knowledge.

4.1 Remixing Feminist Discourse

Flood, Dragiewicz and Pease (2021) explained that antifeminist backlash may involve appropriation and co-optation of feminist discourse, and this was observed within MGTOW. First, users could intertextually reference well-known feminist slogans and, through modification and recontextualisation, imbue the slogan with antifeminist meaning.

(1) **User1 (25)**[3]: »How DARE you spend your money on things you like?«

User2 (7): »My wallet, My choice!«

For example, one thread was initiated by a user sharing a photo of a Lego set he had recently bought. The most upvoted comment in the thread (shown in example 1) chastised the original poster for making such a purchase. Buying a Lego set is presented as a subversive or courageous act (intensified by the capitalisation of DARE) that would leave the buyer open to disapproval or questioning from others. However, the mockery and questioning from User1 does not appear to be genuine, but rather an approximation of how out-groups would likely respond to the actions of MGTOW. This positions MGTOW as a marginalised group, as they cannot perform mundane actions such as making consumer purchases without being criticised by others.

In a direct reply to User1's rhetorical question, User2 alluded to the slogan »my body my choice« replacing »body« with »wallet«. The slogan has historically been associated with feminism, particularly regarding abortion rights. However, some feminists have critiqued the slogan for its reliance on »individualist, consumerist notions of ›free choice‹« with no accounting for structural barriers that may affect women's ability to make or act on their choice (Smith 2005, p. 127). Indeed, the slogan has been used by User2 to account for such individualist, consumerist notions of choice and implying that the right to

3 The number in brackets roughly corresponds to the number of ›upvotes‹ a comment received from other users.

make consumer purchases is equivalent to reproductive rights. Not only does the analogy position the two as equally important, but it also implies that men face the same barriers to making consumer purchases as women, trans men, and non-binary people face when accessing abortion. Within the larger dataset, it was often argued that separatism is the only way for men to freely pursue their hobbies and interests. Such ideas can be traced back to earlier men's rights texts. For instance, in the foundational work »The Myth of Male Power«, Warren Farrell (1993/1994) argued that although men earn higher incomes than women in most occupations, this should not be considered male privilege because men are obligated to spend their money on their female partners and so women control how men's incomes are used.

Furthermore, appropriation could take place at a visual level. Figure 1 shows a comic depicting a man and a woman climbing separate staircases, with their respective predicated skills written on each step. Men's predicated skills are mostly written as abstract nouns (e.g., »creativity« »leadership«) while women's predicated skills are written in gerund form using taboo language (e.g., »bitching« »cock gobbling«), emphasising women's lack of professionality. In addition, women have fewer steps than men which may suggest that women possess fewer skills. The relay between image and text lends to an interpretation that it is easier for men to succeed because they have more useful skills and personality traits. On the other hand, women rely on their sexuality and expect men to treat them like a »princess« rather than solve problems on their own. However, the comic uploaded to r/MGTOW had been heavily modified. The original comic was titled »Equal Opportunity: A cartoon about gender equality« and did not include any text[4]. The original comic by Rodrigo de Matos may be interpreted as a commentary on structural sexism against women, as the rungs on the ladder are further apart for women and so it is more difficult for women to climb the stairs to success. By remixing the image, the creator is able to appropriate a feminist comic for antifeminist ends.

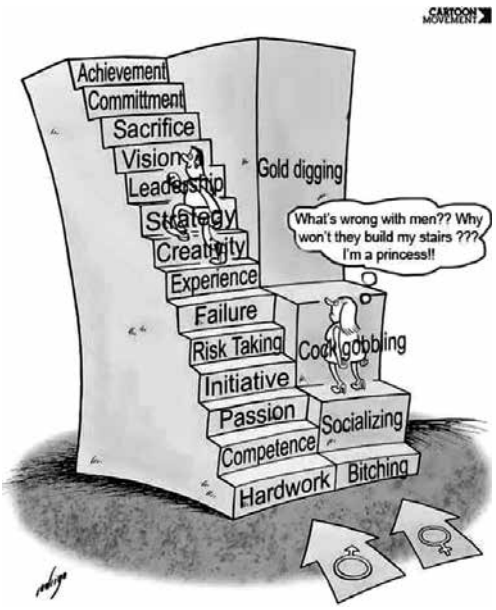


Figure 1: A remixed feminist cartoon shared to r/MGTOW.

4 https://cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/equal-opportunity (retrieved 14.09.23)

(2) **User3 (1)**: »Marriage: State sponsored prostitution racket in which the male becomes the legal and financial slave of the female.«

Finally, appropriation could also occur at the discursive level as users could employ interdiscursive references and allusions to historical feminist arguments and discourse. For example, User3 redefines marriage as encompassing »prostitution« and »legal and financial slave[ry]« (example 2). Marriage is further derogated through the predications »state sponsored« and »legal« suggesting that misandry is systemic and supported by the government and important institutions. Through a *topos of freedom* and *topos of finance* (Reisigl/Wodak 2001), User3 could implicitly argue that men should not get married to avoid becoming slaves and being financially exploited by women. The comparison to prostitution and slavery parallels historical feminist arguments about women's role in marriage. For instance, Mary Wollstonecraft compared women marrying men »for support« to »legal prostitution« (1792\2010, pp. 261–262), while similar comparisons were made centuries later by Simone de Beauvoir (1949\1953) and Andrea Dworkin (1983). Meanwhile, comparisons between marriage and slavery were made by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill (1869\2012), Emma Goldman (1897), and later by Dworkin (1989\1981). However, the power dynamic posited within this comment is markedly different to that described by feminists. While feminists have argued that marriage oppresses women through forcing them to exchange sex for financial security and safety, MGTOW argue that marriage oppresses men through obliging them to provide financially for their partner and fulfil a breadwinner role.

4.2 Role Reversal

A closely related strategy was role reversal. A typical example would involve a user sharing an example of a woman insulting a man, or men in general, and subsequently asking other users to change the genders so that it is the man insulting a woman, often with the tacit assumption that the reversed scenario would not be taken as problematic. Such a rhetorical strategy rests on a *topos of justice* (Reisigl/Wodak 2001), as it positions two situations as equivalent and argues they should be treated in the same manner. The implicit argument is thus: because most people would object to a man making derogatory comments about women, then by analogy people should also object to women making derogatory comments about men.

(3) **User4 (11)**: »Imagine if men did this instead (called it Female tears). There would be new protests in America.«

(4) **User5 (3)**: »Just imagine the blowback from saying ›the women can settle for the scraps for all I care‹.«

For example, in response to a photograph of four women holding »Male Tears« mugs, User4 asked readers to imagine a reversed scenario in which men created and used mugs labelled

»Female Tears« (example 3). ›Male tears‹ is an example of the ›ironic misandry‹ adopted by some feminists during the early 2010s as a way of mocking and satirising negative stereotypes of feminists (Lawrence/Ringrose 2018; Marwick/Caplan 2018). However, such satire was not recognised, nor validated, by users of MGTOW and was instead used as evidence of genuine misandry. Similarly, in response to a screenshot of a Facebook comment of a woman claiming that women »deserve better jobs and higher pay« than men and that »men can settle for scraps«, User4 asked readers to consider how others would react to such a statement if »men« were replaced with »women« (example 4). In both examples, not only is it assumed that people would object to the reversed discourse but that the criticism would be so intense that it would lead to »blowback« and »new protests in America«. As well as positioning men as marginalised, this also positions feminism as hegemonic and powerful.

(5) **User6 (26)**: »For those who have trouble understanding how this is female supremacy and sexism against men... just change ›woman‹ to ›whites‹ and ›men‹ to ›blacks‹ for them.«

Alternatively, users compared misandry to other forms of marginalisation such as racism. For example, in the same thread as example 4, User6 asked readers to replace »men« with »blacks« (example 5). The comment relied on a *topos of justice* (Reisigl/Wodak 2001) and mimicked marginality by suggesting that the social status of men vis-à-vis women is equivalent to the social status of Black people vis-à-vis White people. Conversely, from a feminist perspective it could be argued that this constitutes a fallacy of false analogy because Black people are in a marginalised position relative to White people whereas men are not marginalised relative to women. Therefore, a woman saying that men deserve »scraps«, while not being very pleasant, is not as materially harmful as a White person saying the same about Black people. However, within MGTOW and the manosphere it is assumed that women are privileged over men and therefore a woman's derogatory statement about men would be directly equivalent to racism.

Given that MGTOW make claims of male victimhood and given the prevalence of racism within the manosphere (Bogetić 2022), it is perhaps surprising that this comment does not also make claims of reverse racism. Instead, Black people are positioned as a marginalised group. However, the comment is explicitly directed at »those who have trouble understanding« the sexist nature of Jessie's comment – if someone does not believe men can be victims of sexism, they may also not believe White people can be victims of racism. Therefore, positioning Black people as victims of racism may be strategic in helping others understand sexism against men, rather than to suggest that that racism is something upheld by White people against Black people exclusively or prototypically.

4.3 Statistics

One limitation of role reversal is that it is typically hypothetical – users would ask readers to *imagine* a reversed scenario and *predict* a differential outcome, without having to

actually produce evidence that this differential outcome would occur. To further bolster claims of marginality, users could deploy statistics and cite external sources. This relies on a *topos of numbers* (if the numbers support a certain *topos*, the action should be carried out) or a *topos of authority* (if an authority figure says that an action or statement is correct, then the action should be carried out) (Reisigl/Wodak 2001).

(6) **User7 (20)**: »Yep. Foodie calls.
23-33 % of women regularly engage in the practice:
https://nypost.com/2019/06/21/a-third-of-women-only-date-men-because-of-the-free-food-study
They don't like you – they're just hungry. […]
Don't even put yourself in a situation where you would have to shoulder the cost of a female's meal in the first place.«

For example, User7 (example 6) argued that men should avoid paying for women's meals while on a date due to the possibility of being the victim of »foodie calls« (i.e., a woman agreeing to a date solely to receive a free meal, without the intention of starting a relationship). This was supported through a *topos of numbers* in claiming that »22–33 % of women« engage in the practice and a *topos of authority* in citing an academic study on the topic, as well as references to personal experiences of reading about foodie calls. User7 linked to a press release about a study on foodie calls rather than the original study, likely because it is more accessible. However, in the original article, Collisson, Howell, and Harig (2020, p. 425) claimed that 23–33 % of women had engaged in a foodie call at least once, which is different from 23–33 % of women engaging in them »regularly« as User7 claimed. In actual fact, of those women who engaged in foodie calls, only 15–16 % did so frequently and most women found the practice »slightly to moderately unacceptable« (Collisson/Howell/Harig 2020, p. 429). While these findings were included in the press release, User7 omitted these results and in doing so, facilitated an argument that foodie calls are a regular and accepted practice among women and consequently men must never pay for women while on dates to avoid being deceived.

(7) **User8 (7)**: »[Harvard study--Women initiate 70 % of domestic violence](https://archive.ph/4es0j)
>When the violence was one-sided, both women and men said that women were the perpetrators about 70 % of the time. Men were more likely to be injured in reciprocally violent relationships (25 %) than were women when the violence was one-sided (20 %).«

Similarly, User8 (example 7) referred to the results of a study (Whitaker et al. 2007), which found that women initiate »70 % of domestic violence«. In terms of nomination strategies, the study authors were not named, but metonymically referred to by their institution »Harvard« which may function to increase the credibility of the study, given the global reputation of the university. User8 also did not provide a hyperlink to the original

paper by Whitaker et al. (2007), but instead to an archived discussion thread in which the original poster asserted that »liberals« would not be able to »refute« the results. These statistics position men as marginalised, as they assert that men are more likely to be victimised by domestic violence than women. In the context of MGTOW, sharing these statistics may have the effect of persuading readers to avoid relationships with women, in order to avoid becoming the victim of their abuse. Unlike example 6, User8 did accurately report on the findings of the study. However, this study, as well as other studies which present similar findings, has been critiqued for using poor quality measures of intimate partner violence and for failing to account for issues of coercive control (Reed 2008; Reed et al. 2010). Nevertheless, linking to such a study could lend more credibility to MGTOW claims of marginalisation, as they are supported through external evidence produced by legitimated academic sources.

(8) **User9 (134)**: »9 times out of 10, when a woman says that her prior husband/boyfriend was abusive, it's total bullshit.«

(9) **User10 (4)**: »In UK, women are paid £11,000 for filing a police report«.
User11 (2): »›In UK, women are paid £11,000 for filing police report.‹
Why would a woman lie about rape? Guess we can add 11,000 quid to the list. Holy shit!«

Finally, statistics or numerical figures could be presented without sources. In some cases, the statistics likely fulfilled a rhetorical function such as hyperbole. For example, pseudo-statistics such as »9 times out of 10« (example 8) may serve to draw attention to and demonstrate the apparently high prevalence of false allegations of rape and abuse, rather than aiming to provide accurate figures on the subject. On the other hand, other numerical figures appeared to be entirely fabricated. For example, User10 in thread 4 (example 9) claimed that British women are paid £11,000 merely for filing a police report about rape or domestic violence, let alone successfully winning a court case. No sources or links were provided, so it is difficult to ascertain where this figure originated. However, this lack of evidence was not challenged or questioned by other users in the thread – in fact, other commenters appeared to accept this as truthful. Indeed, in other threads and comment chains, users repeated the claim that women financially benefit from making false allegations of abuse.

4.4 MGTOW as Suppressed and Unpopular

The final strategy discussed in this paper is the self-presentation as representing suppressed or unpopular facts and opinions. Such a self-representation was not entirely unwarranted. At the time of data collection (Summer 2020), r/MGTOW had been quarantined for several months, while other subreddits affiliated with the manosphere (e.g., r/incels) had been banned. Reddit administrators do not usually warn subreddits be-

fore placing them in quarantine, nor provide an explanation afterwards. Consequently, r/MGTOW users expressed frustration and confusion at the measure and asked questions about why the subreddit was quarantined or how the quarantine function actually worked in practice. Some users also anticipated that their subreddit would soon be banned from Reddit, which eventually did happen in August 2021.

(10) **User12 (1)**: »not been on here for a while. I see that the sub has been quarantined. Does anyone know why? is that something that reddit forces upon you? Thanks«
User13 (3): »Because Reddit is essentially the online version of China's social credit system (social cReddit, geddit?), and communists see independent thought and politically-incorrect truths as dangerous and requiring the gulag treatment.«
User12 (1): »arrrh right yey. so from a perspective that they believe MGTOW to be dangerous!!!! Must be doing something right then! :)
thanks for replying«
User14 (1): »You have no idea how much people hate independent men. Thoughts or action.«

Example 10 displays a comment chain in which three users discussed the purpose and rationale of the quarantine. User12 asked why the subreddit had been quarantined, then others responded that MGTOW are perceived as »dangerous« and »hate[d]« for their independence and political incorrectness. For User12, the fact that MGTOW are perceived by others as »dangerous« validates MGTOW ideology as correct. It is not immediately obvious how the grounds (MGTOW are seen as dangerous) support the claim (MGTOW must be doing something right). To understand, one must refer back to User13's comment, where it was claimed that »communists« specifically try and censor the »truth«. By a symptomatic relation, MGTOW can also be argued to be the truth. In other words, if MGTOW were not speaking truthfully, then presumably Reddit would leave them alone. Therefore, the fact they are actively censored provides the ›evidence‹ that they are correct. Alternatively, »communists« are understood as an ideological opponent within MGTOW and therefore anything that communists dislike must automatically be good. The comment chain realised an ideological square (van Dijk 1998), with emphasis on the positive traits MGTOW (»independent«, »right«, »truth«) and negative traits of Reddit (»communists«, censorious, »fearful«). The predications of »independent « and »politically incorrect« position MGTOW as subversive and function euphemistically to cloak the sexist, misogynistic character of the community, while the nomination »truths« positions MGTOW as factual. Overall, MGTOW positioned themselves and their discourse as suppressed, but ultimately correct.

(11) **User15 (1)**: »I guarantee you that, in the uk at least, leftists are gearing up make ›misogyny‹ illegal so you can get jail time for saying anything bad about women online. They've already done that with race. Governments are far more interested in policing thought crime than actual real crime in neighborhoods.«

In addition to censorship on social media, users also represented themselves as marginalised by government censorship. User15 (shown in example 11) asserted that UK citizens could face »jail time for saying anything bad about women online«. Like in example 10, censorship was attributed to »leftists«. In addition, User15 delegitimised the severity of online misogyny through placing it in scare quotes and by drawing a distinction between »actual real crime« and mere »thought crime«. The latter serves as an intertextual reference to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*, one of the most famous novels about censorship. As shown in example 10, r/MGTOW users are aware of their »politically incorrect« reputation and so users may take this post as a warning that they could be prosecuted for their »thought crimes« on social media.

(12) **r/unpopularopinion author (56)**: »School favors girls more than guys

> Lemme start off by saying I'm a freshman in high school. I've seen stuff and the girl is always favored. Once I was in school and a creepy girl was touching boys in the face and groped on guy. She got just a ›stop it‹ that would never happen for guys
>
> For guys if they did that who knows the police would be called. I think guys get favored lots of times in their lives but schools wise the girls have the edge for sure«

Finally, MGTOW discourse was represented as »unpopular« in broader society. For example, one thread was initiated with a screenshot from r/UnpopularOpinion with the title »School favors girls more than guys« (example 12). The main argument within the post itself relied on a *topos of justice* and a role reversal (see section 4.2): female students are able to grope and act creepy towards male students, but not the reverse. Like the role reversals discussed in section 4.2, the reversed scenario is assumed to be taken more seriously as not only would teachers punish male students, but they would involve law enforcement. Consequently, the author can conclude that female students are privileged in school at the expense of male students. This privilege is intensified by the use of the extreme case formulation, as girls are »always favoured… for sure« while boys are »never« favoured. The fact that the original author posted in r/UnpopularOpinion implies that the popular opinion is that male students are favoured at school. By extension, this would imply that it is feminist theories which are popular.

(13) **User16 (7)**: »He is 14 and in a propaganda factory. How he realised this is actually a good sign. Give him time, he will wake up to the world.«

(14) **User17 (9)**: »This kid is going to have a brainwashing session pretty soon.«

Although the original author did not use terms such as ›misandry‹ or indeed any other lexical items which would suggest explicit affiliation with the manosphere, the submis-

sion was reposted to r/MGTOW and resemiotised as an example of young men resisting feminist indoctrination. Some users expressed admiration and pride that young men are able to come to these conclusions as such a young age, while others lamented that this must mean that schools are becoming even more sexist towards boys. For example, User16 asserted that it is a »good sign« that the author is beginning to recognise female privilege and that he will »wake up« to the truth soon enough (example 13). On the other hand, User17 (example 14) expressed concern that the teenager will face consequences. Furthermore, both commenters produced a conspiratorial representation of feminism and education: User16 metaphorically referred to school as a »propaganda factory« while User17 claimed that the teenager will be subject to a »brainwashing session«. This implies that feminists are in control of the education system, aiming to control young people's minds and forcefully correct dissenting views. User17 also highlighted the poster's young age through the nomination »this kid« which may have the effect of exacerbating the negative depiction of feminists, as they are a threat to children, often considered an innocent group in need of protection.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has discussed and critiqued four strategies used by members of r/MGTOW in their mimicry of marginality. First, users could appropriate feminist discourse and argumentation, such as by taking an explicitly feminist slogan or comic and remixing it to convey an antifeminist message or creating allusions to both contemporary and more historical feminist arguments. This is reflective of Banet-Weiser's (2018) theory of the ›funhouse mirror‹ wherein feminist arguments become twisted and distorted for the purpose of antifeminism. Secondly, users could employ a strategy of role reversal, which involved presenting an example of a woman or feminists' negative commentary or actions towards men and asking readers to imagine the same scenario with ›reversed‹ genders. Discussing how this strategy is used in accusations of reverse racism, McVey (2021) considered how such argumentation is problematic because it elides contextual factors in presenting all instances of differential treatment as motivated by prejudice and because it assumes that racism (or in this case, sexism) is an interchangeable, universal set of behaviours with no accounting for differentials of power.

The third strategy discussed was the (mis)citation of statistics and use of the *topos of numbers* and *authority*. Citation of academic sources may help MGTOW users to increase their credibility and minimise accusations of bias, considering as such sources were produced by researchers at legitimated, respected institutions (Schmitz/Kazyak 2016). Similar to the results of Kim's (2023) analysis of Namuwiki, I found that MGTOW did not have to name or accurately cite these studies in order to achieve legitimising effects. Finally, the fourth strategy discussed was the self-presentation as censored or unpopular. Users presented themselves, and their discourse, as suppressed and marginalised by several sources – by women, by Reddit administrators, by governments, by teachers, and by peers in the social sphere. A framing as »unpopular« allows users to suggest

that their views as »objectively true« but »disvalued in mainstream discourse« (Hanson/Pascoe/Light 2023, p. 169). In addition, Schmitz and Kazyak (2016, p. 18) suggested that men's rights discourse was effective in part due their focus on »issues grounded in truth«. The same may also apply to MGTOW and their mimicry of marginality: male separatism is indeed an »unpopular opinion« to the extent that heterosexual marriage rates remain high and MGTOW discourse was suppressed by Reddit through a quarantine and an eventual ban.

Taken together, these strategies achieved evidence-based misogyny (Rothermel 2023). The discourse appeared to be somewhat effective and persuasive, which can be seen from the fact most posts analysed within this paper had received at least one upvote from other users and users seldom corrected or challenged the content of the argumentation. As explained by Rothermel, evidence-based misogyny has the power to effectively »build, legitimate, and sustain« misogynistic ideologies (ibid., p. 5) and create »direction for potential anti-feminist mobilization« (Rothermel 2020, p. 1379). Through mimicry of marginality, MGTOW users positioned men as the true victims of women, feminism, and broader systems of misandry and could subsequently cement an antifeminist world view and convince others that separating from and avoiding women is the only way to escape this marginalisation.

Importantly, the misogyny and mimicry of marginality by members of the MGTOW community should not be considered as a novel phenomenon, or as something restricted to the online context and separate from mainstream beliefs regarding gender relations. MGTOW arguments exhibit similarity with arguments presented by men's rights advocates in the 20th century, such as notions of a spending obligation gap or criticisms of the breadwinner role, and with popular media accounts of men being marginalised and left behind in areas such as education. Furthermore, the interdiscursivity with feminist discourse reflects the history of the men's rights movements as growing out of the feminist movement, while the use of role reversal arguments perhaps echoes the discursive tendencies of earlier men's rights and liberationist groups to form parallel critiques and posit »false symmetry« between men and women's roles in society (Messner 1998, p. 258). Furthermore, Rothermel (2023) also explained that evidence-based misogyny is effective through its appeals to culturally accepted knowledge. MGTOW arguments often relied on common-sense, formal notions of equality, akin to gender-blindness or sameness, as opposed to substantive equality which concerns the redistribution of social goods to marginalised groups. Such an understanding is uncoupled from any analysis of power relations and so any differential treatment between men and women, particularly situations in which women were treated more amicably, could be taken as evidence of men's marginalisation.

Finally, there are several limitations to this work which should be acknowledged. The presentation of four strategies was intended as illustrative, so future work could seek to quantitatively address how frequently these strategies are employed in a larger set of data or address quantitative or qualitative differences in how these strategies are realised in other manosphere communities (such as men's rights or incel groups) or on other social media platforms. In particular, future research could take a more multimodal approach

and consider the mimicry of marginality using audio-visual means. Finally, this paper has engaged in text-immanent and socio-diagnostic critique of manosphere discourse and their mimicry of marginality, though it is also important to propose solutions and engage in prospective critique. To this end, future research should address how we can effectively address the problem of the manosphere and how to equip young people with the tools to effectively recognise mimicry of marginality, for example by examining the possibility and prevalence of counterdiscourse.

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Stagings of Self-Marginalisation, Self-Stigmatisation and Self-Victimisation in Martin Heidegger's Textual Communications – Reflections on the Necessity of a Discourse-Ethical Re-Reading of Heidegger's Communicative Behaviour

Abstract: Constructions of marginalisation, peripherality and exclusion appear as increasingly important strategic moments of postmodern as well as post-factual identity discourses. The associated staging strategies, as elements of mimicry of marginality, will be opened up in this paper on the basis of Martin Heidegger's text-communicative behaviour. Based on the strategies of self-referential marginalisation, stigmatisation and victimisation, found in his textual communications, we reflect on which discourse actors use, which strategies of the mimicry of marginality, for which goals, and under which conditions. Moreover, the necessity of a discourse-ethical re-reading of Martin Heidegger shall be made visible.

Keywords: Self-Marginalisation, Self-Stigmatisation, Self-Victimisation, Heidegger

Zusammenfassung: Diskurspositionelle Konstruktionen von Marginalisierung, Randständigkeit und Ausschlusserfahrungen erscheinen als zunehmend wichtige strategische Momente postmoderner sowie postfaktischer Identitätsdiskurse. Damit verbundene und als Mimikry der Marginalität interpretierbare Inszenierungsstrategien sollen in diesem Beitrag anhand des textkommunikativen Verhaltens Martin Heideggers erschlossen werden. Anhand der sich in seinen Textkommunikaten wiederfindenden Strategien der selbstbezüglichen Marginalisierung, Stigmatisierung und Viktimisierung wird reflektiert, welche Diskursakteure unter welchen Bedingungen, mit welchen Strategien Mimikry der Marginalität nutzen. Zugleich soll die Notwendigkeit diskursethischer Re-Lektüren Martin Heideggers sichtbar gemacht werden.

Schlagwörter: Selbstmarginalisierung, Selbststigmatisierung, Selbstviktimisierung, Heidegger

1. Introduction[1]

Both in their introduction to *Mimicry of Marginality* (2022) and in this thematic issue, Silvia Bonacchi, Charlotta Seiler Brylla, and Ingo H. Warnke attempt to capture a specific discourse strategy of postmodern and postfactual (not only but especially of identity-[2]) discourses. The relevance of the concept is explicated by the authors, since it is »eine zentrale Diskurspraktik in der polarisierten Gegenwart« [›a central discourse practice in the polarized present‹] (Warnke/Bonacchi/Brylla 2022, p. 507).[3] The starting point of this concept is a strategic staging, in which an assumed discursive exclusion or at least an assumed discursive marginalisation, is constructed with further optional elements, including, for example, a physical-existential threat. From this staged situation of marginalisation, one's behaviour, one's own communication and one's own attempt to assert certain values and norms are therefore legitimised.

In a first step, it seems productive to reflect on both phrase elements in their productivity concerning the contexts to be discussed here: The term *mimicry* is borrowed from natural sciences, where it means, among other things, »Schauspielerei mit falschen Warntrachten« [›acting with false warning signs‹] (Wickler 1968, p. 10), with the function of a protective adjustment (cf. ibid., p. 75). Based on a triadic *mimicry* model consisting of a) a model, b) an imitator and c) a perceiver on whom the *mimicry* is supposed to have certain effects (cf. ibid., p. 179), the concept proved to be highly effective:

> »Die Idee der Mimikry […] schien ungemein plausibel. Und zwar allein schon deswegen, weil fast jeder längst Beispiele für dieses Prinzip kannte.« (Wickler 1968, p. 120)
>
> [›the idea of mimicry […] seemed immensely plausible. If only because almost everyone had long known examples of this principle.‹]

On the one hand, this led to an expansion of the concept of mimicry (cf. Wickler 1968, p. 46) and, on the other hand, to the concept being adapted for other contexts. For this context it seems instructive that the concept of *mimicry* was used as early as the 1950s to describe social phenomena; by way of example, I would like to refer to a description of the entrepreneur Günther Quandt by the journalist Kurt Pritzkoleit in his book »*Männer, Mächte, Monopole. Hinter den Türen der Westdeutschen Wirtschaft*« from 1953:

1 I am very grateful to the two reviewers, whose comments led to a substantial improvement of my text. Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Lindokuhle Shabane, who critically proofread my text and from whose comments I was also able to benefit greatly.

2 In this context, identity is understood as communicatively and performatively produced by the individual within the framework of his or her sociocultural interaction with other members of a society, but is also influenced by the social, cultural, and discursive conditions within which the individual moves. In this respect, acts of positioning and or as identity constructions are also directly interrelated.

3 All references from Martin Heidegger's texts as well as research literature cited in German that are central to the understanding of this text have been translated by the author.

> »Seine [=Quandts; FM's note] *Mimikry*, die unter uns schwachen und eitlen Menschen so selten vorkommende Fähigkeit, die Schutzfarbe der Umgebung anzunehmen, ist zu hoher Vollendung entwickelt: Unter Textilfabrikanten erscheint er als Textilfabrikant, unter Metallfachleuten als Metalfachmann, unter Waffenspezialisten als Waffenspezialist, unter Elektrotechnikern als Elektrotechniker, unter Versicherungsexperten als Versicherungsexperte, unter Kalibergleuten als Kailbergmann, und in jeder Erscheinungsform wirkt er so echt und überzeugend, dass der Beobachter, der ihm in einem Gebiet seiner vielschichtigen Tätigkeit begegnet, die Schutzfarbe für die ursprüngliche und einzige, für die angeboren und unwandelbar hält.« (Pritzkoleit 1953, p. 88, emphasised by FM)
>
> [›His [=Quandt's; FM's note] mimicry, the ability, so rare among us weak and vain people, to assume the protective color of the surroundings, is developed to high perfection: Among textile manufacturers he appears as a textile manufacturer, among metal specialists as a metal specialist, among weapons specialists as a weapons specialist, among electrical engineers as an electrical engineer, among insurance experts as an insurance expert, among potash miners as a potash miner, and in every manifestation he appears so genuine and convincing that the observer who encounters him in an area of his multifaceted activity takes the protective color for the original and only one, for the innate and unchangeable one.‹]

Mimicry in this socio-social context also describes a phenomenon of functional adaptation to the social, cultural or discursive environment. This is accompanied by an element of *intentionality* (Quandt consciously adapts himself) and *authenticity* (thus, Quandt would not be perceived as an actor appearing in a certain staged role). At the same time, Pritzkoleit's critical descriptions allow for an extension of the triadic *mimicry* model: once again, there is a) a model (e.g. the (actually the role of a) textile manufacturer, metal expert, weapons specialist, etc.), b) an imitator (Quandt) and c) a perceiver – but these positions now appear differentiated into cI) a perceiver on whom the *mimicry* has an effect, who perceives Quandt in his stagings as authentic, and cII) a perceiver (in this case Pritzkoleit) who recognizes this strategy of *mimicry* as such and deconstructs it by pointing it out.

At this juncture, there already is a possible analytical potential for critical discourse researchers to recognize, describe and, if necessary, deconstruct *mimicry* actions as role enactments – and thus, for example, to draw attention to the masking of hegemony (and thus also of hegemonic power) called for by Bonacchi, Brylla and Warnke (cf. 2022, p. 507). Crucially, it is not only about *mimicry* in a general socio-discursive sense, but about a specific *mimicry of marginality*: the intentional, authenticity-suggesting staging as an excluded discourse actor.

In this context, *marginality* refers to a societal normative phenomenon, which the social and political philosopher Iris Marion Young counted as one of five forms of oppression (together with »*exploitation*«, »*powerlessness*«, »*cultural imperialism*« and »*violence*«; cf. 2002, p. 444). She describes »*marginality*« as a product of social power

and suppression effects (cf. ibid., p. 439), which entails, among other things, the loss of certain rights and freedoms, as well as opportunities for self-realization (cf. ibid., p. 435). To Young, marginalisation is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression; not only because of the effects described, but also because of its scope. Anyone can be marginalised:

> »alte Menschen, zunehmend auch Menschen, die zwar nicht sehr alt sind, aber ihren Arbeitsplatz verloren haben und keinen neuen finden können; junge Menschen, besonders Schwarze oder Latinos, die gar nicht erst einen ersten oder zweiten Arbeitsplatz finden können; viele alleinerziehende Frauen und ihre Kinder; andere Menschen, die unfreiwillig arbeitslos sind; viele geistig oder körperlich Behinderte.« (Young 2002, p. 435)
>
> [›old people, increasingly also people who are not very old but have lost their jobs and cannot find a new one; young people, especially blacks or Latinos, who cannot even find a first or second job; many single women and their children; other people who are involuntarily unemployed; many mentally or physically disabled people.‹]

As a social phenomenon of oppression, *marginality* is, in its original meaning, as briefly outlined here, something that is experienced reactively or normatively speaking through no fault of one's own. In this respect, one can ask, why such a socially oppressed discourse position is staged in terms of a communication strategy. A possible answer can be sought in social science research on victimhood, which points out that

> »Akteure in aktuellen Opferdiskursen […] nicht selten auf vermeintlich ähnliche Ergebnisse und Prozesse der Vergangenheit [verweisen], um den eigenen Standpunkt zu legitimieren und zusätzliches ›Opferkapital‹ anzuhäufen.« (Rudolph 2020, p. 25).
>
> [›actors in current victim discourses [...] not infrequently [refer] to supposedly similar results and processes of the past in order to legitimise their own point of view and to accumulate additional ›victim capital‹‹]

The accompanying pattern of self-victimisation, which can be added as a strategic element of a *mimicry of marginality* (on this, see also below), can be used »angesichts der damit konnotierten Forderung nach Empathie« [›in view of the demand for empathy connoted with it‹] (Treskow 2020, p. 47).

At this point, it seems possible to describe the *mimicry of marginality* as a discursive phenomenon of the intentional, tentatively authentic staging of a social role or position that is characterized by a discursive lack of freedom of action and that is used, for example, to accumulate ›Opferkapital‹ for one's own discursive goals.

Based on this introductory reflection, I can apply the concept towards the communicative behaviour of a concrete discourse actor (as a »Diskurskonstrukt« in the sense of

Teubert 2018, p. 32)[4]: Martin Heidegger. The reasons for choosing this discourse actor lie, on the one hand, in his relevance not only across disciplines of social and human sciences but also in society and, on the other hand, in his communicative behaviour, which has not yet been dealt with by (discourse) linguistic analysis. Despite all controversies, Martin Heidegger is still considered one of the most influential and important philosophical thinkers of the 20th century (cf. Velkley 2009, p. 235). Therefore, the »Heidegger case« (Vasek 2016, p. 392) proves to be relevant in terms of discourse linguistics as well as discourse ethics.

From a discourse-ethical perspective, it is a matter of positioning oneself as a researcher, e.g., through the choice of the object of analysis or through the choice of analytical methodology:

> »*heute sind es zunehmend sprachliche Aggression, Tabubrüche und sprachliche Gewalt* […], *die von uns, wie ich meine, nicht nur persönliche, sondern auch sozusagen disziplinär-analytische Positionierungen verlangen. Dies ist zugleich die Legitimationsbasis einer verantwortungsethischen Linguistik.*« (Kämper/Warnke 2020, p. 4, emphasis in original).

> [›*today it is increasingly linguistic aggression, taboo-breaking and linguistic violence* [...] *that demand of us, I believe, not only personal but also, so to speak, disciplinary-analytical positioning. This is at the same time the legitimation basis of a responsible-ethical linguistics.*‹]

In this way, it is not only imperative, but downright inevitable, through the choice of research object and method, as well as through, for example, category formations and interpretations, to appear as a discursively positioning researcher and not to deny one's own discursive influences. Therefore, the constructivist perspective from which Heidegger's presentation of victimhood and marginalisation are grasped and interpreted should be made explicit. It cannot be about grasping ›the real Martin Heidegger‹ (whatever that would be), but about developing perspectives on communicative phenomena on the basis of observations and interpretations. To this end, I will interpret the texts by the German philosopher, Heidegger, and reflect, and problematize his communication. This is also to be understood against the background of demands to re-read cultural canon authors. The debates about Martin Heidegger's role as a canonized author, which have been con-

4 Reference is made to the concept of »Diskurskonstrukt« in order to emphasize Heidegger's multiple discourse-constructive embeddedness: on the one hand, he is regarded as a construct of discourses and thus discursively perspectivised (also by researchers), while on the other hand, he himself can be described as (partially) constructing discourses. The concept counters possible accusations of insufficiently describing Heidegger as an individual or assumes that such a description cannot succeed in toto. The over-complexity of reality and of individuals can only be countered by fragmentarisations and perspectivisations. Thus, it is not a matter of comprehensively grasping the individual Heidegger, but rather of adopting a certain discourse-critical perspective from which Heidegger's communicative actions, as partial elements of certain discourses, are reflected and interpreted.

ducted continuously since the end of the ›Third Reich‹, can easily be supplemented and expanded by discourse linguistics that sees itself as socially relevant and critical. However, Heidegger's strategies can be used to derive indications of present-day communication of staging oneself unjustifiably as a victim. In this process, statements by the philosopher can be closely related to the concept of *mimicry of marginality*:

(1) »Man hat nicht nur meine, sondern gute Arbeiten meiner Schüler über die griechische Philosophie, Plotin, Meister Eckhardt, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche – wütend verketzert und als einseitig gebrandmarkt und sie nachher kräftig und vielseitig ausgenutzt und dann verschwiegen.« (SH 1942–1948, p. 478)[5]

[›Not only mine, but good works of my students on Greek philosophy, Plotin, Meister Eckhardt, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche – have been angrily heresied and branded as one-sided and afterwards vigorously and versatilely exploited and then concealed.‹]

(2) »Das Totschweigen und Übergehen ist doch System und gesteuert.« (MH–MM 31.05.1968, p. 57)

[›The silencing and ignoring is nevertheless systematic and controlled.‹]

Within his textual communication, both in the so-called »Schwarzen Heften« (exhibit (1)) and his letters, as in this case in a letter to Max Müller (exhibit (2)), there are signs that Heidegger (and also his students (see exhibit (1)) saw himself (respectively themselves) as marginalised, rejected and excluded: He was »*wütend verketzert*« ›angrily heresied‹, »*gebrandmarkt*« ›branded as one-sided‹, »*kräftig und vielseitig ausgenutzt*« ›vigorously and versatilely exploited‹ but above all »*verschwiegen*« ›concealed‹ or rather »*totgeschwiegen*« ›silenced‹ by a hegemonic power that remains unspecific (but which is sometimes referred to as a »*System*« (see exhibit (2)).

The fact that Heidegger, who was already widely received and discussed during his lifetime, stages himself as a thinker who has been silenced, may not only be surprising at first glance, but is also (and this is the central thesis of this paper) part of a broader strategy of Heidegger to present himself as a victim by staging self-victimisations, self-stigmatisations and self-marginalisations to influence his social standing and framing; the fear of loss of discourse sovereignty may also factor in him staging himself as a victim. These connections will be underpinned by an analysis of eight correspondences,[6] the »Schwarzen Hefte« of the years 1942–1948, as well as the collection of essays »Das Rek-

5 A list of sigils can be found in the list of sources at the end of the paper.

6 The correspondences with I) Hannah Arendt (1925–1975), II) Kurt Bauch (1932–1975), III) Fritz Heidegger (1930–1949), IV) Karl Jaspers (1920–1963), V) Ernst Jünger (1949–1975), VI) Karl Löwith (1919–1973), VII) Max Müller (1930–1970) and VIII) Otto Pöggeler are analysed in this paper.

torat 1933/34: Tatsachen und Gedanken« (1945),[7] to contribute to the interpretation of strategies of *mimicry of marginality*.

First (see section 2), central references to the »Diskurskonstrukt« (Teubert 2018, p. 32) Heidegger are given, followed by (see section 3) his strategic enactments exemplarily based on the three categories *victimisation*, *stigmatisation* and *marginalisation*.

2. Characterizations of the Diskurskonstrukt Martin Heidegger by His Contemporary Peers

Heidegger's controversial behaviour was pointed out early on by students, colleagues and other companions. Heidegger's former student Hannah Arendt, for example, openly addresses the problem of Heidegger's inauthenticity in a letter to her husband Heinrich Blücher:

> »Seine [H.] Briefe an Jaspers, die er mir zu lesen gab, alle wie früher: das gleiche Gemisch von Echtheit und Verlogenheit oder besser Feigheit, wobei beides gleich ursprünglich ist.« (Arendt 1950\2013, p. 190)
>
> [›His [H.] letters to Jaspers, which he gave me to read, all as before: the same mixture of genuineness and mendacity or better cowardice, both being equally original.‹]

Karl Jaspers, whose correspondence Arendt refers to, also comes to a similar conclusion in the late 1940s, wondering in his notes on Martin Heidegger whether:

> »durchgehende Zweideutigkeit – die Unoffenheit, die Unaufrichtigkeit – […] in der ganzen Philosophie [Heideggers liegt].« (Jaspers 1948/50\1978, p. 58)
>
> [›the continuous ambiguity – the missing openness, the insincerity – [...] lies in the whole philosophy [of Heidegger].‹]

He elaborates on these reflections over the next decades and arrives at a remarkable judgment:

7 In doing so, the author is clearly aware of the differences in his corpus in terms of text genre. Even at first glance, a distinction must be made between the letters as dialogically addressee-oriented, private communicates, the »Schwarzen Heften« as monologically semi-public forms of notebooks and the collection of essays »Das Rektorat 1933/34: Tatsachen und Gedanken« as a monologically public form of an apologetic report. The resulting differences concern not only basic criteria (for example when, where and to what extent occasion-related these were created), but also aspects of addressee-relatedness, the degree of privacy and with regard to the characteristics of the various communicative text genres themselves. These differences, however, will be addressed at some suitable points in the analysis section, insofar as they are relevant to the analysis itself.

»Was H. 1933 tut, das waren die ›unmenschlichen‹ Folgen einer Philosophie, der der Mensch in seiner Freiheit, seiner Verantwortung, seinem Selbstsein verloren gegangen ist.« (Jaspers 1961/64\1978, p. 264).[8]

[›What H. does in 1933, those were the ›inhuman‹ consequences of a philosophy to which a man in his freedom, his responsibility, his selfhood was lost.‹]

These character judgements of long-time companions already hint at how Heidegger is to be assessed in his communication behaviour – proceeding with a certain degree of ruthlessness[9] and prepared to accept *Zweideutigkeiten* und *Uneindeutigkeiten* ›ambiguity‹ and ›insincerity‹ or to use them in his favour[10].

The fact that Heidegger may be perceived as a self-centred, ruthless and strategically truth-flexible communication partner as well as discourse actor is also evident when looking at the research literature, which, for example, points out that Heidegger's early philosophical texts were bursting with the will to self-assertion (cf. Thomä 2019, p. 383). His penchant for insincerity for his own ends has also been critically elaborated: »Heidegger's scholarship needs to distance itself from Heidegger's portrayals [...] for the simple reason that Heidegger was an inveterate liar. He had no qualms about outright fabrication« (Knowles 2019, p. 181–182). Finally, reference was made to his narcissism: »Heidegger was clearly anxious about establishing his originality as a thinker« (Bernasconi 2017, p. 174). His »anxiety about the public reception of *Being and Time* shows how consistently attentive he was to his place in the philosophical world and how deeply concerned he was

8 The Jasperian accusation of ›Unmenschlichkeit‹ has also been addressed in Heidegger research papers. Peter Trawny, for example, speaks of the philosopher's thinking being everything but moderate (cf. 2016, p. 9). Other aspects concern his philosopho-centrism in which the human being plays only a minor role: »Wer nur das ›Sein‹ im Blick hat, verliert fast zwangsläufig den Menschen aus den Augen. Die inhumane Grunddisposition bei Heidegger zeigt sich ab Mitte der 30er Jahre immer deutlicher« (Vasek 2016, p. 399). [›He who has only ›being‹ in view almost inevitably loses sight of the human being. The inhuman basic disposition in Heidegger shows itself more and more clearly from the mid-1930s onwards‹]. In this respect, Heidegger had »kein Interesse daran den Menschen zu erforschen« [›no interest in researching the human condition‹] (Precht 2020, p. 37) and had displaced the human being from his thinking (cf. Fischer 2019, p. 209).

9 Cf. also a letter of Karl Jaspers, who emphasizes Heidegger's ruthlessness and coldness: »Als Sie im März 1933 plötzlich sich entschlossen, nach Freiburg zurückzufahren, taten Sie es mit dem Wort ›man muß sich jetzt einschalten‹. Als meine Frau nach der Lektüre eines Blattes des Völkischen Beobachters weinte wie jemand, dem in der realen Welt der Boden genommen wird (es waren Drohungen und Forderungen bezüglich der jüdischen Ärzte und Rechtsanwälte), da sagten Sie: es tut gut, einmal zu weinen« (Jaspers 1978, p. 115). [›When you suddenly decided to go back to Freiburg in March 1933, you did it with the words ›one must intervene now‹. When my wife cried after reading a sheet of the Völkischer Beobachter like someone who is being grounded in the real world (it was threats and demands concerning the Jewish doctors and lawyers), you said: it is good to cry for once‹.]

10 At this point, it is not possible to discuss Heidegger's relationship to National Socialism, which has also already been comprehensively examined (cf. exemplary Knowles 2019), as well as his anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism (which also affected his philosophy) (cf. again only exemplary Di Cesare 2016).

with his philosophical legacy« (Knowles 2019, p. 27, emphasis in original) – interestingly, this contrasts sharply with Heidegger's letters, in which he, anticipating a modesty topos, indicates little to no interest in career successes (exhibits (3) to (5)). The staging of certain social roles and discursive positions also becomes clear in these passages:

(3) »Ich habe keine Anlagen zu Stellenjägerei.« (MH–KJ 05.08.1921, p. 25)

[›I have no attachments to job hunting.‹]

(4) »Hartmann und Jaensch wollen, daß ich nachrücke – ob das möglich ist, weiß ich nicht. Jedenfalls ist es mir gleichgültig.« (MH–KJ 19.05.1925, p. 50)

[›Hartmann and Jaensch want me to move up – whether that is possible I don't know. In any case, it is indifferent to me.‹]

(5) »Ich selbst habe ja keinen Ehrgeiz, mich als Autor gedruckt zu sehen, oder gar hohe Auflagen meiner Schriften herauszuschlagen.« (MH–FH 29.01.1943, p. 86)

[›I have no ambition to see myself printed as an author, or even to get high print runs of my writings.‹]

These descriptions of Heidegger's nature (partly in connection with his philosophising) by companions and research literature should make it clear that the German philosopher's communication can be characterized by strategic and intentional stagings. Heidegger tried to present himself in a better light, for example by playing down his urge for recognition and staging himself as modest, or through subsequent revisionist statements, for example, concerning his role in the ›Third Reich‹.[11] These assessments also legitimise the following analysis, in which Heidegger's communicative behaviour is understood in terms of an intentional, tentatively authentic staging of a social position that is characterized by a discursive lack of freedom of action and which one (Heidegger) makes use of to accumulate ›Opferkapital‹ for his own discursive goals and to (re)gain discursive sovereignty over his person and work.

11 In his correspondence, Heidegger often combines such revisionist statements with a kind of topos of unsayability, out of which he rejects further and sometimes demanded explanations of his behaviour or tries to avoid them. Cf. »Wenn ich auf Erklärungen zu Ihrem ersten Brief jetzt nicht eingehe, dann will ich damit nichts übergehen. Bloßes Erklären wird sogleich ins Endlose hinaus schief« (MH–KJ 05.07.1949, p. 174) [›If I do not go into explanations of your first letter now, then I do not want to pass over anything with it. Mere explaining immediately becomes crooked into the infinite‹] or »Viel lieber ginge ich auf Ihren vorigen und Ihren letzten Brief ein. Aber wo beginnen? […] Was hier gedacht ist, liegt außerhalb der Alternative von Kommunikation und Nichtkommunikation« (MH–KJ 12.08.1949, p. 181). [›I would much rather go into your previous and your last letter. But where to begin? [...] What is thought here lies outside the alternative of communication and non-communication‹].

3. Analysis

3.1 Heidegger's Stagings of Self-Victimisation in the Context of His *Mimicry of Marginality*

3.1.1 Theoretical Introduction

In the context of the analysis of this aspect of Heidegger's *mimicry of marginality*, the staging of experiences of victimisation, reference is made to the concepts of *victimhood* and (self-)*victimisation*. Victimhood and self-victimisation both appear to be directly related to the aspect of *marginality* since exclusion and marginalisation are often perceived as victimisation. Marginalised discourse actors are discursively suppressed and thus forced into a victim role. In this context, it seems central that this victim status is a constructivist one:

> »Opferschaft ist keine objektiv feststellbare Tatsache, sondern immer das Ergebnis sozialer Aushandlungs- und Zuschreibungsprozesse, die nicht selten hochgradig umstritten und stark zeitgebunden sind.« (Rudolph 2020, p. 26)
>
> [›Victimhood is not an objectively fact, but always the result of social processes of negotiation and attribution, which are not infrequently highly contested and strongly time-bound.‹]

In this context, the very concept of victimhood contains a moment of strategic appropriation (cf. Rudolph 2020, p. 24): Actors of current victim discourses often refer to similar phenomena of the past »um den eigenen Standpunkt zu legitimieren und zusätzliches ›Opferkapital‹ anzuhäufen« [›to legitimise one's own point of view and to accumulate additional ›victim capital‹‹] (ibid., p. 25). However, the success of this strategy always depends on discursive circumstances (ibid.) The concept of victimisation as a process of becoming a victim (cf. Treskow 2020, p. 45)[12] also contains a constructivist[13] as well as self-referential moment.[14] Thus, these concepts of victimisation and victimhood are products of social attribution and negotiation processes. This implies not only the often-subjective dimensions of victim status, but also the dynamic and processual character

12 A distinction can be made between victimhood and victimisation with regard to the procedural scope: »Opferschaft umfasst im Vergleich zu Viktimisierung begrifflich eher deren Rahmen, einen längeren Vorgang oder das Ergebnis von Viktimisierung. ›Opferschaft‹ enthält anders als ›Viktimisierung‹ grammatisch keinen zeitlichen Aspekt« (Treskow 2020, p. 46, emphasis in original). [›Victimhood, compared to victimisation, conceptually includes rather its frame, a longer process or outcome of victimisation. ›Victimhood‹, unlike ›victimization‹, does not contain a temporal aspect‹].

13 Thus, experiences of victimisation are the result of multiple individual and collective attribution processes (cf. Rudolph 2020, p. 31) and must be considered in their socio-economic and cultural embedding (cf. Schmoll/Müller 2020, p. 287).

14 Moreover, it stands in a nexus to other concepts, whereby the connection between victimisation and stigmatisation (see also section 3.2) is particulary relevant for this analysis (cf. Treskow 2020, p. 53).

of this status and opens multifaceted dimensions of meaning. In this openness, these concepts are used by heterogeneous groups of actors and, in part, are also instrumentalized:

> »Das Muster der Selbstviktimisierung findet sich in Argumentationen politischer Parteien, politisch extremer Gruppierungen und Radikalisierter. Der Begriff kann angesichts der damit konnotierten Forderung nach Empathie geschickt für ambivalente Opferdiskurse genutzt werden.« (Treskow 2020, p. 47)
>
> [›The pattern of self-victimisation can be found in the argumentations of political parties, politically extreme groups and radicalized persons. In view of the demand for empathy connoted with it, the term can be cleverly used for ambivalent victim discourses.‹]

and thereby entail negative consequences: »potentially toxic consequences of self-declared (›real‹ or ›imagined‹) victimisation: it often leads to forms of retribution which can prolong violence« (Duijzings 2020, p. 261). The staging of self-referential experiences of *victimhood* and *victimisation* will now be reflected upon in Martin Heidegger's communiqués.

3.1.2 Interpretation

From the 1920s (exhibit (6)) to the 1960s (exhibit (9)), there is evidence that Heidegger sees or enacts himself in various victim roles and narratives:

(6) »Es ist jetzt einwandfrei festgestellt, daß Scheler gegen mich mit allen Mitteln intrigiert.« (MH–KL 21.04.1923, p. 85–86)

[›It is now perfectly established that Scheler is scheming against me by all means.‹]

(7) »Es ist freilich nicht der erste Fall während der letzten Jahre, daß wichtige ausländische Post mich *nicht* erreicht.« (MH–KJ 22.06.1949, p. 171, emphasis in original)

[›Of course, it is not the first case during the last years that important foreign mail does *not* reach me.‹]

(8) »Ihr Brief bringt nun schon Licht in die Sache; vor allem wird die Haltung ›der Universität‹ deutlicher.« (MH–MM 27.02.1950, p. 22)

[›Your letter now sheds light on the matter; above all, the attitude of ›the university‹ becomes clearer.‹]

(9) »Von den Wühlereien des Herrn vom Collège de France habe ich gehört; ich

nehme davon aber keine weitere Kenntnis. Der betreffende hat sich schon vor Jahren den Wiesengrund-Adorno ans Collège de France bestellt, um gegen mich zu hetzen.« (MH–EJ 27.08.1966, p. 58)

[›I have heard of the incitement of the gentleman from the Collège de France, but I take no further notice of it. The man in question ordered Wiesengrund-Adorno to the Collège de France years ago in order to agitate against me.‹]

(10) »Mir gegenüber begann jetzt das Verdächtigen, das bis zur Anpöbelung ausartete.« (RTG 1945, p. 40)

[›Suspicion, which degenerated to the point of molestation, now began toward me.‹]

(11) »*Jetzt* sind *wir* daran. Ich mache mir gar nichts vor. Ich weiß, durch unseren Sohn in Rußland, daß mein Name jetzt auch wieder vorne an steht und daß die Bedrohung sich jeden Tag auswirken kann.« (MH–KJ 08.04.1950, p. 202, emphasis in original)

[›*Now* it's *our* turn. I am not fooling myself at all. I know, through our son in Russia, that my name is now also in the front line again and that the threat can affect us every day.‹]

(12) »Ich mache mir auch darüber nichts vor, daß ich mit meinem Denken zu den Bedrohtesten gehöre, die zuerst ausgelöscht werden.« (MH–HA 12.04.1950, p. 94)

[›I also don't fool myself about the fact that with my thinking I belong to the most threatened ones who will be extinguished first.‹]

Three different contexts can be discerned: I) First, Heidegger extensively portrays himself as a victim of actual or alleged conspiracies that have negative consequences for him. Thus, he refers to the fact that it has been »*einwandfrei festgestellt*« ›perfectly established‹, that people are scheming against him »*mit allen Mitteln*« ›by all means‹ (exhibit (6)), whereby both concrete actors (»*Scheler*« (exhibit (6)) or a *Herr vom Collège de France*« (exhibit (9)) and entire institutions (such as the »*Universität*« (exhibit (8)) are involved in these contexts, which can take on conspiracy-like proportions when he points out that »*wichtige ausländische Post mich nicht erreicht*« ›important foreign mail does not reach me‹. Heidegger's cited experiences of victimisation can sometimes be dismissed as careerist power struggles (exhibits (6) and (9)), but the other contexts prove more significant for reflecting Heidegger's victimisations: For example, II) he also refers to violence to which he is exposed and which thus makes him a victim – he speaks of »*Verdächtigungen*« ›suspicion‹ that degenerate into »*Anpöbelungen*« ›molestation‹ (exhibit (10)) – and III) he cites forms of existential threats,

sees himself as »*dran*« ›on‹ (exhibit (11)) as well as part of »*den Bedrohtesten, die zuerst ausgelöscht werden*« ›the most threatened ones who will be extinguished first‹ (exhibit (12)). The latter evidence is of particular relevance, as it indicates a close link between stagings of victimhood and victimisation experiences and conspiracy theory-like narratives, which can be found in Heidegger's texts. Similar to exhibit (7), a threat is indicated but remains unspecified. Why is Heidegger among the threatened thinkers who are to be erased? Even the reference to his son in Russia, through which he knows that his »*Name jetzt auch wieder vorne an steht und daß die Bedrohung sich jeden Tag auswirken kann*« ›name is now also in the front line again and that the threat can affect us every day‹ (exhibit (11)), can do little to concretize the constructed threat.

The evidence, however, indicates Heidegger's strategic staging behaviour, which in this case is probably intended to serve the purpose, of among other things, arousing empathy on the part of the addressee. This is of particular relevance against the backdrop of perpetrator-victim-reversals that can also be encountered in Heidegger's writing:

(13) »Ich habe Dich vergessen – nicht aus Gleichgültigkeit, nicht weil äußere Umstände sich dazwischen drängten, sondern weil ich Dich vergessen mußte und vergessen werde, so oft ich auf den Weg der letzten konzentrierten Arbeit komme.« (MH–HA 10.01.1926, p. 54)

[›I have forgotten you – not out of indifference, not because external circumstances interfered, but because I had to forget you and will forget you as often as I come to the path of the last concentrated work.‹]

(14) »Auf Grund des Beamtengesetzes verschwinden in meinem Fach hier drei Juden, so daß ich ganz allein – ohne Assistenten – die Arbeit machen muß.« (MH–FH 13.04.1933, p. 35)

[›Due to the Beamtengesetz, three Jews disappear in my compartment here, so that I have to do the work all by myself – without assistants.‹]

(15) »Hier ist es wenig schön. Wir müssen KZ-Leute in die Wohnung nehmen.« (MH–FH 23.07.1945, p. 126)

[›It is not very nice here. We have to take concentration camp people into the apartment.‹]

In all three of the cited examples, the *perpetrator* (whereby a broad definition of *perpetrator* must be taken) stages himself as a *victim*, either to present himself as the actual sufferer who »*vergessen mußte*« ›had to forget‹ in the context of a separation that he himself had initiated and promoted (exhibit (13)), or to point out in the context of the anti-Jewish regulations at universities that threatened both the existence and life of Jewish scientists, that he »*ganz allein die Arbeit machen muß*« ›has to do the work all by myself‹ (example

(14)), or in order to point out after the end of the Second World War how difficult and »*wenig schön*« ›not very nice‹ it was to now have to take »*KZ-Leute in die Wohnung*« ›concentration camp people into the apartment‹ (exhibit (15)). In these passages, Heidegger's self-centeredness becomes quite apparent, whose experiences of victimhood and victimisation thus appear in a different light and allow the conclusion that a privileged discourse actor inappropriately stages himself as a victim – regardless of the hegemonic position he held and which makes his conspiracy-theoretically tinged statements (cf. Thomson 2017, p. 188) implausible.[15]

These passages also clearly show how the stagings of victimisation can be interpreted as part of Heidegger's *mimicry* of being or appearing *marginal* oneself – he sees himself as a victim pushed to discursive margins that in no way reflect his actual discursive position before, during and after the ›Third Reich‹.

3.2 Heidegger's Stagings of Self-Stigmatisation in the Context of His *Mimicry of Marginality*

3.2.1 Theoretical Introduction

The connection between *victimisation* and *stigmatisation* was already stated in 3.1.1, so that both aspects can be understood as elements of *mimicry of marginality*: Just as *victimhood* and *victimisation* marginalise and exclude discourse actors and thus locate them on the discursive periphery, *stigmatisation* can result in these effects. Therefore, it seems obvious to take a deeper look at the aspects of (self-)*stigmatisation*. Fundamentally, *stigmatisation* refers to the attribution of »negativ bewerteter, gruppenspezifischer Merkmale und Verhaltensweisen« (Colmenero 2015) [›negatively evaluated, group-specific characteristics and behaviors‹]. At this juncture, we will argue for a broader concept of stigmatisation, which includes all possible elements that can contribute to the construction of a negative social identity.

15 This goes hand in hand with levelling strategies that can also be found, which can have the aim to blame ›all sides‹. Cf. »Diejenigen, die damals schon so prophetisch begabt waren, daß sie alles kommen sahen, wie es kam – so weise war ich nicht –, warum haben sie fast 10 Jahre gewartet, um gegen das Unheil anzugehen« (RTD 1945, p. 26) [›Those who were already so prophetically gifted at that time that they saw everything coming – I was not that wise – why did they wait almost 10 years to go against the disaster‹]. Again working with a diminutive or modest topos – he was just »nicht so weise« ›not that wise‹ – any hegemonic power difference is levelled by Heidegger at this point – it may seem almost comical that the German philosopher, seemingly unaware of all the mechanisms of oppression in the ›Third Reich‹, asks why they waited almost 10 years, »um gegen das Unheil anzugehen« ›to go against the disaster‹. That at the same time such statements can be evaluated as part of staging narratives is shown by other statements that stand in contrast to the one quoted above (and can also be evaluated as staging strategies). Cf. »An einen ›Sieg‹ haben wir nie geglaubt; und wenn es dahin gekommen wäre, wären wir zuerst gefallen. Schon im Sommersemester 1937 wußte ich das ganz eindeutig« (MH–KJ 08.04.1950, p. 201, emphasis in original) [›We never believed in ›victory‹; and if it had come to that, we would have fallen first. Already in the summer semester of 1937 I knew that quite clearly‹].

Similar to *victimhood* and *victimisation*, acts of *stigmatisation* should be thought of as historically, socially and culturally specific, mutable (cf. Colmenero 2015), and ultimately constructivist acts of attribution – *stigmatisations* include thereby not only the acts of exclusion themselves but also the construction of an excluded self (cf. Lobenstein-Reichmann 2013, p. 12). *Stigmatisations* and *stigmas* have been comprehensively described by Erving Goffman as substantial threats to someone's identity (cf. Sepp 2017, p. 272). Not only does he introduce a basic typology and distinguish between *stigmatisations* of a) physical deformities (in the late Middle Ages and early modern times, these were mainly related to lepers and leprosy sufferers), b) individual character defects (such as weakness of will, treacherous or weak opinions, unnatural passions, or dishonourableness) and c) phylogenetic characteristics (such as ethnicity, race, nation, or religion) (cf. Lobenstein-Reichmann 2013, p. 10), but he also describes the effects that *stigmatisations* can have on the individual and how that often leads to a redefinition of one's social, cultural and discursive value (cf. Goffman 1967, p. 163–164).

At this point, we are not concerned with Heidegger's stigmatising actions,[16] but with utterances that suggest that he feels stigmatised by others, or that he enacts himself as stigmatised by others, in order to indicate that he himself is threatened, victimised and marginalised.

3.2.2 Interpretation

Two types of stigmatisation experiences become recognizable in Heidegger's communication: On the one hand, (in a broader sense) *phylogenetic acts of stigmatisation*, within which he sees himself »*als Nazi abgestempelt*« ‘labeled a Nazi‹ (exhibit (16)) and on the other hand, much more comprehensively, *individual characterizations of stigmatisation*, within which he stages himself as misunderstood as well as his work insufficiently interpreted (exhibits (17) to (19)).

(16) »[M]an ist jetzt endgültig als Nazi abgestempelt; man wird so etwas, was man gar nicht war in dem Sinne, wie die Welt das meint.« (MH–FH 21.09.1942, p. 142)

16 Evidence for this can easily be found, however and Heidegger himself often made stigmatising statements in his various textual communications; in addition to his letters, especially in the so-called »Schwarzen Heften«. In particular, his anti-Judaic to anti-Semitic remarks should be mentioned, in which he uses common pejorative stereotypes. Cf. »Die Juden ›leben‹ bei ihrer betont rechnerischen Begabung am längsten schon nach dem Rasseprinzip, weshalb sie sich auch am heftigsten gegen die uneingeschränkte Anwendung zur Wehr setzen« (SH 1939–1941, p. 56, emphasis in original) [›The Jews, with their emphatically calculative aptitude, have been ›living‹ according to the racial principle for the longest time, which is why they are also the most vehemently opposed to its unrestricted application‹] or »Das Weltjudentum, aufgestachelt durch die aus Deutschland hinausgelassene Emigranten, ist überall unfaßbar und braucht sich bei aller Machtentfaltung nirgends an kriegerischen Handlungen zu beteiligen, wogegen uns nur bleibt, das beste Blut des eigenen Volkes zu opfern« (SH 1948–1951, p. 164). [›World Jewry, incited by the emigrants let out of Germany, is everywhere incomprehensible and, with all the development of power, nowhere needs to take part in warlike actions, whereas all that remains for us is to sacrifice the best blood of our own people.‹]

[›You are now definitively labeled a Nazi; you become something you were not at all in the sense that the world thinks you were.‹]

(17) »Man *kann* so verantwortungslos verfahren bei der Auslegung der Rede; man darf sich aber dann nicht ausgeben als solchen, der sich verantwortlich weiß für den Geist und das Heil der deutschen Universität. Denn so oberflächlich zu denken und so oberflächlich in den Tag hineinzuschwätzen, entspricht vielleicht politischen Methoden, widerspricht aber dem innersten Geist der Sachlichkeit des Denkens, welchen Geist man doch retten zu müssen vorgibt.« (RTG 1945, p. 30, emphasis in original)

[›One *can* proceed so irresponsibly in the interpretation of the speech; but then one must not pretend to be one who knows himself responsible for the spirit and the salvation of the German university. For to think so superficially and to prate so superficially into the day may correspond to political methods, but it contradicts the innermost spirit of objectivity of thought, which spirit one nevertheless pretends to have to save.‹]

(18) »Weder die Zeitung noch der Schriftsteller haben sich damals auf ein Durchdenken dessen eingelassen, was damals geschah. Und im Grunde ist das heute noch so. Wenn ich mir die Reaktion auf meinen Technikvortrag ansehe, dann finde ich überall nur das eine: man meint, ohne das Denken auskommen zu können.« (MH–MM 18.04.1954, p. 37–38, emphasis in original)

[›Neither the newspaper nor the writer engaged in thinking through what was happening then. And basically, that's still the case today. When I look at the reaction to my technology lecture, I find only one thing everywhere: people think they can do without thinking.‹]

(19) »Sie werden inzwischen Gadamers Buch auch schon gesehen haben. Was das Verhältnis meines Denkens zu Husserl betrifft, sind einige grobe Irrtümer unterlaufen, die freilich nur durch sorgfältige philologische Arbeit beseitigt werden können.« (MH–OP 07.01.1961, p. 93)

[›You will have seen Gadamer's book by now. As far as the relation of my thinking to Husserl is concerned, some gross errors have been made, which, of course, can only be eliminated by careful philological work.‹]

(20) »Die seit 1928 festsitzenden Vor-urteile sind nur mehr schwer auszurotten.« (MH–OP 19.02.1959, p. 22)

[›The prejudices that have been stuck since 1928 are now difficult to eradicate.‹]

It is interesting that Heidegger often de-individualizes the perpetrators of his stigmatisation experiences and captures them with the non-specific, impersonal pronoun »*man*« (see the exhibits (16) to (18)). By using this generalizing pronoun, Heidegger indexes a certain generality of his experiences that goes beyond the individually described situations and is meant to present his stigmatisation experiences in a more comprehensive picture.

By presenting himself as negatively stereotyped, classified or misunderstood, Heidegger is able, on the one hand, to describe himself once again as the victim of negative acts of attribution and, on the other hand, to reject criticism arising from what he sees as misinterpretations of his work. Thus, he condemns the forms of his misinterpretations as »*verantwortungslos*« ›irresponsible‹ (exhibit (17)), denies the actors expressing them to have engaged in a »*Durchdenken*« ›thinking through‹ of his work (exhibit (18)) and points to »*einige grobe Irrtümer*« ›some gross errors‹ (exhibit (19)) in the interpretation of his thoughts . In this context, the *acts of stigmatisation* also have a diachronic component, when he refers in exhibit (20) to the fact that the »*Vorurteile*« ›prejudices‹ against him have existed since 1928 and are »*nur mehr schwer auszurotten*« ›now difficult to eradicate‹.

In this way, a close connection emerges between acts of *victimisation* and *stigmatisation*, to which Heidegger refers for his »Opferkapital«, staging himself as misunderstood, as well as stereotypically or stigmatisingly forced into certain social roles. The effects of marginalisation alluded to in both previous categories of analysis will be highlighted in a final step when it comes to *self-marginalisation* enactments in the German philosopher's textual communication.

3.3 Heidegger's Stagings of Self-Marginalisation in the Context of His *Mimicry of Marginality*

3.3.1 Theoretical introduction

As already stated in the introduction, the concept of *marginalisation* was determined as one of five basic forms of oppression. Oppression that can affect both ethnic and social groups (cf. Lobenstein-Reichmann 2013, p. 344 or Walaszewska 2017, p. 77), is to be seen closely in the context of other forms of discrimination (e.g., discrimination of professional achievements but also personal characteristics such as intelligence) (cf. Sepp 2017, p. 274) and results in negative effects such as loss of respect or social isolation (cf. ibid.). In these manifestations, experiences of *marginalisation* in certain areas of communication have also already been captured by linguistic researchers (cf. Marx 2017 or Mattfeldt 2020). Heidegger now stages experiences and effects of *marginalisation* much more frequently than of *stigmatisation*:

3.3.2 Interpretation

(21) »Ich überlege mir ernstlich, ob ich meinen Aristoteles nicht zurückziehen soll. – Mit den ›Rufen‹ wird es wohl nichts werden. Und wenn ich erst publiziert habe, wird es gar aus sein mit den Aussichten.« (MH–KL 08.05.1923, p. 88)

[›I am seriously considering withdrawing my Aristotle. – It will probably come to nothing with the (professorship) ›calls‹. And when I will be published, it will be over with the prospects.‹]

(22) »Jetzt ist es doch so weit, daß ich auf der ganzen Linie – was man so nennt – abgelehnt werde in allen Weisen und Tonarten.« (MH–KL 06.08.1932, p. 183)

[›Now, after all, I am rejected all along the line and in all ways and keys.‹]

(23) »Mein gedruckter Hölderlinvortrag wird offenbar systematisch totgeschwiegen.« (MH–FH 20.02.1942, p. 79)

[›My printed Hölderlin lecture is apparently being systematically hushed up.‹]

(24) »Die Erwähnung und Besprechung dieses Aufsatzes wurde parteiamtlich verboten.« (RTG 1945, p. 22)

[›The mention and discussion of this essay was banned by party officials.‹]

(25) »Ich bin seit fünf Jahren von der Universität entfernt und werde, trotz aller Bemühungen Einzelner, wie ein toter Hund behandelt. Das ist die Tatsache, an der Versicherungen, ich sei der größte Philosoph der Zeit und allerlei Vertröstungen und das Ausstreuen der Nachricht, ich läse längst wieder, nicht das mindeste ändern.« (MH–KB 29.06.1950, p. 128)

[›I have been ousted from the university for five years and, despite all efforts of individuals, I am treated like a dead dog. This is the fact that assurances that I am the greatest philosopher of the time and all kinds of dissuasions and the spreading of the news that I have been reading again for a long time do not change anything at all.‹]

(26) »Wir sind heute nicht nur Einzelne und Vereinzelte. Wir sind auch ohne die Aussicht auf eine Sicherheit und Stetigkeit des Geschichtsganges.« (MH–EJ 31.03.1955, p. 28)

[›Today we are not only individuals and isolated. We are also without the prospect of a certainty and steadiness of the course of history.‹]

(27) »Die ständig wiederkehrenden politischen Anwürfe und Lügen sind nur die hilflosen Versuche, mein Denken aus dem Gesichtskreis der heutigen ›Gesellschaft‹ wegzuschieben.« (MH–MM 17.05.1966, p. 54)

[›The constantly recurring political accusations and lies are only the helpless attempts to push my thinking away from the field of vision of today's ›society‹.‹]

Two forms of *marginalisation* become discernible: I) First, though rarely encountered, are seemingly experienced *marginalisations* concerning his professional future, as in exhibit (21), in which he points out to his pen pal Karl Löwith that »*mit den Rufen wohl nichts werden wird*« ›it will probably come to nothing with the (professorship) calls‹. To what extent Heidegger is staging himself at this point, or whether these remarks are authentic expressions of his uncertainty, cannot ultimately be determined. Indeed, in the early 1920s, Heidegger was still in an uncertain situation – something that can be comprehensively traced in the correspondence between him and Karl Jaspers.[17] However, it can at least be doubted that Heidegger's prospects were so unpromising, since a letter to Löwith, sent about six weeks later, already contains a success: »Ich habe einen Ruf nach Marburg mit Rechten und Stellung eines Ordinarius zum 1. Oktober« [›I have received a call to Marburg with the rights and position of a full professor as of October 1‹] (MH–KL 18.06.1923, p. 94). Heidegger's professional position may not have been so bad after all, so that these expressions of professional marginality can be interpreted as strategic, at least to a certain extent, against the background of the impetus of Heidegger's communicative behaviour, which was examined in section 2.

II) Furthermore, Heidegger sees himself excluded from social spheres and *marginalised* in this way – he explicitly names this »*Wegschieben aus dem Gesichtskreis der heutigen ›Gesellschaft‹*« ›pushing my thinking away from the field of vision of today's »society«‹. It is striking that Heidegger speaks of such *marginalisations* independently of the social system: Already at the end of the Weimar Republic (1932) he refers to being rejected »*auf der ganzen Linie*« ›all along the line‹ (exhibit (22)), recurs, that during the ›Third Reich‹ his lectures (exhibit (23)) and essays (exhibit (24)) were »*systematisch totgeschwiegen*« ›systematically hushed up‹ or »*parteiamtlich verboten*« ›banned by party officials‹ and (in his opinion) is not listened to even after the end of the war, was »*von der Universität entfernt, wie ein toter Hund behandelt*« ›ousted from the university and treated like a dead dog‹ (exhibit (25)), sees himself as »*Einzelnen und Vereinzelten*« ›individual and isolated‹ (exhibit (26)) and thus pushed away from the field of vision of today's society (exhibit

17 Cf. »Von der Aussichtslosigkeit des Heidelberger Extraordinariats wurde ich durch eine Andeutung von Afra Geiger in einem Brief an Löwith gebührend unterrichtet […]. Gefreut hätte ich mich sehr vor allem für meine Arbeit, die dadurch ›freier‹ und ›gelöster‹ geworden wäre. So lebe ich weiter unter innerem und äußerem Druck.« (MH–KJ 03.08.1921, p. 25) [›I was duly informed of the hopelessness of the Heidelberg Extraordinariate by a hint from Afra Geiger in a letter to Löwith [...]. I would have been very happy, especially for my work, which would have become ›freer‹ and ›looser‹ as a result. So, I continue to live under inner and outer pressure.‹]

(27)).[18] Considering Heidegger's successes in the 1920s (at the latest since the publication of »Sein und Zeit«), his singled-out position as a thinker during the Nazi regime (cf. Arendt 2019 [1946], p. 320), and his canonization in the 1950s and 1960s, it seems rather absurd to conceptualize him as a cut-off, marginalised actor.

It can be interpreted as an expression of Heidegger's self-centeredness, that despite all honours and reach, he nevertheless sees himself as too little or misread. It can also be interpreted as a sign of a strategy to diminish and marginalise oneself, to stage oneself as threatened and stigmatised in order to create a better image vis-à-vis one's correspondents, to be able to demand empathy and thus to overwrite one's own weaknesses and failings.

Mimicry of marginality serves the strategic staging of social and discursive *marginalisations* (cf. Warnke/Bonacchi/Brylla 2022, p. 507) and thus at the same time as a masking of hegemony (cf. ibid.). This masking is specifically functional for discourse actors who make use of these procedures. In the example chosen by Bonacchi, Brylla and Warnke of a tweet by former AfD leader Jörg Meuthen, such a purpose can lie, for example, in the deflection or redirection of socio-political contexts:

> »Im Kontext eines schwarzen Opfers tödlicher rassistischer Polizeigewalt entschied der AfD-Chef also, über Rassismus gegen die weiße deutsche Mehrheitsgesellschaft zu sprechen.« (Bonacchi/Brylla/Warnke 2022, p. 507)
>
> [›So in the context of a black victim of deadly racist police violence, the AfD leader decided to talk about racism against white German majority society.‹]

When Heidegger speaks of himself as existentially threatened, as misunderstood and *marginalised*, there is often a perpetrator-victim reversal, with which Heidegger at least attempts to claim for himself the empathy and understanding of actual victims of experiences of *victimisation*, *stigmatisation* and *marginalisation*. Against the background of his own Nazi entanglements (cf. Zaborowski 2009 or Rohrkrämer 2020) as well as racist, anti-Judaic and anti-Semitic statements and attitudes (cf. Rockmore 2017 or Precht 2020, p. 133), which he expressed not only as a private person but also as a world-class philosopher and understood as part of his philosophy (cf. Di Cesare 2014 or Lapidot 2016), such remarks as Heidegger makes in his correspondence or notebooks appear problematic and worthy of reappraisal.

18 Indeed, Heidegger was forbidden to teach at universities after the end of the ›Third Reich‹, partly on the basis of an expert opinion by Karl Jaspers. However, this ban did not last long (1945–1951) and did not hinder his extensive and international reception. Already at the beginning of the 1950s, an intensive reception of Heidegger took place in Germany. Thus, while exhibit (26) may still reflect Heidegger's situation to a certain extent, this can hardly apply to his later assessments in exhibits (27) (from 1955) and (28) (from 1966).

4. Concluding Remarks

Language serves both as a medium of *communication* and as a medium of *exclusion*, *stigmatisation* and *victimisation*. On the one hand, it is a medium for critically pointing out and reflecting on these phenomena and on the other hand, it is a medium for implementing these very phenomena:

> »Im Anschluss an die sprechaktheoretische Einsicht, dass Sprechen zugleich Handeln ist, kommt es uns auf den Umstand an, dass wir Gewalt durch Sprache nicht nur androhen oder darstellen können, sondern dass in Sprache und mittels Sprache auch Gewalt vollzogen und ausgeübt werden kann.« (Koch 2010, p. 11)
>
> [›Following the speech-act-theoretical insight that speaking is at the same time acting, we are concerned with the fact that we can not only threaten or represent violence through language, but that violence can also be carried out and exercised in language and by means of language‹]

An important task in this context is the capturing and reflection of corresponding linguistic practices. This thematic issue aims to make an important contribution to this, based on the practice of *mimicry of marginality*.

My contribution is not about acts of *marginalisation* of perpetrators towards victims, but about acts that aim at a form of self-referential *victimisation*. Based on Martin Heidegger, an important philosopher of the 20th century, certain strategies were demonstrated and their functionality reflected upon. Against the background of Heidegger's continuing relevance for the human and social sciences, critical re-readings appear as necessary as they are required to point out ethically problematic aspects of the thoughts and actions of this canonical author. On the basis of three inductive categories (*self-victimisation*, *self-stigmatisation* and *self-marginalisation*), an attempt was made to trace the extent to which, in what ways and for what purpose Heidegger makes use of strategies in order to mask himself in the sense of *mimicry of marginality*. Based on a corpus consisting primarily of various correspondences, but also of other testimonies, it was possible to show how Heidegger uses these strategies to present himself in a certain light, to divert attention from his own mistakes and thus to pre-empt the evaluation of his person by others (e.g., his pen pals) or to influence them. In the context of this contribution, however, this could only be done exemplarily and is, therefore, to be understood as the first step of a more comprehensive, communication practice-oriented, discourse-ethical reappraisal of Martin Heidegger.

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Postkolonialismus trifft Kritische Theorie

Nikita Dhawan
Die Aufklärung vor Europa retten
Kritische Theorien der Dekolonisierung

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Postkoloniale Studien, die sich mit dem Erbe des weltweiten Kolonialismus und Imperialismus auseinandersetzen, erfahren derzeit insbesondere von rechter, aber auch liberaler Seite Kritik: Ihnen wird vorgeworfen, gegen die Aufklärung, nihilistisch, eurozentrisch und schließlich antisemitisch zu sein. Nikita Dhawan argumentiert dagegen, dass diese Vorwürfe bestenfalls auf Missverständnissen des Projektes der Dekolonisierung beruhen. Sie versucht, den »versäumten Begegnungen« zwischen Postkolonialen und Holocaust Studies nachzuspüren und darüber hinaus die »Identitätsverwechslung« zwischen postkolonialen und dekolonialen Ansätzen zu bereinigen. Zusammenfassend beleuchtet Dhawan die widersprüchlichen Konsequenzen der Aufklärung, ohne einen gegenaufklärerischen Standpunkt einzunehmen. »Die Aufklärung vor Europa retten« bedeutet für sie, die Unabdingbarkeit der Aufklärung in der Umsetzung kritischer Projekte zu behaupten, zugleich aber ihr »giftiges Erbe« mitzudenken.

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Fortschritt auf dem Prüfstand

Petra Pinzler
Hat das Zukunft oder kann das weg?
Der Fortschrittskompass

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Was ist heute Fortschritt? Brauchen wir mehr oder weniger Wachstum? Niedrigere Steuern oder bessere Umverteilung? Mehr Freizeit? Rettet uns die Technologie vor der Klimakrise oder ein anderes Verhalten? Die Journalistin Petra Pinzler sortiert die Fäden: Wo sind die Ideen, die uns ein gutes Leben bringen, und wer will uns dagegen Rückschritt als Fortschritt verkaufen? Ihr Buch beantwortet große Fragen mit lebensnahen Antworten und misst die kursierenden Fortschrittskonzepte an den gegenwärtigen Herausforderungen.

»In Zeiten der Zumutung können wir Schuldige suchen oder den Mut finden, Ressourcen zu bündeln, um neue Strukturen zu schaffen. Wer Lust auf Letzteres hat, wird mit diesem Buch belohnt.« *Prof. Dr. Maja Göpel, Politökonomin und Nachhaltigkeitswissenschaftlerin*

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Zukunftsangst, nein danke!

Andrea Römmele
Demokratie neu denken
Szenarien unserer Welt
von morgen

2024 · 223 Seiten · € 30,–
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Angesichts der großen gesellschaftlichen Herausforderungen brauchen wir in Deutschland eine Politik, die Probleme nicht verwaltet, sondern visionär nach vorne denkt. Denn nur die Vorstellung möglicher Zukunftsszenarien rüstet uns für Eventualitäten und macht Demokratie gestaltbar.

In diesem Sinne beschreibt Andrea Römmele die Megatrends und Konfliktlinien, die alle Lebensbereiche unserer Gesellschaft erfasst haben: Digitalisierung, Klimawandel, demografische Entwicklung, Migration, global vernetzte Wirtschaft und Urbanisierung. Zu jedem dieser Megatrends entwirft sie fiktive Szenarien, die veranschaulichen, wie Demokratie bei großen Veränderungen lebendig bleiben kann – oder wie sie scheitert.

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Fabian Kessl / Holger Schoneville (Hrsg.)

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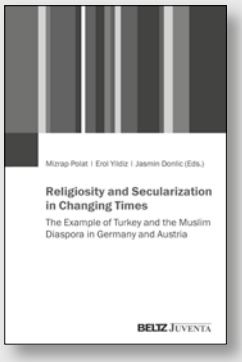
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