

NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET?: ARAB AND MUSLIM IMMIGRATION AND FAR-  
RIGHT REACTIONS TO RACE, NATION, AND CULTURE

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation analyzes how far-right digitally networked German and American Islamophobic communities on Twitter frame, discuss, and imagine Arab and Muslim communities as supposedly destabilizing the Western-nation state as a racially homogenous national cultural community. Employing a feminist grounded theory methodology this dissertation involves scraping the comparative hashtags #Islamization and #Islamisierung, visualizing digitally networked Islamophobic communities, identifying user-types, analyzing discursive themes, and tracking information transmission to examine the way in which Islamophobic digital discourse is not merely Transatlantic but increasingly transnationalized among American, German, Indian, and Nigerian digital networks. In charting the contours of these Islamophobic digitally networked communities and the content of their conversations, this dissertation tracks the way in which German and American far-right Twitter users increasingly articulate a series of paranoid linkages between Muslim, Jewish, and Black communities alongside political progressives, multi-lateral institutions, and national governments as united in seeking to destabilize an imagined white or ethnic German, Christian, hetero-patriarchal nation-state and the broader cultural imaginary of the West. This dissertation contributes to contemporary studies of far-right digitally networked communities and finds that even as far-right German and American Islamophobic networked communities are mired within racially exclusionary nationalist rhetoric they are increasingly linked to the growth of transnational and multi-racial far-right networks that span the Global North and South.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION .....	1
A Note on Terminology .....	11
CHAPTER I. HISTORICIZING RACE, NATION, AND CULTURE IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES.....	21
Germany: From Ethnic Nationalism to a <i>Multikulti</i> State .....	22
The US, India, and Nigeria: Whiteness, (Hindu) Nationalism, and Fulanization .....	27
Conclusion .....	34
CHAPTER II. A FEMINIST GROUNDED THEORY FRAMEWORK FOR WORKING WITH DIGITAL DATA.....	36
The Data Themselves.....	45
CHAPTER III. IDENTIFYING GERMAN AND AMERICAN FAR -RIGHT TWITTER USERS .....	54
Introduction.....	54
The Far-Right Hindu Nationalist .....	65
The Neighborly Racist .....	70
The MAGA Devotee.....	77
The White Supremacist Nationalist .....	85
A Clash of Civilizations: Saffronization, Islamophobia, and Whiteness.....	88
The <i>Heimat</i> Enthusiast.....	97
The Neighborly German Racist .....	100
The Transnational Trumpist.....	102
The Alleged Anti-Totalitarian.....	105

“ <i>Der Islamischen Republik Deutschland</i> ” (IRD): Mosques and (Mis)information.....	108
Conclusion: Transnationalizing and Categorizing Far-Right Users .....	112
CHAPTER IV. MAPPING GERMAN AND AMERICAN FAR-RIGHT	
ISLAMOPHOBIC DIGITALLY NETWORKED COMMUNITIES .....	116
Introduction.....	116
Crafting (Aesthetic) Graphs .....	122
Early Spring Graphs.....	127
Late Spring Early Summer Graphs .....	147
Late Summer Graphs .....	156
Conclusions: Far-Right Islamophobic Network Structures .....	170
CHAPTER V. TRAVELING ACROSS FAR-RIGHT DIGITALLY NETWORKED	
COMMUNITIES .....	175
Introduction.....	175
Quarantine or “Quran-time?”: COVID-19 Crises and Mediating Islamophobic	
Digital Discourse .....	178
Women, Children, and <i>Gemeinschaft</i> .....	206
Digital Born Conspiracies and Islamophobic Discourse .....	230
Conclusions: Digital Soldiers and Cultural Warfare .....	248
CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION: NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET? .....	251
REFERENCES .....	262



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Graph A USA March 25, 2020 .....	127
2	Graph B Germany March 27, 2020.....	128
3	Graph C USA April 7, 2020 .....	133
4	Graph D Germany April 7, 2020 .....	134
5	Graph E USA May 8, 2020.....	141
6	Graph F Germany May 1, 2020 .....	142
7	Graph G USA June 17, 2020 .....	147
8	Graph H Germany June 5, 2020 .....	148
9	Graph I USA July 4, 2020.....	156
10	Graph J Germany July 27, 2020 .....	157
11	Graph K USA August 24, 2020 .....	165
12	Graph L Germany August 8, 2020.....	166
13	The Goal of the Left? .....	198
14	The Goal of the Left...A Radical, Totalitarian Feline Society.....	200
15	Top Meme Describing the Struggle for White Supremacy and Global Authoritarianism .....	202
16	Zuckerfest-Look.....	209
17	Stab Wounds in Spring .....	222
18	Iran Pre-1979 .....	239
19	Somehow it All Makes Sense .....	241

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	American and German User-Types and Initial Codes .....	59

## INTRODUCTION

The 21<sup>st</sup> century may be defined as an era of multiple and overlapping geopolitical crises; the 2008-2009 financial crisis, the so-called Syrian refugee crisis in Europe, the environmental crisis of global warming, the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic, and finally the persistent crisis of sustained police brutality and systemic racism experienced by Black Americans in the United States (Öniş 2017). From this departure point of crisis, this dissertation engages in a transnational analysis of Germany and the United States to examine how far-right communities on Twitter frame, imagine, and discuss Arab and Muslim communities and immigration.

In grounding this transnational comparison, I use the concept of crisis as a frame with which to probe both the political crisis of the nation-state as a supposedly homogenous cultural and racial community as well as the crisis of national identity in an age of globalization. Both of these parallel crises, of the object of the nation-state and the subjectivity of national identity, are influenced by a series of structural changes to national economies and societies as a result of globalization which has spurred transnational migration, exacerbated forms of income inequality, and influenced a shift towards robotization and contingent, precarious service employment (Arrighi 2007; Baldwin 2016; Castles 2002).

In using crisis as a frame, I emphasize crisis as both real and imagined, “organic” and constructed drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci (1976). Stuart Hall in discussing the Gramscian usage of the frame of crisis defines crisis as “not a static phenomenon but rather, one marked by constant movement, polemics, contestations, etc., which represent the attempt by different sides to overcome or resolve the crisis and to do so in term that favor their long term hegemony” (1986, 13). As such, I explore how far-right digitally networked communities seek to discursively resolve what they view as the imagined crisis of increasing racial and religious

diversity that signals a more fundamental threat to the existing white and ethnic German Christian hegemony within each nation-state.

This global, digital comparison seeks to intervene in and comparatively examine the concept of race as a defining feature of national identity and culture in Germany and the United States. Additionally, this dissertation contributes to a greater understanding of relations between digital nationalisms, race, immigration, and culture in the current period. To further examine these crises of nationalism and race, this dissertation explores how American and German digital far-right groups discuss, frame, and describe Arab and Muslim communities and immigration in terms of the cultural crisis of immigration as supposedly overwhelming Western cultural values, and implicitly, Western whiteness (Feldman 2011). The dissertation answers two central research questions; how do far-right Twitter users imagine, frame, and discuss the presence of Arab and Muslim communities in Germany and the United States in digital, national, and global contexts? And, how do German and American far-right Twitter users articulate the racial, cultural, and religious boundaries of nation and national identity on Twitter?

By examining the way in which far-right German and American digitally networked Islamophobic communities discuss and frame Arab and Muslims groups I implicitly turn the analytical lens on these communities themselves. As Edward Said articulated in his seminal work, *Orientalism* (1979), tracing and critiquing the way in which Western scholars and authors constructed a romanticized image of the Orient in the larger context of the political-economic project of colonialism, analyzing constructions and representations does not reveal a fundamental essence of the Other but rather illuminates the dynamics of power that inform the construction of these representations. As such, this dissertation project's main research questions and analysis of far-right discourse, while focused on Islamophobic digitally networked communities, works to

reveal, analyze, and deconstruct the way in which far-right German and American users understand their own national and racial identities.

What this project documents is the way in which Islamophobic digital discourse for both German and American digitally networked communities is increasingly transnationalized and links Arab and Muslim communities with other targeted groups: Jews, Black communities, the LGBTQIA+ community, and political progressives as threatening to destabilize an imagined white or ethnic German, Christian, hetero-patriarchal nation-state and the broader cultural imaginary of the West. This dissertation demonstrates the mutability of far-right German and American Islamophobic ideology and its connections to other ideological positions such as misogyny, gender reactionary ideology, and racism that become mediated by far-right Twitter users who act as “digital soldiers” for the cause of racialized (trans)nationalism.

I contend that this current state of crisis of nation and culture that categorizes liberal democracy in the West is most productively explored by juxtaposing an analysis of German and American far-right online communities. Whereas the United States historically represents the unique tension between capitalism, liberal democracy, and white supremacy (Melamed 2015), comparatively, Germany represents a nation where, after the breakdown of the liberal democratic Weimar Republic, the nation descended into a regime of genocidal fascism through the rise of the Third Reich and the subsequent Second World War (Bergen 2016).

As nations of extremes in terms of racialized statecraft, both Germany and the United States are implicated within discourses of historical revision and (re)presentation of their national pasts. German and American scholars have sought for the articulation of a national usable past to examine, analyze, and theorize on the present and future of their respective societies. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, American Studies scholars noted a singular and pragmatic defining feature of the

field as articulating a “usable past” with which to understand contemporary socio-culture conditions (Trachtenberg 1984, 671; Shank 1997, 97). Comparatively, in Germany, historians have also called for the articulation of a “usable past” in the aftermath of the fascist Third Reich and Germany’s partition into the democratic and communist states of the Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD) and the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR), respectively. Robert Moeller, in discussing the mediation of post-WWII cultures of memory in the BRD, notes that even in the 1950s “[t]he German search for a usable past is not at an end” (2001, 20)

For both Germany and the United States, the necessity of articulating a usable past is particularly pressing with each nation at critical political and cultural junctures. Both the United States and Germany have witnessed similar far-right populist political waves since the 2010s that spurred the election of Donald Trump in the 2016 American presidential election and the electoral success of the emergent far-right anti-immigration party the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in the German 2017 federal election (Benkler et al. 2017; Erlanger and Eddy 2017). Additionally, the German state is in the midst of enacting immigration and integration policies to address the settlement of over one million refugees (Degler and Leibig 2017). In doing so, the German state is on the precipice of realizing a multi-ethnic, democratic society. Comparatively, the United States is currently defined by a more epistemic crisis of racialized nationalism that affects not only Arab and Muslim communities, but immigrants and Americans of color more broadly, with persistent racialized violence perpetuated against Black Americans by the police and a former federal administration that has enacted racialized immigration policies designed to re-whiten the nation (Hubler and Bosman 2020; Serwer 2019). Moreover, the January 6, 2021 Capitol insurrection that saw Trump supporters storm Congress in an attempt to

stop the certification of the 2020 presidential election further exemplifies the state of epistemic crisis American democracy is experiencing (Biesecker et al. 2021).

Thus, the search for a usable past is a key scholarly question in terms of German and American history and a contemporary cultural and political imperative to make sense of current conditions—with far-right digitally networked communities engaging in curating their own forms of racially exclusionary national pasts to realize racially exclusionary and usable futures for their own purposes. Placing these national histories and presents in conversation, this dissertation identifies similarities in racialized national imaginaries, national identity formation, and cultural expression and consumption focused on the thematic issues of race, immigration, and cultures of crisis to make a broader point about fundamental and emerging tensions between processes of globalization which herald a supposed despatialization of culture and increased racial diversity against the fragmenting concept of a Western nation-state unit as a bounded cultural and racial community (B. Anderson 1991; Hall 1997; Macedo and Gounari 2005; Sassen 1999). In exploring these contemporary phenomena, this dissertation documents the disturbing emergence of transnational far-right, Islamophobic networks that link together far-right users from Germany to the United States, to India, to Nigeria, connected by similar forms of racist, xenophobic, anti-Muslim, and gender reactionary (trans)national ideology.

This dissertation tracks the manifestation of a troubling usable future in terms of the development of far-right transnationalized Islamophobic digitally networked communities in an era of multiple crises, focusing on how far-right digitally networked communities imagine Muslim and Arab groups as harbingers of national, civilianization, and cultural crisis. I document the ways in which historic and born-digital conspiracies increasingly motivate far-right users across multiple national boundaries to believe in paranoid linkages between Muslim

communities, multi-lateral institutions, national governments, and other groups as internal and external enemies of racially and ethnically homogenous Western nation-states. This project also tracks the ways in which Islamophobic discourse is increasingly “mainstreamed” (Mondon and Winter 2017), becoming an ever-larger feature of socially conservative German politics and serves as a shared grammar among socially conservative American users who consume increasingly radical far-right content.

Ultimately, what the German and American far-right has imagined as a crisis *at* borders visualized by journeys of refugee border-crossing through Europe to reach Germany and border-crossing by children, families, and individuals from Central America at the US-Mexican border (Freedman 2016; Wood 2018), is rather a crisis *of* borders. National borders have previously limited national community to some extent along racial lines, but today increasingly fail to contain the cultural multiplicity of people both on the move and people caught between emerging walls (Anzaldua 1987; Freedman 2016; A. Ong 1999). The physical and epistemic contestation over borders has spurred a renewed far-right German and American focus over the concept of a racially and ethnically exclusionary national cultural community. Far-right communities increasingly identify the supposed “browning” of the United States and Europe as allegedly threatening an imagined racial-ethnic and cultural homogeneity of these states due to the presence of Muslim immigrants, refugees, and citizens (Dalla, Ellis, and Cramer 2005; Rashad 2003).

As such, this dissertation analyzes how German and American digitally networked Twitter communities frame and discuss Arab and Muslim communities. This comparative juxtaposition explores how national identity, race, and culture come together in everyday digital discourse, asking the question of whether national, racial, and cultural identity is undergoing a



fusing process as a backlash to globalization? Additionally, this project examines how in this hyper-nationalist context we may identify instances of emerging far-right *transnational* digital cultural communities via linkages between far-right Islamophobic Twitter users. Going forward, this introduction outlines in greater detail the efficacy of a comparative analysis between German and American far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities and clarifies terminology.

In my work I frame Twitter as a form of a digital public, drawing on Michael Warner's conception of a public as a community which "comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation" (Warner 2002a, 50). I emphasize Tweets and hashtags as key texts in circulation that create a discursive, mutable, or "ad hoc" national digital community on the platform that is made legible through its conversations specifically focused on Arab and Muslim communities (Bruns and Burgess 2011; Shahin 2020). This study focuses on Twitter as a micro-blogging platform notable for its circulation of national political discourse and the formation of transnational digital political networks (Shahin 2020). Twitter, unlike comparative social media platforms, is "heterogenous" and allows for more extensive network building because of the ease of simply including other usernames in Tweets (Zheng and Shahin 2018, 1). Pei Zheng and Saif Shahin note that Twitter as a social media platform is defined by a series of technological affordances that render it a networked public sphere, the "@" and "#" mechanisms used on the platform facilitate the "connecting [of] people with shared interests," even as users may not be followers unlike on other social media platforms (2018, 3).

As such, I frame these groups as digitally networked publics that come into being for a moment in time through their usage of shared hashtags, or texts, and thus merit particular attention. Examining Twitter hashtags is a strategy to study how digital communities form on the platform Twitter. As Anatoliy Gruzd and Caroline Haythornthwaite note in the context of

Twitter: “Social media traces are thus an entry point to describing and later understanding and facilitating community interaction” (2013, 3). Hashtags on Twitter thus serve as a particular “trace” to then examine how far-right digitally networked Islamophobic communities on Twitter form, interact, and transmit ideology. However, these digital communities are ephemeral and shifting and do not necessarily parallel the existence of offline far-right coalitions. However, these digitally networked communities are critical to examine as they are the structures by which Islamophobic hate-speech is articulated and disseminated within digital space. Furthermore, they may serve as the basis for *future* offline, transnational far-right political coalition building and thus merit attention and analysis.

In categorizing these far-right communities, I synthesize Warner’s works (2002a; 2002b), with an approach to digital communities conceptualized as network publics outlined by danah boyd as “publics that are restructured by networked technologies” (2010, 41), in the case of this project, Twitter, which facilitates the circulation of texts, images, and videos. Further explicating this emphasis on far-right digitally networked publics, I examine the individual users or network actors within these communities to analyze how they construct their “networked self” on Twitter through the construction of user biographies and connections with other users (Papacharissi 2010, 309). I note here, however, that while I analyze the construction of users’ networked selves as they present them, these identities are mutable constructions. In particular as I consider racial identity in this project, notions of whiteness and ethnic Germanness emerge in relation to other users and Twitter content. While I take user biographies as authentic and meaningful data to study, I emphasize that the nationalist, racial, religious, and gendered affiliations users present are not essential, fixed, or natural but part of the process of identity construction in digital spaces.

Additionally, in Chapter II I outline the procedural steps for analyzing and scraping data on the platform Twitter and visualizing scraped data in the form of social network visualizations or graphs. While I deploy data visualization techniques drawing from the principles of social network analysis, this dissertation project is fundamentally guided by a commitment to feminist forms of knowledge production and collection which seek ultimately, “to make visible what remains invisible” (Leurs and Olivieri 2014, XXXI). In scraping data produced by everyday Twitter users who comprise German and American Islamophobic digitally networked publics, I track the way in which far-right communities on Twitter evolve, develop, and articulate a shared political and cultural ideology. Drawing attention to everyday Twitter communication on the comparative hashtags #Islamization and #Islamisierung I document how average, everyday Twitter users produce and share increasingly radical Islamophobic content, make transnational connections with other far-right users, and, finally, express a disturbing belief in violent conspiracies. I classify these individuals as everyday Twitter users to differentiate them from verified Twitter accounts belonging to far-right media personalities, politicians, and influencers. Ultimately, tracing these far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities I emphasize the reification of race as a key facet of American and German national identity in today’s global digital age.

In analyzing the way in which far-right German and American Islamophobic digitally networked communities discuss, frame, and imagine Muslim and Arab groups I shed light on the imagined boundaries and limits of the German and American national cultural community. In theorizing on the condition of refugees in modern nation-states, Giorgio Agamben has argued that “...the refugee is the sole category in which it is possible today to perceive the forms and limits of a political community” (1995, 114). I take up Agamben’s proposition in this dissertation

and contend that Muslim and Arab immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and citizens are the key categories with which to perceive the forms and limits of the national *cultural* community in Germany and the United States as they are invoked under the hashtags of #Islamization and #Islamisierung. I argue that Islamophobia, for both German and American far-right Twitter users, becomes the site whereupon whiteness and ethnic German identity is mediated and expressed. To engage in the circulation of Islamophobic digital discourse is to assert a particular racial, ethnic, and religious identity for users. Through the usage of hashtags of #Islamization and #Islamisierung, far-right users implicitly and explicitly signal their membership as white (Christian) Americans and ethnic (Christian) Germans. Islamophobic digital discourse is a prism through which to identify not only the racialization of Arab and Muslim groups but to identify how far-right users construct their own ethnic and racial identities.

Following Chapters I and II, in Chapter III I outline a taxonomy of Islamophobic German and American Twitter users drawing attention to patterns of radicalization, mainstreaming of Islamophobic discourse, and transnationalization. In Chapter IV I outline the way in which Islamophobic digital discourse is transmitted, engaging in social network analysis of these communities, and produce twelve social network visualizations of these communities. In Chapter V I engage in a close textual reading of the content of Tweets identifying thematic trends that define the communicative themes of these communities. In doing so, I analyze how these far-right digitally networked communities articulate a vision of an exclusionary national, cultural, racial community that also features distinctively transnationalized dimensions, thus foregrounding the construction of far-right Islamophobic digital networks defined by Global North-South and Transatlantic linkages.

*A Note on Terminology*

In my subsequent discussion and examination of these digitally networked communities I use the phrase “far-right” when considering German and American Twitter users. My usage of the term far-right refers to a diffuse collection of German individuals who ascribe to (neo)fascist and ethnically nationalist political ideals in the reunified German state. While Germany has a formalized, extreme far-right party, the Die Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), this party is electorally marginal (Jesse 2001). My usage of the term far-right in this dissertation refers more broadly to Germans who ascribe to and support (neo)fascist and ethnically nationalist ideologies and who may or may not be formally politically affiliated with the NPD, or the AfD, a new far-right party that has reached a historic milestone of being the first far-right party to achieve electoral representation in German Bundestag or parliament (Friedman 2017). In Germany, I characterize far-right communities and users as those who emphasize a belief in ethnic German nationalism, critique immigration in racialized terms, and hold a position of anti-multilateralism or Euroscepticism. That is, individuals and communities who are opposed to further European Union integration, centralized control in Brussels, and are against a common European cultural identity (Lees 2018). This is to say, the fundamental characteristic of the German far-right is a core belief in ethnic nationalism.

Since the rise of the AfD, the profile of far-right German politics has become more visible and is increasingly an issue for the federal German government. Pro-immigration German politicians have been murdered or attacked by far-right vigilantes and the federal German military has uncovered an extensive network of Neo-Nazis within its ranks (Bennhold 2020; Hill 2019). Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic anti-lockdown protests have also coincided with a heightened visibility of far-right public protest (AP 2021).

Finally, Germany has seen a recent dramatic rise in anti-Semitic violence with German Jews pointing towards the cross-over between COVID-19 conspiracies and far-right conspiratorial communities, a trend I discuss in Chapter V (DW 2021). This is to say that while Germany is home to historic and contemporary far-right fascist parties, the nation is currently in the midst of both a grassroots far-right, anti-immigrant populist political movement as well as a cultural shift towards the mainstreaming of far-right rhetoric and discourse that directly echoes the language and ideology of the Third Reich. In this dissertation, I track the types of individuals who are members of these evolving far-right Islamophobic digitally networked publics, explore the way in which this type of far-right, anti-immigrant, Islamophobic discourse is articulated among everyday German Twitter users, and document and analyze the content of these conversations.

Alternatively, in the context of the United States, which has a two-party system lacking a nationally recognized far-right party, I use the term far-right to refer to a contemporary manifestation of individuals who champion a form of extreme far-right political ideology that features enthusiastic support of white supremacy, white cultural nationalism, and a critique of free-market economics and immigration (Hartzell 2018; Esposito 2019), regardless of whether they are formally affiliated with the Republican Party or formalized far-right organizations. Indeed, over the past five years from the election of President Donald Trump in 2016 to the 2020 presidential election it has become increasingly difficult to differentiate between mainstream cultural social conservatism, institutional Republican political ideology, and far-right beliefs. Trump's "Make America Great Again," henceforth MAGA, style of politics has spurred a formative shift in which the ideological base of the Republican Party and the cultural right,

already espousing values of gender traditionalism, Christianity, and anti-immigration sentiment, has radicalized these positions.

As such, while contemporary scholars have discussed the emergence of the alt-right as a political and digital phenomenon distinguished from institutional Republican politics and mainstream social conservatism, today, the main tenants of the alt-right which include its digitality, anti-institutionalism, explicitly racist discourse, gender traditionalism, and a reactionary nostalgia for an imagined white past in fact define mainstream Republican and socially conservative politics (Bezio 2018; Michelsen and de Orellana 2019). As such, alt-right ideology is increasingly mainstreamed and institutionalized in the United States as evidenced by the symbiotic relationship between President Trump and alt-right media outlets, policymakers, and online communities (Barkun 2017; Hartzell 2018).

I argue that in the US there is no “alternative” right but rather merely a far-right, extreme, yet mainstreamed socially conservative political culture. As I discuss in Chapter III, while I differentiate between users who espouse far-right Islamophobic digital discourse as being on a continuum of radicalism, all users are ultimately ensconced within a larger far-right digital ecosystem. For both German and American far-right users, the question of labeling is not related to differences in the fundamental content of their ideology, but rather, as I explore, the form and structure of their rhetoric and how they spread information, stories, and narratives to resonate with different segments of far-right digitally networked communities.

While the emergence of far-right digital communities and far-right anti-immigration politics may be classified as a recent phenomenon, there is an expanding literature on contemporary German and American far-right communities and digital discourse (Berg 2019; Bezio 2018; Bitzan 2017; Hartzell 2018; Nagle 2017; Morstatter et al. 2018; Stern 2019a). This

dissertation adds to this scholarly conversation by focusing specifically on the theme of Arab and Muslim communities and immigration within these far-right digital communities and includes the detailed collection of Twitter discourse for over six months during a period of systemic global crisis—the COVID-19 pandemic—which has also paralleled a rise in Islamophobia globally (Apoorvanand 2020; Mahmood 2020).

While scholars have examined the American far-right digital ecosystem concerning Muslim immigration and studied Islamophobia in Germany in the context of formalized far-right political movements or broader public attitudes (R. Ahmed and PISOIU 2020; Benkler et al. 2017; Gardner, Karakaşoğlu, and Luchtenberg 2008), this dissertation provides a new dimension to analyses of race, culture, national identity, and digital communities. This dissertation project provides a global comparative analysis of German and American Islamophobic digitally networked communities and their communicative discourse in the specific networked context of the Twitter platform.

I not only describe the content of these conversations or the digital ecosystems in which they occur, but I identify the types of users that make up these communities, analyze how and what type of (mis)information is transmitted through discursive networks, and engage in a detailed textual analysis of the major themes and narratives that motivate users to connect and engage. In analyzing far-right communities and focusing on how they describe Arab and Muslim communities, I turn the analytic lens on these users themselves—the way in which far-right groups discuss, frame, and imagine Arab and Muslim groups in racially exclusionary ways reveals how they see the boundaries of the national cultural community. As a white, female researcher committed to feminist and antiracist values in my research, I aim to make the dynamics of racialization, whiteness, and Islamophobia at work in Germany and the United



States more visible where they often appear hidden, unmarked, and invisible (Dyer 1997), particularly in discourses on immigration and Arab and Muslim communities

As such, I intervene in the growing literature on the American and German digital far-right to analyze how as a community they engage in discursive constructions and mediations of Arab and Muslim communities online, this is to say, how they construct and understand the Other, thus revealing how this political community articulates the boundaries of German and American national imaginaries. Additionally, I also visualize the digital networks of these communities to identify the networked connections between far-right Twitter users. In studying user profiles, network structures, and the content of digital conversations I trace the mediation of racialized German and American nationalism as defined by a shared belief in Islamophobia while also drawing attention to the growing significance of transnational far-right networks, far-right Hindu nationalist users in the United States, and in Germany the influence of far-right conspiratorial digital news websites. These are all separate threads which tie together the larger theme of crisis this dissertation is framed by.

In my work I ultimately identify two parallel crises—a crisis of the divergence between imagined and actual national community among far-right German and American Twitter users in terms of race, religion, gender, and political persuasion and a more epistemic crisis of (mis)information whereby social media platforms such as Twitter are structured in such a way that allow for the production and dissemination of conspiratorial, viral, and virulently racist and Islamophobic content. As I will discuss in Chapters III and V, this type of content does not violate Twitter’s platform policies but may ultimately serve as the ideological foundation for off-platform forms of violence.

These two issues; of the crisis of imagination and a crisis of media structures, has created a digital landscape on Twitter that is increasingly dominated by Islamophobic, racist, far-right content produced, spread, and consumed by everyday Twitter users in Germany, the United States, India, and beyond. As such, a major contribution of this dissertation project is not only to document and describe far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities in Germany and the United States, but to identify how these communities have grown and become linked to other far-right Islamophobic nationalist communities in the Global South. In Chapter IV I discuss these linkages that connect Nigerian and Indian users to the American far-right through the shared grammar of digital Islamophobia; although, as I expand upon in Chapters I and IV, the Nigerian discussion and engagement with the #Islamization is historically and contemporarily distinctive from German, American, and Indian contexts and must be read against Nigeria's unique experience with British colonization and histories of ethnic regional conflict.

Finally, this dissertation contributes the creation of an archive of far-right Islamophobic Twitter data. The data scraped from German and American far-right Twitter networks will constitute the creation of an archive of Twitter data, a corpus of over 12,000 Tweets, that may shed light on the dynamics of far-right speech on Twitter. In Germany specifically, the federal government has enacted new laws to curb hate-speech and fake news on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Kottasova and Schmidt 2017). The data collection in this dissertation may be of use in the context of German policymaking as it documents the contours and content of far-right networks on Twitter. Providing documentation of online hate-speech may assist in legal cases and may be used as evidence to lobby the German government and larger European Union (EU) to enact stricter policies requiring social media companies to take down and address racist, violent digital discourse. In the case of the United States, while federal

regulation of social media companies in terms of content moderation is still a developing topic (Ghosh 2021), the creation of an archive of Islamophobic Tweets during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic in the United States also offers an archival time-capsule useful for analysis in other case studies.

Going forward, in Chapter I I review the relevant literatures concerning race, nation, culture, and histories of Arab and Muslim communities in Germany, United States, India, and Nigeria to provide historical context to contemporary discussions of far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities. In doing so, I draw attention to the similarities in racialized nationalism between Germany, United States, and India while also emphasizing that while contemporary manifestations of the German and American far-right may be digitally mediated on platforms such as Twitter, these communities share genealogical connections to past ideological traditions of fascism in the case of Germany and white supremacy in the United States. As such, this chapter emphasizes how far-right German and American Islamophobic digitally networked communities in fact are *re*-surgent phenomena undergirded by new constellations and linkages to the Global South and supported by Twitter's platform structure that facilitates dynamic forms of information transmission even as the content the hate-speech has historic roots. In Chapter II I outline in detail my methodological framework of feminist grounded theory that undergirds my multiple forms of data analysis including data scraping, data visualization, close textual reading, and social network analysis.

In Chapter III I analyze profiles of individual users in the corpus of Tweets tracking the #Islamization and #Islamisierung hashtags articulating a taxonomy of users and drawing attention to how various user-types interact in a series of representative examples. In this chapter I outline who is involved in Islamophobic digitally networked communities and draw attention to

the transnationalized dimensions of these German and American communities—while they are defined by nationalistic perspectives in the case of German networks in fact far-right American politics such as the Q Anon conspiracy and former President Trump inspire German users. And, in the case of the United States we see the emerging influence of diasporic and national far-right Hindu nationalist Indian and Indian American users as key network actors, thus evidencing a more complex portrait of the everyday far-right German and American Twitter user.

In Chapter IV I analyze twelve Name Network visualizations produced from the data scrape that includes the highest number of Tweets from each month. In producing and analyzing these visualizations I draw attention to the structural contours of each community and examine how stories, information, and narratives are shared within these networks in addition to identifying the influence of particular users. I argue in this chapter that Islamophobic hate-speech on Twitter cannot be addressed by Twitter’s content moderation policies due to the structural nature of information transmission on Twitter as not stemming from a series of discrete “bad” network actors. But rather, far-right, racist Islamophobic hate-speech emerges on Twitter in the German case from a series of everyday users and secondary digital news sites. As such, Islamophobic content merely manifests on Twitter rather than being specifically produced for the platform. In the American case, this chapter draws attention to the significance of micro-influencers on Twitter who are diasporic and national far-right Hindu Indian and Indian American nationalists and far-right Indian news accounts, thus evidencing the linkages between a far-right American and Indian digital media ecosystem.

In Chapter V I analyze a series of thematic pathways that connect users and make network structures meaningful, engaging in the feminist grounded theory process of coding, memoing, and identifying emerging conversational themes from the data. I identify key thematic

issues motivating users that were circulated among the network structures visualized in the preceding chapter. I recontextualize Islamophobic digital content and emphasize linkages between Islamophobic hate-speech and other far-right ideological positions of racism, xenophobia, and gender reactionaryism. In discussing three key themes that emerged from the data—COVID-19 women and children, and conspiracies—I discuss how Islamophobia for German and American far-right Twitter users serves as the shared grammar of transnational far-right political ideology that is both resurgently national and transnational.

In exploring how far-right German and American Twitter users imagine Arab and Muslim communities as a means to illuminate the shifting racial, cultural, and religious boundaries of nation and national identity in digital spaces, this dissertation project seeks to draw attention how digital platforms such as Twitter provide structures for the expression, re-articulation, and evolution of far-right racialized *transnational* political ideology. By engaging in a comparative analysis of these two far-right groups, this project documents one such usable future of the global far-right—a digital cultural war designed to discursively eliminate Arab and Muslim communities along with other marginalized groups from the imagined boundaries of Germany, the United States, and the broader imagined West *and* East.

Antonio Gramsci in theorizing the concept of crisis notes that “...crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (1976, 276). Focusing on this particular crisis, of digital racialized nationalism, and these imagined dialectical racialized and religious conflicts I analyze in this dissertation project a specific set of morbid symptoms: German and American Islamophobic digitally networked communities. These communities are both a symptom of this contestation over the cultural restructuring of the nation-state and a group implicated within this crisis

seeking to prolong and ensure the continued supremacy of whiteness and ethnic German homogeneity. As I noted earlier, both Germany and the United States are at the precipice of fundamental societal change with the resurgence of far-right politics contesting both progressive movements and more racially diverse social realities. Tracking far-right digitally networked Islamophobic communities I examine how these networks seek to contest these realities and engage in a discursive “war of position” racializing and rhetorically excluding Arab and Muslim groups from the boundary of nation (Gramsci 1976). As follows in the next chapter, I discuss how these symptoms have chronic or historic roots.

## CHAPTER I. HISTORICIZING RACE, NATION, AND CULTURE IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

This dissertation examines the nexus of race, national identity, and culture in Germany and the United States focusing on the phenomenon of Arab and Muslim communities in these respective states. By centering the analytical category of Muslim and Arab immigrant and refugee communities I seek to unhinge “the old trinity of state/nation/territory” (Agamben 1995, 117), and I suggest, the historical trinity of nation/race/culture which presupposes nation-states act as containers for a homogenous racial-cultural community. What follows in this section is a discussion of the relevant histories of racialized nationalism in Germany and the United States focusing on the interrelations between conceptions of racial-ethnic identities in the context of nation-building and immigration. Additionally, I briefly address the relation between Muslim communities, race, and nationalism in India and Nigeria as discussions of #Islamization in these nations emerged from the scraped American dataset. I draw attention to the linkages between the racialization of Muslims in America and concepts of “color-blindness,” India’s “caste-blindness” and post-9/11 securitization programs that inform a racialization of Muslims, and Germany’s *Rasse* blindness or post-racial rhetoric against histories of Turkish immigration and the Holocaust (Hobson 2012; Nigam 2019; Roig 2016; U. K. Singh 2019). This review serves to ground this dissertation’s contemporary discussion of nation/race/culture in digital spaces with historical context and illustrates the comparable yet evolving genealogies of racialized nationalism in Germany, United States, India, and Nigeria that are made visible through Islamophobic discourses.

*Germany: From Ethnic Nationalism to a Multikulti State*

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the contemporary contours of the German nation began to take shape as the imperial Prussian state began to pursue nationalist policies while simultaneously reaffirming the German philosophical theory of the *Volksgeist*, articulated by philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1800), which was particularly resonant during the Third Reich and has since re-surfaced in present day AfD discourse (Klikauer 2018b; 2018a; Tansill 1940). Herder affirmed the concept of a national community bound together through shared spiritual purpose and articulated a concept of German cultural superiority which presupposed a connection between race, temperament, and cultural identity (1800, 128). From this early period onward, racial identity and culture figured centrally into determining socio-political and legal belonging in the German state. Rogers Brubaker, in historicizing the development of German nationalism, argues that the German nation became “an ethnocultural fact” before it became a political reality (1994, 4).

This discussion of national origins may suggest that Germany’s fascist period took the fundamentals of ethnocultural nationalism to their natural conclusion, however, while ethnocultural understandings of national belonging were and continue to be a feature of German nationalism they are not a singularly historically determinant force. Continuities in racialized ideology from the Prussian to Nazi state are not evidence of the nation’s “separate path” of modernization and nationalism leading to a tragic predestination of the Holocaust and fascism as theorized in the *Sonderweg* thesis (Kocka 1988). Rather, Germans, and their Austrian and Polish neighbors have at times worked to articulate democratic and transnational forms of belonging in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with the failed experiment of the Weimar Republic and the



*Anschluss* movement representing alternative, democratic political projects (Berman 1997; Hochman 2016).

As Nasar Meer notes in discussing the historical intersections of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, we may understand that “the category of race [is] co-constituted with religion” (2013, 389), particularly in historic and contemporary German contexts. Just as the construction of race in a global context is not an inevitable universal phenomena but rather a historically specific process (Hall 1980), histories of anti-Semitism in Germany are not directly causal of contemporary manifestations of Islamophobia but rather are related to economic and cultural historical specificities in the post-war German state. Furthermore, I emphasize the existence of historical and thus potential *contemporary* possibilities for a German model of cultural and political belonging that is not predicated primarily on ethnicity, even in the historical aftermath of the Third Reich. However, as I discuss later in this work, far-right German digitally networked communities are increasingly fostering transcontinental European and Transatlantic connections defined by a mutual ideological position of Islamophobia.

Concerning Nazi ideology, race, and immigration I draw attention to the Third Reich’s relationship with foreign labor which informed subsequent German policies and conceptions of immigration in the post-fascist period. Embarking on a campaign of rapid economic industrialization as part of his consolidation of political power and a war-time strategy (Turner 1972), Adolf Hitler, while rhetorically emphasizing the concept of a national *Volksgeist* in this period also actively relied upon the labor of forced workers comprised of Slavic and Russian groups to facilitate German Eastward expansion (Smelser 1990). At one point in 1944, the Third Reich was dependent on the labor of over 8 million forced, foreign laborers (Spoerer and Fleischhacker 2002, 172). Scholars have viewed this program of economic expansion and

programs of forced labor as a form of German continental colonialism (Baranowski 2011; Kühne 2013; Fitzpatrick 2016), thus emphasizing the nuanced, violent relations between race, labor, and German nationalism whereby an “imagined community” of pure ethnic Germans was materially defined by the racialized labor of ethnic Slavs, Poles, and Russians (B. Anderson 1991).

Following the collapse of the Third Reich, the German state was left with a heavily damaged physical infrastructure, divided governments, and massive internal displacement of native Germans, ethnic Germans expelled from Eastern Europe, Poles, Ukrainians, Russian former forced laborers and POWs, as well as surviving Jewish concentration camp survivors (Antons 2014, 114; Brubaker 1994, 168; Cohen 2011, 73, 93). By the beginning of the 1950s, it became clear that former West Germany could not meet its own labor needs from a native labor pool and Western Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD) soon began recruiting foreign laborers (Castles 1985, 518). The signing of the German-Italian Agreement on Worker Recruitment in December 1955 was quickly followed by an agreement with Turkey, thereafter, Germany’s *Gastarbeiter* era began (Triadafilopoulos and Schönwälder 2006). Here, I focus on West Germany because of the higher historic levels of immigration to this state compared to the low levels in communist East Germany which only saw nominal numbers of immigrant workers from other Communist countries such as North Vietnam (Röttger-Rössler and Anh Thu Lam 2018).

Unlike other European nations attracting foreign workers, such as the UK, which planned for forms of permanent immigrant settlement (Steinert 2011), the German state viewed immigration as a temporary phenomenon. The initial political, economic, and cultural understanding of foreign labor in the post-war period is evoked in the German linguistic framing of *Gastarbeiter* which translates to “guest-worker” (Chin 2007, 108). Ultimately, the BRD’s

early immigration paradigm would influence cultural and legal treatment of immigrants in the West *and* East post-reunification and thus merits particular attention.

Turkish guest-workers in Germany from the 1950s to the early 1970s were not viewed as a visible part of Germany society in a political or social sense. The continued ethicized understanding of membership in the democratic German polity did not require a confrontation of the social difference posed by the increasingly large Muslim Turkish presence because Turkish workers and their families were not considered part of the social or political body of the nation (Chin 2007, 83). Additionally, the legal classification of Turkish guest-workers remained associated with a law developed during the Third Reich, the Aliens Police Decree of 1938 (O'Brien 1988, 115-116). Even as the democratic BRD had divested from its Nazi past in terms of governance structure, politically, legally, and culturally, ethicized conceptions of national belonging continued to haunt the new republic.

In the later portion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the economic situation in former West Germany deteriorated and the post-war economic miracle or *Wirtschaftswunder* ended, the nation sought to confront what was termed as the “Turkish question” (Chin 2007). West German society became increasingly focused on the Muslim cultural and religious affiliation of Turkish communities and the possible development of *Parallelgesellschaften*, or parallel societies, that were physically, culturally, and religiously separate from the larger German public (Heitmeyer and Imbusch 2005; Hoesch 2017). During this period, Western German concerns over immigration and cultural identity served as a proxy for the historically taboo question of race, or *Rasse*, as explicit discussion of racial identification became bracketed to the recent historical past of the Third Reich and projected upon the supposedly prejudicial society of the Communist DDR (Chin 2007).

During the 1970s, this framing of immigration that eschewed confrontation with questions of race to focus on cultural difference would eventually inform contemporary political conceptions of immigration and German Muslim communities (Booth 1985, 4). The shift from explicit racialized ideology underlined by discourses of biological inferiority became outmoded in Germany and social difference and inequality became mediated culturally. Elizabeth Buettner discusses this phenomenon as “new racism” or “neo-racism” whereby native white Europeans transformed racial hierarchies into a hierarchy of culture; “‘new racism’ [was] predicated upon cultural difference rather than physical distinctions” (2016, 367). In Germany specifically, race became “repackaged in cultural terms,” with racialized discourse centered on cultural concerns ranging from growing Islamic religious practice to the proliferation of the “ethnic” food of kebab (Shoshan 2016, 57). Today with the disappearance of explicit discussion of *Rasse*, Germany, like other Western European democracies, fashions itself as a “post-racial” state (Roig 2016). Race is thus approached through the lens and rhetoric of culture and religion.

In modern reunified Germany, culture continues to be a critical field where citizenship and racial membership is mediated and expressed. The far-right party the AfD in their manifesto state that a common Western European, Christian culture forms the basis for political discourse and political subjectivity in Germany, echoing Herder’s treatise written hundreds of years ago (“AfD Grundsatzprogramm Englisch” 2017, 45-46). In this sense then, German historical conceptions of national belonging have come full circle with contemporary far-right communities re-articulating historic concepts of race, nation, and culture to police the boundaries of the nation-state responding to present day instances of immigration and demographic change.

*The US, India, and Nigeria: Whiteness, (Hindu) Nationalism, and Fulanization*

Comparatively, in the United States racial and national belonging have been explicitly structured by economic systems—settler colonialism, the plantation economy, and industrial capitalism—since the state’s founding, with cultural affiliation and identity playing a key role in the consolidation of race. American nationalism has and continues to be defined by practices of settler colonialism which, as Andrea Smith argues, is imbricated within other systems of domination, including “white supremacy, imperialism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism” (2012, 77). The expropriation of Indigenous lands into property by European colonists and the enslavement of Black communities via the Transatlantic Slave trade in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that underlie American economic development are inextricably linked (Moreton-Robinson 2015, xiii). Settler colonialism in the United States facilitated the articulation and expression of race as a social category by dividing “humans into three categories: own-ing property, becoming propertyless, and being property” (Moreton-Robinson 2015, xxiii).

Even in the shift from British colony to democratic nation-state, American nationalism continued to be defined by discourses of (un)freedom predicated on racializing, disenfranchising, and dehumanizing Black Americans to re-affirm the political and labor rights of white citizens and workers (Morgan 1972, 24; Fields 1990). While racialized nationalism in the United States is intimately connected to the development of racial capitalism more broadly (C. J. Robinson 2000), racialization was not solely determined by the economic development, rather, racialization and racism must be conceptualized as the result of a concurrent “set of economic, political and ideological practices” (Hall 1980, 338), of which culture played a key role.

White supremacy in the United States was not simply the result of an economic system but functioned as a socio-political ideology through which white Americans understood their

social location and relation to state, labor, and community. W.E.B Dubois, in his seminal work *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), while predominately focused on the political and economic dimensions of postbellum American history, was the first scholar to identify the way in which race in the United States had critical subjective, psychological, and cultural dimensions that affected how individuals understood their place in American society, articulating the concept of the “psychological wages” of whiteness (1935, 700). Dubois, in explaining the enduring political divisions between similarly economically marginalized Black and white workers in the United States, theorized the existence of a form of cultural and psychological compensation of white working-classes who received social deference, cultural acceptance, and civic inclusion as a result of their whiteness (Dubois 1935, 700-701).

In the United States then, in the aftermath of Civil War, which saw the outlawing of slavery and nominal inclusion of Black Americans into social life as citizens and workers (Dubois 1935), the salience of race as a constitutive feature of American national belonging did not disappear. Rather, the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw specific socio-historical articulations of whiteness emerge due to increased immigration from Western and Eastern Europe. Whiteness as a racial identity in the United States became increasingly tied to the formation of working-class consciousness and was made legible and visible through cultural texts, events, practices and discourse (Roediger 1991, 14). As such, the question of immigrant integration or assimilation in 20<sup>th</sup> century into American society may be understood as the possibility of whitening. Irish, German, and Italian immigrant groups were initially marginalized as both culturally and racially Other, but through the development of a white racialized working-class political consciousness and the adoption of and participation in American racist mass

cultural forms such as minstrelsy shows, European immigrants ascended into normative whiteness (Barrett and Roediger 2005; Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 1991).

This trend of whitening of European immigrants was further solidified in the post-WWII period with shifts in residential settlement which featured an exodus of white and European immigrant families from urban centers to redlined suburbs (Freund 2007). George Lipsitz, in discussing the calcification of race in the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, emphasizes that “...urban renewal helped construct a new ‘white’ identity in the suburbs” (1998, 7). Comparably, municipal disinvestment in urban cities, the hollowing out the federal welfare state, the construction of interstates through minority neighborhoods, and dismantling of affirmation action programs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century further exacerbated racial differences in wealth equity while shoring up the cultural “value of whiteness” (Lipsitz 1998, 17), even as explicitly racialized rhetoric in the United States became superseded by a “color-blind” public and political discourse (Avila 2014; Harris 1993), much like the post-reunification disappearance of *Rasse* from the German public lexicon.

The rise of “color-blind” rhetoric in the United States, particularly characteristic of the 1990s and early 2000s, reveals not the dissolution of race in a global, digital age but rather illustrates the way in which neoliberalism in the United States emphasized concepts of liberal individualism at the expense of collective interests and the celebration of cosmetic diversity excluding structural change (Lipsitz 1998). While race remains a key structuring principle of society in the United States, in a neoliberal, globalized age, in popular consciousness, the election of former President Barack Obama as the first Black President appeared as evidence of a supposed American transcendence of race (Hobson 2012).

Despite these public discourses of a transcendence of race in the United States in the 1990s and early 2000s, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks Kambiz GhaneaBassiri notes that a new and racialized public political rhetoric manifested that specifically targeted Muslim communities (2013). In the United States, cultural concerns over supposed fundamental differences in a dialectical Muslim and American “way of life” were mobilized to racialize and exclude Muslim communities as separate from the nation and objects of suspicion (GhaneaBassiri 2013, 54, 56). Erik Love has argued that while this 9/11 period may be understood as the culmination of contemporary American Islamophobia and racialization of Muslims, Islamophobia is but another long term “racial project” in the United States that solidified Arab and Muslims communities as distinctive racial and religious Others particularly after the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis (2017, 84, 87, 89). Following 9/11, Islamophobic discourse merely became more mainstreamed with the association of Muslim communities with terrorism an increasingly racialized process (Love 2017).

Additionally, Andrew Shryock, along with his co-authors, has argued that Arab and Muslim communities during the height of the “War on Terror” have had their citizenship identities defined by crisis and shifting boundaries of political and religious exclusion (Baker and Shryock 2009; Shryock 2013; Shryock and Lin 2009a; 2009b). However, along with Steve Garner and Saher Selod, I emphasize that in the particular context of the United States’ racialized nationalism, Muslim communities are not only affected by these more generalized notions of security and crisis, but are subjects to explicit forms of American racialization whereby historically in the United States “social status and indeed citizenship have been generated by assignment to a position in the racial hierarchy” (2014, 8).



Comparatively, in India the contemporary racialization of Muslim communities has similar parallels to Germany and the United States related to the question of the position of minority religious communities in society and post-9/11 security culture respectively. The historic communal conflict between Muslim and Hindu Indians is imbricated within histories of British colonialism, specifically Partition in 1947 whereby Pakistan and India became independent states with respective Muslim and Hindu majorities (Roy 2013). However, as I discuss later in Chapter III even these terms of “Hindu” and “Muslim” are deceptively simple and neglect both the historic religious diversity of India and the colonial construction of Hinduism as a homogenous religion (R. King 1999). What I draw attention to here in this section is the way in which the violence, forced population movements, and the articulation of a secular yet majority Hindu independent India presented a critical historical question posed initially by Gyanendra Pandey in the context of Partition, “Can a Muslim Really be Indian?” (1999). During Partition Muslims in India became constructed as at best disloyal members of the new national community and at worst potential terrorist subjects threatening a new, secular yet Hindu-majority Indian nation (Berda 2014; Pandey 1999).

Pandey, in situating the racialization and oppression of Muslims in India notes that from Partition “a particular conception of the Indian nation emerged, in which the Muslims had an unenviable place, the Dalits and other oppressed castes and classes were invisible or only symbolically present... [in relation to the] ‘mainstream, Hindu majority’” (1999, 625). As such, in India while these social divisions may be understood as religiously or caste-based, referring here to the articulation of a system of four hierarchical castes in Indian society derived from Hindu religious texts (Sircar and Rajahmani 2021), these communal conflicts are in fact projects of racialization that Other Muslim Indians and are informed by a political desire to preserve both

a casteist Indian society and one that confirms to belief in Hindutva, or the belief that India should be a Hindu majority nation. These notions of Hindutva intersect then with India's post-9/11 security regime which has increasingly sought to engage in programs of racialized securitization that disproportionately target Muslim Indians as racialized subjects of terror and crime (Chakravartty 2002; U. K. Singh 2019).

I review these dynamics of India's national history and instances of religious-racial conflict as India emerged as a key theme in the scraped American dataset and thus requires contextualization. Furthermore, while the racialization of Muslims in India has a unique and particular national, colonial context, the way in which the secular yet implicitly imagined Hindu-majority Indian state conceives of Muslim citizens is similar to the patterns of American racialization targeting Muslim communities particularly in terms of securitization discourse. Additionally, I draw particular attention to the parallels between American notions of racial "color-blindness," Indian "caste-blindness," and the invisibility of *Rasse* in German public discourse, all similar forms of willful denial of caste-based domination that Isabel Wilkerson explores in her work comparing German fascism, India's caste system, and the American racial-caste structure (Wilkerson 2020). Dhamma Darshan Nigam in discussing the effects of this blindness in the Indian context notes that when one "cannot imagine caste then caste based inequalities and atrocities also become invisible for them" (2019). In the contemporary cases of India, the United States, and Germany not only are caste and race frequently purported to be "invisible" thereby neglecting the realities of racialized caste-based and Islamophobic violence, but increasingly race has reappeared visibly and violently in Germany, the United States, and India in terms of Islamophobic digital discourse.

These similar historical mediations of race and Islamophobia in Germany, the United States, and India are fundamentally distinctive from the Nigerian case where no such “blindness” related to religious and ethnic conflict exists. The theme of Nigeria also appeared in the American dataset, so I provide a brief overview of the historical presence of Muslim communities in Nigeria. Like India, Nigeria was colonized by the British from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Harnischfeger 2006). To buttress their hold on the region, British colonists sought the collaboration of the indigenous ethnic Hausa-Fulani tribe (Salamone 1985). Following an independence movement in 1965 the Nigerian state experienced several iterations of military rule and finally achieved democratic independence in 1999 (Lewis 1994; Harnischfeger 2006). Against the backdrop of colonialization and the dominance of the Hausa-Fulani group was the developing conflict between Muslims in the North, predominately members of the ethnic Hausa-Fulani group, and indigenous Christian groups in the South and Middle Belt of the country (Harnischfeger 2006, 37). The Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, which existed in a dominant social position during British colonization, at times acting as indigenous collaborators to the British regime, maintained their influence and power in postcolonial Nigeria society.

This ethnic conflict and instability in Nigeria reached a violent culmination during the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War or the Nigerian-Biafra War which involved the attempted yet unsuccessful secession of the Biafra region in Eastern Nigeria (Onuoha 2018), a conflict defined by ethnic and religious division. As such, ethnic and religious tension in Nigeria may be understood as fundamentally linked, with fears over the “Fulanization” of Nigeria also fears of the supposed “Islamization” of the state (Johnson 2017, 265), with contemporary Biafran independence movements not only critiquing Hausa-Fulani political dominance but the role of Islam in Nigerian socio-cultural life. This is to say that discussion of Muslim communities in

Nigeria is contextually and historically distinctive from Germany, the United States, and India and must be read not only as indigenous to the state but understood in a context defined by Muslim and Hausa-Fulani majority dominance. As such, the concept of “Islamization” is qualitatively and historically different in Nigeria, although as I explore in greater detail in Chapter IV, this shared language of Islamization ultimately links Christian and Biafran Nigerians with an ascendant American and Indian far-right.

### *Conclusion*

In Germany, the United States, India, and Nigeria, as I have evidenced in this brief review, culture, religion, and national identity are defined by race. Today, these discursive themes of culture, race, and nationality are reappearing as explicitly fused. The German and American far-right, drawing on earlier ideological traditions of the European New Right movement and historic American white supremacist movements today embrace a Gramscian approach to fighting a “war of position” against liberal, multiculturalism and increasingly emphasize cultural values as a critical site to police the boundaries of the national and racial community (Hawley 2019; Michelsen and de Orellana 2020, 123). Culture has become the space whereby boundaries of nation and race are actively being mediated (Michelsen and de Orellana 2019), particularly in digital spaces.

In the context of the post-9/11 United States, scholars have increasingly identified that discourses of Islamophobia, which ostensibly focus on concerns of cultural and religious difference, must be examined and theorized using race as an explicit category of analysis (Ernst 2013; Garner and Selod 2014; Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006; Love 2017; Meer 2013). In Germany, the disappearance of race from the public lexicon has not meant that concerns over

ethnic purity have disappeared, but rather that they are mediated through the rhetoric of cultural difference and “German values” (Chin et al. 2009; Mandel 2008).

In these national contexts, we may understand that “[in] the new cultural racist discourses, religion has a dominant role” (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006, 4). In both Germany and the United States this takes the form of a juxtaposition between supposedly divergent Western Christian and Eastern Islamic cultural values, and in India, Gyanendra Pandey has articulated this tension as a “unspecified, but (as it is asserted) fundamental, ‘difference’—in the case of the Indian Muslims” (1999, 610). Comparatively, in Nigeria, historic religious-ethnic conflicts have not disappeared but have shifted from Civil War to mediation within digital spaces (Nwofe 2019; Nwofe and Goodall 2019). In far-right circles discussion of Muslim communities correlates to fears of a supposed creeping multiculturalism and increased racial diversity as an “existential threat” to the imagined white, ethnic German, or Hindu nation state (Michelsen and de Orellana 2020, 128). In this next chapter, I lay out my feminist methodological framework that seeks to document, describe, and analyze this alleged clash and these creeping threats.

## CHAPTER II. A FEMINIST GROUNDED THEORY FRAMEWORK FOR WORKING WITH DIGITAL DATA

This dissertation involves data scraping to contextualize larger trajectories of racialized state-making and the formulation of national cultural imaginaries, identifying the interplay between race, citizenship, and cultural identity in far-right digitally networked Islamophobic communities. Specifically, this dissertation involves textual analysis of social and digital media texts and images and collection of data from Twitter using the data scraping platform Netlytic and the visualization software Gephi. As a project that employs the method of data scraping, this form of collection is guided by an inductive grounded theory approach with special attention paid to comparative analysis, multiple readings of data, thematic coding, and creation of memos documenting the research process (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz and Belgrave 2019; Evans 2013)

Fundamentally, themes emerge from the aggregated Twitter data collected. Identifying emerging themes is guided by a close reading of images, Tweets, and statistical measurements of social network graphs attending to both the language in the texts as well as the larger historical context in which these texts are produced. As Sara Ahmed has noted in discussing how to engage in feminist readings of texts of postmodern theory, feminist close reading “works against, rather than through, a text's own construction of itself... re-thinking of how [the text] works, of how and why it works as it does, for whom” (2004, 17). In my close readings I follow Ahmed’s position that this form of textual analysis “does not necessarily involve a dependence on the assumption that there is a ‘meaning’ or ‘truth’ which can be uncovered,” but rather I seek to place a series of texts in conjunction to make a larger theoretical argument about the trinity of nation/race/culture (Ahmed 2004, 17). As such, I pair the procedures of grounded theory with a

feminist, close textual reading to identify emerging themes and networks from my archive of Tweets (S. Ahmed 2004; Lukić and Espinosa 2011; Mckee 2003).

Emphasizing a feminist grounded theory approach in this dissertation means remaining open to “all possible theoretical understandings of the data” through multiple and repeated readings of the data thus allowing new themes to emerge from the coding process (Charmaz and Belgrave 2019, 744). Initially, grounded theory was first articulated by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), and while Strauss and Glaser eventually diverged in their methodological approaches, the essential methods include coding, memoing, sampling, and theoretical saturation. Strauss and Glaser initially developed the grounded theory methodological framework in an attempt to demonstrate that qualitative methods could adhere to the supposed more rigorous standards of “objective” quantitative social scientific research by articulating a series of key steps in the grounded theory process of data gathering, coding, analysis, and theory building (Burawoy 1991, 275). In this dissertation I draw on Kathy Charmaz’s contemporary interpretation of grounded theory that emphasizes the practice of grounded theory as defined and guided by inductive data gathering:

Grounded theorists start with data. We construct these data through our observations, interactions, and materials that we gather about the topic or setting. We study empirical events and experiences and pursue our hunches and potential analytic ideas about them (2006, 3).

This dissertation is guided fundamentally by the data collected and the subsequent production of memos, the articulation of codes or tags, and then a crystallization, articulation, and analysis of major themes.

As a dissertation project defined by a feminist grounded theory framework and the practice of close reading, I specify that while I deploy data analytic tools such as Gephi, engage in social network analysis, and develop a taxonomy, the methodology underpinning this project is situated firmly within a feminist, critical, cultural epistemological framework whereby themes emerge in specific relation to my research questions and my positionality. I re-appropriate data tools as a feminist scholar to study a particular ephemeral digitally networked community and attempt to push against what Koen Leurs has argued are “exclusionary modes of scientific inquiry” that digital data and data analytic tools invite (2017, 134). Additionally, as a feminist scholar having lived in Germany and worked with refugees and asylum seekers, I take these experiences with me as I code, analyze, and examine the data of far-right groups. This particular positionality—of being a white, American woman with familial and professional ties to Germany structures my perspective and defines my relation to the stakes of this project. While I may use quantitative measurements and data analytic tools, I seek to actively work against white Western social scientific assumptions that structure both digital data and data analytic tools that “reflect positivist, transcendental empiricism and disembodiment value- freeness” (Leurs 2017, 133). Embracing a feminist grounded theory framework is one such strategy to push against these assumptions built into data tools and digital data themselves.

In further explicating the value of grounded theory as method that invites the specific practice of comparative analysis, Michael Burawoy notes that grounded theory as method is operationalized to examine two “[u]nlike phenomena with a view towards discovering similarities” and allows the researcher to engage in constructing new theory (1991, 280). Thus, grounded theory is a well-situated framework to examine far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities in the comparative German and American contexts. Shulamit Reinharz,



in discussing the relationship between feminist textual analysis and grounded theory, notes that “cultural artifacts invite grounded research if the researcher allows the categories to emerge from the artifacts themselves” (1992, 161). As such, this dissertation juxtaposes a series of cultural texts; Tweets, visualizations, images, and social network data to allow for the emergence of similar themes and analyzes these objects as texts that contain, reflect, and embody themes and categories that can be revealed through the application of a theoretical lens. A feminist methodological framework as is utilized in this work necessarily requires constant “self-reflexivity” of the researcher in the research process and thus pairs well with Kathy Charmaz and Linda Liska Belgrave’s call for contemporary grounded theorists to engage in “methodological self-consciousness” (Leurs 2017, 137; Charmaz and Belgrave 2019, 750). Furthermore, in the age of big data, this translates to a renewed feminist emphasis on partiality, subjectivity, and the situated nature of information and experience regardless of the size or content of dataset, a position initially articulated by Donna Haraway, which is particularly relevant today as datasets become larger and the individual researcher more removed from the embodied context of information (Haraway 1988; Shahin 2016). This emphasis on the situated nature of knowledge and data has been emphasized by feminist data scholars and critical researchers including Lauren Klein (2014), Catherine D'Ignazio (2015), Koen Leurs (2017), and Jill Walker Rettberg (2020).

Specifically, this dissertation project situates itself with an emerging field of scholarship that examines far-right digitally networked digital communities on social media websites in a transnational European and American context combining mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative approaches to data gathering including scraping, topic modeling, social network analysis (SNA), and discourse analysis (R. Ahmed and Psoiu 2020; Awan 2016a; Awan and Zempi 2017; Ekman 2015; Ganesh and Froio 2020; Törnberg and Törnberg 2016). This

dissertation adds to these existing perspectives and studies of far-right Islamophobic digital culture on social media platforms by introducing a combination of SNA with feminist grounded theory methodology. In doing so, I not only examine prominent actors within the network and key themes in online conversations, but I analyze everyday users on the platform Twitter and trace the circulation and connection of users to understand the process by which Islamophobic discourse circulates within these communities. In this way, I realize a multi-scalar, feminist approach specifically designed to avoid the methodological “god trick” that large amounts of data invite researchers to deploy (Haraway 1988).

In addition to my methodological framework of feminist grounded theory, I also deploy a series of evolving best practices for researching far-right communities on Twitter articulated by Valentine Crosset, Samuel Tanner, and Aurélie Campana (2018). Crosset, Tanner, and Campana note a series of unique challenges to gathering data in far-right digital landscapes which can include online anonymity, decontextualization of data, and the rise of a “post-truth” ethos in online spaces (2018, 940). Drawing on Crosset, Tanner, and Campana’s work I embrace their method of studying digital “traces,” or digital content produced by users on Twitter, which include “profile characteristics, tweet, images, memes and online interactions” (2018, 945). In examining these traces of profiles, Tweets, images, memes, and interactions as texts which invite a close textual reading, as well as producing my own maps of these traces through the production of social network visualizations, I am thus able to engage in the process of recontextualization. Just as Reinharz has situated feminist grounded theory as a process of studying cultural artifacts to allow categories to emerge from the items themselves (1992, 161), I look to these digital traces to allow themes and narratives to emerge. Looking at these traces of profiles, Tweets, images, memes, and online interactions thus brackets my analysis from secondary digital texts

and objects, however, whenever possible I seek to identify the original platform or site when a digital trace is linked out and not produced by the posting of a Twitter user.

This dissertation involves the collection of data from the social media platform Twitter using the data scraping platform Netlytic and the visualization software Gephi. By engaging in data scraping and the production of visualizations of digitally networked communities using the software Gephi I describe and analyze the networked contours of “ad hoc” national digital publics in Germany and the United States discussing Arab and Muslim communities (Bruns and Burgess 2011; Shahin 2020). This method of scraping Tweets allows me to scale up an analysis of nativist, Islamophobic discourse in Germany and the United States, rather than, for example, relying on a smaller number of interviews or individually collected Tweets among members of the far-right, collection methods which bring their own ethical and safety concerns (Massanari 2018). Data scraping on Twitter allows me to gather a larger dataset of digital discourse even if my dataset may be considered “small” among traditional approaches data scraping (Dalton and Thatcher 2014; Latzko-Toth, Bonneau, and Millette 2017).

At its most simple level data scraping is a process of collecting digital information and making it legible. We can understand data scraping as a process whereby we “generate structured data on the basis of available unstructured data on the web” (Saurkar, Pathare, and Gode 2018, 363). In the case of this dissertation project, to both gather and generate structured data from Twitter that is legible for a feminist close textual reading, I use Twitter’s Application Programming Interface (API) to scrape structured data from the platform. Twitter’s API may be accessed by companies, researchers, and developers and gives client users access to public user activity on the platform (Bruns and Burgess 2012, 805). Specifically, Axel Bruns and Jean Burgess note that the “Twitter API enables users to automatically capture any tweets containing

given keywords (including hashtags)” (2012, 805). While the Twitter API allows researchers to gather structured Twitter data, such data can also be further examined when presented in visual format by using programs such as Gephi to visualize the networks in question, a methodological strategy Bruns and Burgess suggest (2012, 805). In order to access the Twitter API, I have created a Twitter App entitled, *AltHashtagtracking*, that allows to me access the Twitter API as a client/researcher. Approved apps provide developers, companies, and researchers with “access [to] Tweets by searching for specific keywords, or requesting a sample of Tweets from specific account” (Twitter 2020), however, all these available data is public and does not include private conversations or private accounts.

Using my approved API Keys and Access Tokens as attached to my *AltHashtagtracking* and my Twitter account @emilylynell, I use the platform Netlytic to automate the data gathering process. Netlytic is a text and social network analyzer that utilizes the APIs from social media platforms to streamline and automate the process of collecting publicly available data through focusing on either hashtags, specific accounts, or relevant words. Netlytic allows researchers to collect public, digital conversations of up to 1000 Tweets per scrape and organizes information by geo-location, Tweet description, user profile information, account information, and follower counts, among other parameters. Additionally, Netlytic provides the ability to map the initial contours of digital communities by visualizing how users are connected to one another in either a Name Network or Chain Network.

As such, Netlytic provides researchers with a tool to collect more data of digital conversations than is possible through individual researcher collection and organizes information into CSV, Gephi, GraphML files that may be deconstructed through close reading or re-produced using more sophisticated visualization softwares, such as Gephi, thus enabling a user to engage

in more targeted analysis of social network communities. Gephi is an open-source network visualization software that can visualize imported data—such as scraped Tweets from the platform Netlytic. Gephi allows users to deploy different algorithmic lay outs to data, run statistical measures on community structures, and, in this case, visualize the spatial contours of a discursive community.

It is important to address that in using Gephi I engage with this data visualization software not as a social scientific researcher or a scholar engaged with normative quantitative methodological approaches to social network visualization. Although I make use of the algorithmic affordances and statistical measures embedded within the Gephi software, I engage with this data tool from a feminist data studies perspective. As Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren Klein have noted in their work, producing data visualizations can be a form of feminist method (D’Ignazio 2015; Klein 2014). However, it is critical to explicitly implement feminist research principles in the production of such data visualizations. Feminist principles in the context of this project include a rethinking of binaries, embracing pluralism, considering context, and legitimizing embodiment and affect in the production of visualizations (D’Ignazio and Klein 2016).

Essentially these visualizations that I produce, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter IV, manifest the discursive contours of far-right German and American Islamophobic digitally networked communities. However, the production of these social network visualizations is not the end of my analysis, rather these graphs facilitate another iteration of close reading to identify emergent themes to reveal how Islamophobic digital content is transmitted and shared across a series of network actors. In the case of this dissertation project, I produce a series of Name Network graphs, a visualization of who mentions whom on Twitter, to

show connections between users in communities and visualize possible subcommunities within the network structure. Visualizing and analyzing the network structure reveals influential network actors, particularly in the case of the German visualizations the role far-right digital news companies play in producing (mis)information and highly racialized, Islamophobic digital content.

While the affordances of tools such as Gephi and Netlytic include incredible access to digital information and the ability represent data in new ways to elucidate new insights, the broader practice of data scraping has been critiqued. This body of criticism can be distilled into Noortje Marres and Esther Weltevrede's argument that "scraping makes available already formatted data for social research. Scraped data, and online social data more generally, tend to come with analytics already built in" (2013, 313). Marres and Weltevrede articulate a relevant and valid concern about the way in which data tools and objects from Twitter's API to Netlytic to Gephi fundamentally structure raw data in a way that privileges certain information. This is clearly seen when examining the metadata of scraped Twitter information. Twitter's API collects a series of pieces of information including user follower count, type of device used to post, location, date of account creation, etc., all categories that are important for Twitter's financial interest in datafication of user information. Conversely, researchers may have a different set of questions about user data—how many times did a user type and re-type the Tweet before posting? What accounts do users look at but not follow?

To overcome this limitation of scraped data as structured according to the interests of Twitter and certain quantitative metrics, I emphasize my feminist grounded theory methodology as an initial point of entry of reading, coding, memoeing, and re-structuring the scraped data through social network visualizations to provide my own analytic frame. Anatoliy Gruzd, scholar and creator of Netlytic, along with his co-authors, notes that when working with smaller

amounts of scraped data it is necessary to supplement analysis of social data with an examination of what individual interactions researchers see in the network in order to avoid misrepresenting the results (Gruzd, Mai, and Kampen 2017, 525). I engage in this close examination of traces not to misrepresent a supposedly objective picture of online interaction and discussion, but to look at the structured, scraped data I collect from an explicitly feminist lens.

Specifically, as part of the feminist grounded theory framework this means providing context, engaging in thick description of the scraped data, and making connections to other texts (Latzko-Toth, Bonneau, and Millette 2017, 202-203). Guillaume Latzko-Toth, Claudine Bonneau, and Melanie Millette note that when working with trace amounts of digital social media data thickening requires a contextualization and connection with other texts; “[d]ata thickening is essentially a relational process: it happens when connections are made with other data sources” (2017, 211). In this sense then, while I am engaging with data tools and scraped digital data I situate myself firmly within a feminist grounded theory framework that also gestures towards a fundamental connection to the discipline of American Studies, to engage in attentive close textual reading and thick description of social life and relational textual analysis (Deloria and Olson 2017; Geertz 1973).

### *The Data Themselves*

In this dissertation I analyze racialized digital discourse tracking the hashtags #Islamisierung and #Islamization on Twitter using the software tool Netlytic and the visualization program Gephi. These hashtags track parallel and comparable forms of digital discourse, allowing me to examine the way in which Arab and Muslim communities serve as a representational cipher for fundamental fears of white Americans and ethnic Germans

confronting global multiculturalism, or as they may imagine it, the “browning” of Europe and the West and supposed white genocide (Rashad 2003; Wilson 2018).

The hashtags selected refer to the concept of “Islamization,” which is the supposed fear that Arab and Muslim immigrants and citizens may render supposedly secular, liberal democracies into conservative Islamic cultural societies, which is related to a more extensive history of a supposed “clash of civilizations” between the West and East (Allen 2014; Huntington 1993). A cultural clash of a white West and racially Othered East is a primary preoccupation of the far-right which increasingly correlates cultural values to racial identity (Bar-On 2012; Michelsen and de Orellana 2019; 2020). For our purposes here, the phrase Islamization specifically relates to the way in which German and American far-right Twitter users imagine and construct Arab and Muslim immigrants and communities as racial and cultural Others, and conversely, how these users imagine the cultural and racial boundaries of their own white, ethnically homogenous communities. The hashtag and concept of “Islamization” is thus bound up within the process of racialization. Vincent Legrand has noted that the concept of Islamization “is perceived as massive and depicted in terms of a demographic conquest” (2014, 141), thus emphasizing the interrelations between the concept of Islamization and implicit racialization of Muslim communities as demographically and racially dissimilar compared to ethnic German and white American groups.

This phrase fundamentally reveals the way in which Islamophobia functions as a form of “cultural racism rather than a form of religious intolerance” (Oltmer 2016, 6), whereby differences in cultural values function as metaphors for differences in race. Tracking this hashtag allows me to enter into a specific site of discourse, or a “(techno)social space” on Twitter (Shahin and Dai 2019), where American and German Twitter users engage in a discourse of a



cultural politics of difference based off of religion, which fundamentally is a discussion of racial difference (Buettner 2016; Chin et al. 2009, 93; Oltmer 2016). Nitzan Shoshan has identified this discursive trend as the “culturalization of racism and the ethnicization of politics” in Germany specifically (2016, 4). The hashtags then emerge as the initial research objects and a text that then generates a series of new, relational texts and images including biographies of users, news stories, memes, and visualizations that I produce.

In discussing the analytical usage and history of the hashtag, Elizabeth Losh has noted that hashtags both reveal and create “an interdependent web of social ties” that become navigable for users (2019, 63). In selecting the hashtags #Islamisierung and #Islamization to track, I use the language of far-right political communities to unspool a web of rightwing networks and sift through their discursive content. Specifically, the selection of these comparative hashtags will allow for the examination of how Arab and Muslim communities are framed, discussed, and conceptualized in the digital public sphere.

Critically, the selection of these comparative hashtags treats Islamophobia and racialization as co-constitutive processes (Love 2017). Nasar Meer, in discussing the ethnic and racial dimensions of anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe, argues that “anti-racist scholars [must] grasp the nature of the social imaginaries that constitute contemporary racisms and their mutations in the face of changing historical circumstances” (2013, 394). In this dissertation I situate the alleged fear of Islamization as imbricated within a broader rhetorical strategy deployed by far-right users to racialize Muslim communities. Erik Love argues that “race operates at the very core of Islamophobia” and that white supremacy and Islamophobia ultimately stem from the same ideological “root” (2017, 2). As I track and analyze the deployment of the hashtag Islamization in German and American contexts, I thus implicitly track

and analyze the way in which Arab and Muslim communities are racialized and Othered by far-right Twitter users. Returning to Michael Omi and Howard Winant's definition of racialization as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (1986, 111), by tracking the hashtags I examine how far-right users not only racialize Arab and Muslim communities but also examine how the presence of Arab and Muslim communities is imagined by far-right users as signifying the increasing (and feared) racial diversity of the German and American nation-states. Steve Garner and Saher Selod, in discussing the way in which Muslim communities are racialized, note that

...those who produce, absorb and reproduce representations of...Muslims can transform the clearly culturally and phenotypically dissimilar individuals [and] devotees of the same religion (Muslims), into a homogeneous bloc: this is the basis of the racialization of Muslims (the process), and of Islamophobia (the snapshot of outcomes of this process) (2014, 6).

By examining the textual objects of Islamophobia, the hashtags #Islamization and #Islamisierung, I illuminate this comparative process of racialization of Muslim communities in Germany, the United States, and other global contexts. Analyzing digital discourse on Twitter thus reveals the way in which far-right users articulate comparative German and American national social imaginaries that foreground contemporary racisms in the current globalized age.

Tracking these hashtags using the program Netlytic assists with the identification of the type of users who comprise Islamophobic digitally networked communities (Gruzd, Paulin, and Haythornthwaite 2016). Additionally, engaging in a hand-coding process to trace how narratives of Arab and Muslim communities are constructed reveals how these discourses of religious and cultural difference underlie the re-emergence of racialized nationalism in Germany and the United States whereby Islamophobia is the shared political grammar linking together other

increasingly radical far-right ideological positions that target other groups and facilitates the emergence of transnational far-right networks. Using Netlytic, I have collected a total of 12,677 Tweets, which include 8,952 German Tweets and 3,725 American Tweets over six-month period during the COVID-19 pandemic to curate an archive of Islamophobic digital discourse. Each scrape was conducted on the same day and the differences in total Tweet amounts are a result of German users Tweeting or re-Tweeting the hashtag *##Islamisierung* more frequently than their American user counterparts. Hand-coding and close reading Tweets to identify (re)emerging themes and producing a visualization of the networks of users will describe not merely the content of these texts but the community structures that produce them.

Tracking the German hashtag *#Islamisierung* allows one to enter into the discursive space of German Twitter far-right users; here I draw on other research on German language Twitter users that has used the German language as a proxy for the boundaries of this digital national community (Scheffler 2014). Other scholars have identified key phrases used by German Twitter users in reference to German political discussions and tracked hashtags to illuminate the contours of German political conversations (Tumasjan et al. 2010; Mayr and Weller 2017). I build on this work but focus on the more mutable concept of the discursive German far-right community rather than examining specific political parties or politicians or the hashtags used by those subjects (Morstatter et al. 2018). The selection of this hashtag speaks to a specific German political discussion of Arab and Muslim immigration as evidenced by the term's visibility in the AfD party magazine, *AfD Kompakt*. The AfD has an archival selection of articles devoted to the topic of *Islamisierung*, thus suggesting it is a key source of concern and a key word in discussing Arab and Muslim immigration for the German far-right community (AfD, n.d.).

Selecting the term Islamization comparatively, this phrase seeks to track American political conversations about Arab and Muslim communities. While English is a dominant language on Twitter, with English-language users often engaged in the German far-right Twitter sphere (Hong, Convertino, and Chi 2011; Morstatter et al. 2018), the selection of Islamization emphasizes an American English discussion of Arab and Muslim immigration. Additionally, the term is used by far-right American political groups agitating against Arab and Muslim immigration such as Stop Islamization of America (SIOA), led by Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer. SIOA is a sister organization to the group Stop Islamisation of Europe (SIOE) (ADL 2013). The titling of these two different organizations, spelling Islamization with “z” and “s” respectively, illustrates the linguistic split between British and American racialization and fearmongering of Muslim and Arab immigrants, thus allowing this project to attempt to eschew British discussions of this phenomena on Twitter and focus, however imperfectly, on American English discussions of Islamization.

The selection of these hashtags is ultimately not to exclude other language or data related to Muslim and Arab communities in Germany and the United States or to scrape Tweets which correspond perfectly to national borders on Twitter, but rather these hashtags serve as starting points to continue examining the discursive themes and networks that emerge from tracking this language and emphasize the concept of “user-generated nationalism” on the platform (Shahin 2020). Selecting these phrases and scraping Tweets using the terms facilitates the collection of an initial corpus of Islamophobic discourse on Twitter and serves as the starting point of this project’s archive of Twitter data. A close reading of these Tweets from the German and American hashtags provides a description of the content of these conversations and reveals how Islamophobic digital discourse demonstrates the emergence of global networks of

(mis)information, conspiracy, and racist rhetoric in addition to the articulation of hyper-nationalist networks.

The emergence of other hashtags and transnational networks discussing the Islamization of Germany and America is implied in the feminist grounded theory method employed here and does not disprove the selection of these bounded hashtags but rather opens up a new space for continued analysis, such as in the Indian and Nigerian contexts. Just as the nations of Germany and the United States serve as initial fields for analysis, so do these hashtags. Hand-coding Tweets for themes and producing memos will “thicken” the data collected through the method of close-reading to identify emergent themes (Latzko-Toth et al. 2017; Gruzd, Paulin, Haythornthwaite 2016). In Chapter III, I engage in the construction of a detailed user-taxonomy identifying patterns in other hashtags and descriptors Twitter users place in their biographies identifying parallels between usage of the hashtags #Islamization and #Islamisierung with #MAGA and #QAnon for example—thereby showing the overlap between Islamophobia, Trump supporters, and Q Anon conspiracy theories.

By scraping data following these hashtags and then engaging in multiple forms of analysis, I draw upon the work of Dhiraj Murthy who has emphasized the necessity of engaging with multiple methods in scraping data from Twitter and has called for researchers to incorporate hand-coding, reflexive categorization of themes, and a grounded theory approach to analyzing Tweets (2017). As such these Tweets serve as origin points for further analysis which led me to examine user profiles, genealogies of memes, and producers of news stories that were shared.

The following chapters in this dissertation may be read in the form of a map. The scraped data provides a descriptive account of the digital conversation surrounding Arab and Muslim communities and is used to articulate a user taxonomy in Chapter III which may be understood

as the map legend of Islamophobic digitally networked communities. Chapter III introduces a multitude of players within this digital space ranging from Neighborly Racists to Transnational Trumpists to MAGA Devotees. Identifying and contextualizing the type of user engaged in Islamophobic communities reveals a far more complex digital landscape that involves the mainstreaming of Islamophobia among socially conservative users and the influence of transnational actors—in the case of Germany MAGA politics and in the case of the United States diasporic and Indian national far-right Hindu nationalists.

Chapter IV may be read as the visual map as it contains twelve Name Network visualizations that illustrate the contours of German and American far-right networks allowing one to see how users are connected in various subcommunities. Furthermore, these visualizations illustrate the networked connections between users in the form of edges and nodes, discussed in greater detail later, that can be analyzed to identify how information is transmitted across networks. The German visualizations or maps demonstrate the influence of far-right digital news websites in disseminating (mis)information. Comparatively, the American visualizations illustrate the development of a Global North-South information structure linking together far-right white and Indian American users with far-right Indian users and the activity of Christian and pro-Biafran Nigerian Twitter activists.

Chapter V may be read as the pathways one can follow when reading the maps of German and American far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities. In this section I code the content of the American and German Tweets to identify emerging themes that defined conversations. For both the German and American far-right Twitter users, while discussions of Arab and Muslim communities were mediated by national and local contexts and histories three comparable themes emerged: COVID-19, women and children, and conspiracies. While these

themes all represent distinctive ideological strands within far-right digitally networked communities, they are related the manifestation of a gendered, racialized far-right preoccupation with reproduction of the racially or ethnically homogenous family as a unit that upholds the larger imagined Western, Christian, hetero-patriarchal nation-state during periods of supposed crisis. As such, these next chapters may be read as legend, map, and pathways that seek to document the terrain of far-right Islamophobic digital landscapes.

### CHAPTER III. IDENTIFYING GERMAN AND AMERICAN FAR-RIGHT TWITTER USERS

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter, I discuss the profiles of individual Twitter users in the corpus of Tweets tracking both the #Islamization and #Islamisierung hashtags. Using a Social Network Analysis (SNA) approach, I identify not only the discursive content of online conversations but also the shared language and norms of actors that constitute these online networks (Gruzd and Haythornthwaite 2013). I examine user profile information to glean how actors within these digitally networked communities describe themselves (Gruzd and Haythornthwaite 2013, 9). I adopt a “trace” based methodological framework adapted for research on far-right communities that involves “analyz[ing] how self-descriptions in web users’ profiles reveal the adoption of far-right positions,” this is to say, the way in which these actors construct their identities, which is a key aspect in illuminating what “contribute[s] to the diffusion of far-right propaganda” (Crosset, Campana, and Tanner 2018, 944).

I draw particular attention to political ideology and social identity to examine how far-right communities on Twitter constitute themselves through patterns present in user biographies which point towards recurring categories of “networked” identities within the technologically mediated environment of Twitter (Papacharissi 2011, 309). Despite the challenges in identifying authenticity or even authorship in the anonymized context of digital platforms among far-right users (Crosset, Tanner, and Campana 2018, 940), I take Sophie Bishop’s (2018) position and emphasize the value and “authenticity” of the production and expression of networked digital identities through analyzing self-authored digital texts.



I argue that these identities are mired within conditions of race, gender, class, and geolocation which inform both user experience and identity both on and offline. As Radhika Gajjala and Melissa Altman have argued in emphasizing the porosity between online and offline boundaries; even in “virtual environments, participants do not leave their bodies behind” (2006, 2). As I will argue later, digitally mediated forms of Islamophobic discourse and far-right identifications parsed out on digital platforms may increasingly lay the groundwork for on-the-ground right-wing political activity and violence. Digital platforms represent another space in which individuals may (re)present themselves, where “the possibility exists for the selfing project to become both more explicitly multifaceted and more explicitly segmented” of which social media is another space for the “selfing” project to occur through selecting usernames and writing biographies (Gatson 2011, 232). As such, I approach digital texts such as Tweets and user biographies as a form of meaningful everyday communication that may, through close reading, reveal processes and qualities of identity construction or “selfing” of various users and thereby serves as a window into the concerns and events that animate discussion in far-right digitally networked communities (Bishop 2018, 145).

The “banal” communication and writing that occurs on Twitter comprises an important corpus of information for how Twitter users engage in everyday political discussions, particularly within the context of the “hashtag publics” constituted around the shared hashtags of #Islamization and #Islamisierung (Bruns and Burgess 2011; Bishop 2018, 144). This approach of identifying and analyzing everyday users and their biographies distinguishes this chapter from existing research on far-right digitally networked communities that has focused on analyzing the communication style of political parties or leaders as network actors on social media platforms (R. Ahmed and PISOIU 2020; Caian and Kröll 2015; Ganesh and Froio 2020; Morstatter et al.

2018), or work that has focused on prominent far-right media influencers on various platforms (Ekman 2015).

I build off of the work of Imran Awan who has worked to articulate a taxonomy of Twitter and Facebook users engaged in violent, Islamophobic Facebook groups and Twitter communication (2016a; 2016b). By beginning with the identification of the language used by far-right digitally networked communities on Twitter, specifically the hashtags #Islamization and #Islamisierung, rather than by identifying major accounts within this space, I was able to scrape and reveal a different taxonomy of users who, through their biographies and shared Tweets, clearly were engaged in Islamophobic hate-speech but would not fall into the category of explicit members of far-right political organizations. In analyzing the users who appeared as engaged within this far-right space demonstrated by their common usage of hashtags, I uncovered a broader, more diverse, transnational, and yet, mundane community of users that diverged from a perception of far-right Twitter networks as seemingly dominated by professional politicians, far-right social movement leaders, and explicitly, highly politized influencers. Additionally, my classification of these users as mundane is to draw attention to the way in which these users classify and identify themselves as everyday Americans and naturalize their own whiteness as banal and unmarked, only becoming visible through their engagement with Islamophobic digital discourse.

In documenting a taxonomy of users that appeared through the corpus of Tweets by examining user biographies I identify new patterns of issues that motivate and unite these users. Awan has emphasized a troubling linkage connecting practices of online Islamophobic hate speech on Facebook and offline instances of violence, radicalization of users, and the growth of offline hate groups (2016, 17). As such, in identifying and analyzing both the communicative

networks of these users as well as their user bios I document these digital communities to reveal how users construct their own identity and how they articulate the boundaries of community in both a nationalized and transnationalized sense.

While some scholars argue that Media Studies researchers should consider moving beyond describing and documenting the typographies of digitally networked communities (Couldry and Kallinikos 2017, 156), in particular online hate groups, and instead shift towards analyzing how social media formations and institutions affect offline life, or conversely, should embrace an interventionist research agenda (Shepherd et al. 2015, 8), I contend that documenting, describing, and then tracing the digital networks of these communities is critical. Articulating a taxonomy of users and engaging in SNA provides a map, in the form of social network visualizations, and a map legend, in the form of emergent themes and a taxonomy of users, for scholars and policy-makers to understand the digital terrain of Islamophobic digital publics.

In Chapter IV I move beyond description by tracing process in terms of information flows and patterns of radicalization through the production of SNA visualizations. If, as Shepard et al. argue, “hating” may be viewed as a “as a networked communicative practice” (2015, 5), understanding the users or individual actors involved in these networks is the first step in understanding how particular users who engage in Islamophobic digital discourse may be tied to other constellations of “hate” speech related to race, gender, and sexuality, and how these online forms of hate-speech may inform offline violence.

This chapter not only articulates a taxonomy of users but seeks to emphasize a possible process of radicalization and initial granular transmission of information on Twitter through an examination of American user types and documents and describes the dense, interconnected

network of German Twitter users that coalesced around a series of user types. The particular transnational dimensions of far-right Islamophobic digital networks on Twitter and the discursive themes that resonate with these communities will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters Chapter IV and Chapter V where I discuss the global qualities of Islamophobic digital discourse that parallels multiple forms of racialized nationalism in Germany, the United States, India, and Europe and the connective nature of conspiracies ranging from Q Anon to (mis)information about COVID-19. Below, I include Table 1 which articulates a taxonomy of users, emphasizing similarities in identity, ideology, and shared hashtags that connect far-right users in a series of Transatlantic and global connections across Germany, the United States, and India.

Table 1. American and German User-Types and Initial Codes

User Type	American or German	Codes
White Supremacist Nationalist	American	Pro-White, #WhiteLivesMatter, white, Western Civilization, race-mixing, #redpilled
MAGA Devotee	American	#MAGA, #TRUMP2020, #TRUMP, #STOPTHESTEAL Patriot, #WWGIWWA, #2ndAmendment, #repilled, #KAG,
Neighborly Racist	American	Proud mother, proud father, Christian, Christ follower, Wife, Husband, #Prolife, Family, Sports,
Far-Right Hindu Nationalist	American	American Hindu, Indian American Modi/MODI, #Hindu, Nationalist, India First, Make India Great Again
Heimat Enthusiast	German	Heimat, Vaterland, #DefendEurope, Abendsland, #NoEU, #MerkelMussWeg, #Dexit
Transnational Trumpist	German	#MAGA, #MGGA, #TRUMP2020, #AfD, #WWGIWWA, #qanon, #Q
Neighborly German Racist	German	Christ, Kinder, Familie, Vater, Mutter, Verheiratet, Sports, Oma, Opa,
Alleged Anti-Totalitarian	German	totalitäre Ideologie, Contra Islam, Extremismus, anti-extremisim, totalitarianism, #islamkritisch

This table visualizes the four most common user types from the German and American corpus of Tweets; Heimat Enthusiast, Transnational Trumpist, Neighborly German Racist, and Alleged Anti-Totalitarian and Neighborly Racist, MAGA Devotee, White Supremacist Nationalist, and Far-Right Hindu Nationalist respectively.

Table 1 visualizes the four most common user types from the American and German corpus of Tweets; Heimat Enthusiast, Transnational Trumpist, Neighborly German Racist, and Alleged Anti-Totalitarian and Neighborly Racist, MAGA Devotee, White Supremacist Nationalist, and Far-Right Hindu Nationalist respectively. My categorization of users is not exhaustive but focuses on types of users that emerged in relation to my research questions of how American and German Twitter users discuss and frame Arab and Muslim immigration and communities on Twitter and how these conversations and user self-identifications may illuminate how users, and more broadly far-right digitally networked communities, view the racial and cultural boundaries of the American and German national communities.

The four types of Twitter users, for both the American and German corpuses of Tweets, emerged from a close reading a total of 12, 677 user biographies. Following a feminist grounded theory process I created research memos for each data scrape and identified initial patterns or codes in phrases, hashtags, and words that I then refined into final thematic categories of the user-type label (Charmaz 2006; Connelly 2013). After identifying semantic patterns through reoccurring words or phrases in my memos, such as #MAGA or “Boy-mom,” these words were refined into more substantive codes of a user-type label that captured the major thematic qualities of the user, thereby uniting principles of thematic coding with the feminist grounded theory process (Braun and Clarke 2006; Braun et al. 2019). In Table 1, I include major initial codes, words and phrases, that defined the user type. As represented in Table 1, the user-type labels are derived from the major themes that constitute and define each user such as pro-white

sentiment, a support for a German *Vaterland*, or an identification with Trump and the MAGA movement.

In articulating this taxonomy in the context of a feminist grounded theory framework I emphasize that these user-types and codes emerged in specific relation to my research questions and researcher positionality as a feminist scholar. I deploy the term taxonomy to refer to the way in which I have identified thematic user-types in relation to my examination of race/nation/culture. As Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke have noted in discussing the process of identifying themes in texts, a “theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (2006, 82). These user-types represent emerging patterns of consistent categories of users that appeared in each data scrape and relate to the research questions of this dissertation.

Following the feminist grounded theory process to code Tweets paired with a “trace” based methodological approach, this chapter does not utilize statistical measures and is not concerned with the frequency of particular words or phrases. Rather, following principles of thematic analysis this chapter seeks to excavate emergent themes in relation to the specific research questions of this chapter. Additionally, the anonymity of the platform and the limitations of the Twitter API present limitations for standardizing statistical trends such as geographical location. As such, I emphasize recurrent themes and codes that emerged from the memoing process as articulated in Table 1 in classifying users. Chapter IV features SNA visualizations which are produced using graphical algorithms and statistical measures focusing on the modularity, density, and influence of network actors within the community.

Ultimately, in identifying representative user types, I showcase the type of dominant actors within these far-right Islamophobic networked digital publics that evidences the ubiquity of Islamophobic hate-speech among various users who identify explicitly with far-right political

groups such as the AfD or the Republican Party as well as more “apolitical” users. I emphasize however, that the taxonomy of users I curate and the feminist grounded theory coding process I engage in emerges in relation to the articulation of ephemeral digitally networked far-right communities. While this study is not generalizable, it provides a case study to theorize on the interrelations of digital nationalism, culture, and racial identity in German and American contexts. Because these user biographies are examined in relation to particular hashtags, #Islamization and #Islamisierung, and other connected users, the taxonomy articulated in this chapter reveals but a partial thread of larger networks of Islamophobic digitally networked communities that exist on Twitter and other platforms. As Kathy Charmaz and Linda Liska note in discussing the function of grounded theory as a research methodology, practitioners seek to “develop the analytic story you construct from the data” (2019, 750). As a feminist research project, I am concerned with partiality, subjectivity, and multiple readings of data (Haraway 1988).

Ultimately, I find that Islamophobic discourse is increasingly “mainstreamed” across a broad swath of German and American Twitter users, as well as among other European and Indian Twitter users as I discuss later in this chapter and further expand upon in Chapter IV. As such, this chapter contributes to discussions and analysis of far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities by documenting, describing, and tracing everyday forms of Islamophobic discourse and everyday Twitter users who fall outside the categorization of political figures, leaders, or prominent media figures.

Key findings in this chapter include the identification of transnational support of former President Donald Trump and MAGA, which is a political movement defined by ethnic or white racial economic nationalism undergirded by discourses of racialized nostalgia and a critique of



multiculturalism and globalization (Price 2018). Paralleling the identification of a transnational group of MAGA users, I discuss the strong presence of Christian, “family values” social conservatism, and an ethnicized expression of citizenship and national belonging, qualities that unite German and American Twitter users and serve as key aspects of their self-identification.

While I examine and discuss unique characteristics and user-types in the German and American taxonomy, ultimately, I emphasize similarities across the corpuses of data and transnational connections that appear more salient than differences, suggesting the rise of transnational forms of far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities across Germany, the United States, and as I will discuss, in India. Scholars studying European and American far-right political movements and ideologies in digital spaces have emphasized the transnational rather than national dimensions of such communities (Hafez 2014; Froio and Ganesh 2018; Caian and Kröll 2015), as such, this chapter contributes to their work and takes a transnational approach to analyzing these communities emphasizing the emerging linkages between Global North and South.

In the following section I outline the representative user types that coalesced around the following types for the American corpus of Tweets which include White Supremacist Nationalists, MAGA Devotees, Neighborly Racists, and Far-Right Hindu Nationalists, and for the German corpus of Tweets, Heimat Enthusiasts, Transnational Trumpists, Neighborly German Racists, and Alleged Anti-Totalitarians. I argue that the “who” of these users from my dataset illustrates two key points; firstly, how the process of political radicalization on Twitter may occur in the case of American Twitter users and features a transnationalization of far-right ideology. And, secondly, how German Twitter users reveal the ubiquitous, mainstreamed quality of German Islamophobia and its possible institutionalization through the rhetoric and political

activity of the AfD, Germany's far-right anti-immigration party, which provides a political, institutional venue supporting and disseminating an ethnicized conception of German nationalism and citizenship.

This chapter begins documenting the appearance of the Far-Right Hindu Nationalist user-type. While beginning with this user-type may appear out-of-place in the American corpus of Tweets, this user-type is the origin source and frequent central network actor of Islamophobic discussions among white American users. Hindu Indian and Indian American users are the most influential network actors within this taxonomy of users and are categorized under the same label of Far-Right Hindu Nationalist despite the identifications of users as either Indian or American-Indians because of this user type's strong emphasis a shared political ideology of Hindu nationalism both inside and outside the United States. Far-Right Hindu Nationalists are critical users within this taxonomy because they are the most influential network actors within the community, a phenomenon I document in detail in Chapter IV. Other users, the MAGA Devotee, the Neighborly Racist, and the White Supremacists Nationalist, respond to their Tweets and posts.

Far-Right Hindu Nationalist users, both Indian Americans and Indians, produce and share racialized Islamophobic content in the form of news stories, Twitter threads, and images that is picked up by Neighborly Racists, then shared among more political MAGA Devotees, and finally is endorsed and exchanged among the most radical users of the taxonomy, White Supremacist Nationalists. As such, I begin my taxonomy discussion with Far-Right Hindu Nationalist before moving to a discussion to white American users to document how Islamophobic digital content is produced and then shared among this (trans)national community. In each section on each user-type, I provide representative examples of users from the total 3,725

American Tweets and biographies there were read, initially coded, and further refined. The user examples provided in this chapter represent the major qualities of each user-type.

*The Far-Right Hindu Nationalist*

The Far-Right Hindu Nationalists user-type refers to users who identify as Indians or Indian Americans in their biographies, identifications made visible by Indian flag Emojis and by the appearance of sample codes included in Table 1 that emphasize a user's support for extreme Hindu nationalist politics in India and far-right politics in the US. At first glance, this type of user may appear surprising within the corpus of Tweets, however, as I discuss further in Chapter IV, the rise of far-right Hindu nationalism in India which includes a shift towards increasingly Islamophobic political policies and discourse in the nation also includes a rise of Islamophobic hate-speech on digital platforms (Filkins 2019). Far-right Hindu nationalism has been increasingly institutionalized in India with the rise of Prime Minister Modi and the ascendancy of India's current far-right governing party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Waikar 2018), however, the roots of religious tensions in the state may be identified in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Following British colonization and the Indian nationalist movement that led to the creation of the independent state of India in 1947, the country was partitioned with the creation of Pakistan as a separate nation. Partition was accompanied by population movement and displacement between the two regions against the background of widespread violence (Chaturvedi 2002). While Partition may be simplified as a process of Muslims moving to Pakistan and Hindus remaining in India, this supposed religious binary between Hindus and Muslims as existing before Partition neglects complex colonial historical realities. Not only did the process of British colonization along-side the collaboration of indigenous Brahmin partners influence and solidify the religious category of "Hindu" out of India's diverse religious

traditions, but the experience of Partition itself essentially “ossified religious affiliation” and rendered various groups in India and Pakistan as either members of newly formed majority or minority communities (King 1999; Roy 2013, 4)

Subsequently, even as India remains a religiously diverse nation with the second largest population of Muslim citizens in the world with more Muslim citizens than its neighboring state of Pakistan (Diamant 2019), Muslim Indians remain in the minority within the state and have increasingly been targeted for political exclusion and violence in the context of the growing, institutionalized far-right Hindu nationalist movement, led by Prime Minister Modi, that seeks to realize India as a homogenous Hindu nation (Harriss 2015), an imagined religious and political category that is evoked as a nostalgic reality even as it lacks a historical basis. As such, increasingly Islamophobic legislation and political discourse in India is also mediated in digital spaces. Far-right Hindu Nationalist users located both in India and abroad play a key role disseminating Islamophobic digital discourse on the platform Twitter. In earlier periods, from the 1990s to the early 2000s, scholars of Indian digital diasporas have noted that Indians abroad have been drawn to and emphasized their Hindu nationalist affiliations as a means to connect back affectively and discursively with the Indian homeland (Gajjala 2019, 5; Gittinger 2019; Therwath 2012).

Today, the appearance of far-right Hindu nationalist Indian Americans within far-right American Twitter circles is an emerging topic of research and has been documented by Eviane Cheng Leidig (2019). In discussing this still developing trend, Leidig notes that the activity of far-right Hindu-nationalist diasporic Indian Twitter users is focused primarily on Trump and immigration policy, thereby illustrating how “global Islamophobic tropes can operate and adapt

to local contexts, and ultimately, bolster support for populist radical right ideology in the West,” as well as in the Global South (2019, 79).

My profile of Far-Right Hindu Nationalist users in this context of this work builds off of Leidig’s insights and contributes analyses discussing how these users not only bolster and support far-right ideology by adapting Islamophobic Tweets and memes from Indian national to American national and local contexts, but, as I demonstrate in Chapter IV, these users are influential network actors, producers and originators of stories, memes, and images. The appearance of these users within this dataset illustrates the emergence of a transnational far-right Islamophobic digitally networked political community connecting India and the US as well as the possible emergence of a multi-racial far-right coalition connecting Indian Americans and white Americans in a national context.

Representative of the Far-Right Hindu Nationalist user-type within the dataset is user @NetizenParo. @NetizenParo initially describes herself with the biography, “Dare because you care [US flag] [Indian flag] War is nvr the first choice. Desire fr peace isn't a sign of weakness [praying hands] Respect is a 2-way street. #Scientist: Show me the data [smiley face]” (NetizenParo 2020d), with a reported location of Texas, USA. @NetizenParo, like many other Far-Right Hindu Nationalist users demonstrates a strong connection between India and the United States as evidenced by the national flag Emojis. While initially @NetizenParo’s user biography does not include explicitly political affiliations, post-November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, the date of the highly contested American presidential election between Republican nominee President Trump and Democratic nominee former Vice-President Joe Biden (J. M. Martin and Burns 2020), her biography is updated to illustrate a sense of political radicalization, similarly to MAGA Devotees and Neighborly Racists,

Post-November 3<sup>rd</sup> there is a trend of explicit politicization of user biographies of Far-Right Hindu Nationalist users, including @NetizenParo. @NetizenParo updated her biography to read the following: “PS: Democracy dies with #FakeNews &#appeasement @NetizenParo #HinduAmerican #Patriot Dare bcoz u care [US flag] [red heart] [Indian flag] Desire fr peace isn't a sign of weakness [praying hands] Respect is a 2-way street. #Scientist: Show me the data [smiley face]” (NetizenParo 2020d). This shift in biography, featuring a play on *The Washington Post*'s new slogan, “Democracy dies in darkness” (Concha 2017), also emphasizes @NetizenParo's identification as an Hindu-American here highlighting her religious identification with Hindutva in diaspora.

@NetizenParo's biography stands as representative of several thematic trends present in Twitter biographies of Indian American and Indian Twitter users that began to coalesce under the Far-Right Hindu Nationalist type. Users like @NetizenParo situate themselves as objective Twitter influencers by burnishing professional credentials or affiliations and self-identify as Hindu and or members of the Indian diaspora. @PurnimaNathis is another such example of a Far-Right Hindu Nationalist user who emphasizes her Hindu-American identity and her professionalism while conversely amplifying highly racialized, Islamophobic digital content, @PurnimaNathis describes herself as an “American Hindu. Seen & heard on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX & NPR. Intellectual Pursuits, Politics, Philosophy, Philanthropy. Independent Free Thinker” (Nath 2012). Unlike many white American-identified Twitter users, these accounts usually do not contain explicitly racist or Islamophobic language or political affiliations—the Islamophobic language and content often appears in the Tweets rather than biographies.

In their online biographies, the Far-Right Hindu Nationalist presents an online-self that is professional, respectable, and objective. Once one delves into the content of this user-type's

Tweets and visualizes their position with the network community, it becomes clear that accounts such as @NetizenParo and @PurnimaNathis disseminate virulently racist Islamophobic Tweets even if their ideological position is not immediately apparent from their biographical description. Users such as @NetizenParo produce and share Islamophobic Tweets that are picked up and circulated among increasingly more radical white American Twitter users such as White Supremacist Nationalists. Thus, the articulation and imagining of an exclusively white, Christian American national community emphasized by Neighborly Racists, MAGA Devotees, and White Supremacist Nationalists that excludes Muslim immigrants and American Muslims originates among Indians and Indian Americans, suggesting the emergence of transnational far-right Islamophobic Indian American linkages and the articulation of a multi-racial far-right national coalition between far-right Hindu nationalist Indian Americans and their far-right Christian white counterparts.

In a Tweet that is representative of the general conversation dynamics of @NetizenParo, in a discussion with the user @ShowUrJew Prides, @NetizenParo states; “@ShowUrJewPride I honestly think tht all #Democratic #nations need to #fight the agenda of #Islamization. Everyone can see hw #Jews & #Hindus around the world r being #gaslighted , #history #distorted & #manipulated & #FakeNews media being used to push the #Islamofascistagenda.#StopGlobalJihad” (NetizenParo 2020b). Here @NetizenParo attempts to frame Hindus and Jews as similarity persecuted minorities, a framing used by Hindu nationalists to emphasize their supposed persecution and connection to the Zionist pro-Israeli movement (Anderson 2015, 54), with the alleged “fake news media” pushing an Islamic agenda that is in essence a hybrid religious-fascist-totalitarian ideology. This tactic of connecting one’s supposed persecution with the Jewish community is also used within European far-right circles who situate

secular Europeans as “victims in solidarity with the Jews, portrayed standing side-by-side with Israel against the ‘Islamic threat’, while Muslims are branded as the fascists (‘Islamofascists’)” (Hafez 2014, 485). In this formation, @NetizenParo situates Hindus and Jews as comparable victims to this supposed “Islamofascist agenda,” emphasizing similar discursive tactics carried out by European far-right groups.

Within the same dataset, @NetizenParo shifts her attention to discuss specifically the situation in the United States, stating that “@USMCSDI Get ready for the slow & steady #Islamization of #America. One innocent city/town at a time, by our democratic processes, by provisions in our #Constitution. Look at #India, #GreatBritain, #Germany, #Sweden.... By the time we realize it's too late....it will be. #StopGlobalJihad” (NetizenParo 2020a). These two examples serve to illustrate how the content @NetizenParo’s Tweets appears very divergent from her desire to support “facts” and “peace. For example, usage of the term global “jihad” is a far-right communicative strategy to racialize and Other Muslim (Aguilera-Carnerero and Azeez 2016). Additionally, the claim that Muslims are coordinating with the news media to articulate a global Islamist-fascist agenda has no basis in “facts” and is a conspiracy (Ekman 2015). It is this type of content produced by @NetizenParo that ultimately resonates with other far-right white American users such as the Neighborly Racist user-type.

### *The Neighborly Racist*

This Tweet from @NetizenParo about “Global Jihad” demonstrates the linkages between Far-Right Hindu Nationalist Twitter users and another type of user within this corpus which I term Neighborly Racists, referencing to a type of Twitter user who presents as middle-class, focused on local neighborhood communities, religious, socially conservative, and concerned with protecting “family values” of heterosexual marriage, fixed gender roles, and the



purity of children. I use the term Neighborly Racists to emphasize the contemporary manifestation of middle-class white racism that has historic roots in mid-century middle-class white supremacist movements that focused on issues of traditional gender roles, school segregation, family autonomy, and residential segregation.

These middle-class white supremacist far-right social movements historically have been spearheaded by neighborly mothers and wives, a historic social movement that historian Elizabeth McRae Gillespie has termed “white supremacist maternalism” of the 1950s-1960s (2018). Today, these same issues that motivated white supremacist mothers of the 1950s re-emerge on Twitter and are invoked by users engaged in Islamophobic discussions on Twitter, thereby demonstrating how contemporary manifestations of far-right digitally networked communities have clear historical genealogies to earlier forms of American far-right political communities. My identification of the Neighborly Racist user-type connects to emerging literature that tracks the spread of racialized digital discourse and activity of white users on a variety of social media platforms that focus on middle-classed issues of neighborhood community development, child-rearing, and local schooling (M. Kelly 2020; Kurwa 2019; Lorenz 2020).

These Neighborly Racist users emphasize their identities as mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers, and local community members. They present as merely concerned neighbors and citizens. Scholars studying white women affiliated with far-right digital movements emphasize the rise of a contemporary form of “alt-maternalism” in far-right digital discourse whereby a white women’s “desire for home and family are racialized and ethnicized” (Mattheis 2018). More broadly in a post-9/11 American context, Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz has documented how homeland security culture in terms of national security policy has also become

a “politics of everyday life” where domestic spaces are situated as sites in need of securitization through parenting to protect both the white, nuclear family unit paralleling the broader homeland (2019, 14).

Here, in my dataset I also document that men engage in similar forms of ethnized and racialized discourse concerning family, Islamophobia, and race that manifests as a form of “alt-paternalism.” This male Neighborly Racist primarily emphasizes his identity as a father, husband, or grandfather. Scholars documenting the digital far-right have noted that “[t]he project to re-gender politics plays a critical role alongside the discourse of race war. A common articulation on the Alt-Right is that ‘traditional gender roles are better for society’ and that sexual hierarchy must be allowed to return as legitimate politics” (Michelsen and de Orellana 2020, 126). Thus, this emphasis of users on their identities as “traditional” husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, and grandparents fits within a broader logic of far-right and securitization political discourse. And, as I document later in this chapter, the “re-gendering” of political discourse appears as a project in discussions and critiques of Islam and Arab and Muslim communities where children and education become a key theme upon which users engage with Islamophobic political content.

Annie Kelly, in further explicating the connection between social conservatism, far-right movements, gender, and family emphasizes that both political ideologies emphasize a mythologized desire for fixed gender dynamics and racial homogeneity, although among far-right adherents these desires are coupled with a belief in white victimization (A. Kelly 2017). With the white family and reproduction key aspects of re-building white civilization in the context of far-right ideology (Michelsen and de Orellana 2020), the appearance of Neighborly Racists within the corpus of American Tweets connects to larger anti-immigration discourses

with Islamophobia a specific manifestation of this structural form of xenophobia and racism. This trend is clearly evident in the German corpus of Tweets as well, which I discuss in further detail in a later section. Family, traditional gender roles, and children are main points of identification and supposed contention in far-right right spaces where users discuss the effects and alleged dangers of Arab and Muslim immigration as both a civilization and personal, gendered threat.

Representative of the Neighborly Racist is @Laurale71816951, a user who describes herself as a “Mother to 4 amazing sons! My uterus is sexist! current hobby - playing hide and seek with my kids, hoping they don't find me. Definitely not a snowflake” (L. Lee 2020). Here, we see @Laurale71816951 defines herself explicitly as mother and rejects the label of a “snowflake,” which references a derisive, conservative slang term for liberals as weak, overly emotional, delicate, and easily offended (Schwartz 2017). In discussing the participation of white women in far-right spaces, Ashley Mattheis states that this group of white women seeks to assert their conservatism and far-right affiliations as a strategic, independent choice that emphasizes their power in becoming “‘modern’ women who have overcome what they see as the ‘false-consciousness’ of leftist movements such as feminism, multiculturalism, and anti-racism” (2018, 138), just as @Laurale71816951 emphasizes in her biography.

Comparatively, @Stretcharm40, stands as representative of a Neighborly Racist man, whose biography states he is a “A humble follower of Jesus, Presbyterian by conviction,husband,father,anti abortion, marriage between man and woman, and NOT perfect in this life, serving ALL” (Armstrong 2020). Similar to @Laurale71816951, and like many male-identified users, @Stretcharm40 emphasizes a Christian religious affiliation and a role as a

husband and father, in addition to asserting explicitly political stances against abortion and for homophobic policies such as “traditional marriage.”

These types of users, the Neighborly Racists, appear initially rather politically mundane in their biographies as they do not evince an explicit support of white supremacist politics by including pro-white phrases or hashtags within their biographies like White Supremacist Nationalist Users, nor do they contain Islamophobic language such as “Contra Islam” as distinguishes the German Alleged Anti-Totalitarian user. However, the prevalence of this user-type in the American Corpus of Tweets reveals the resonance of extremely vitriolic and at times violent Islamophobic Tweets, images, and news stories circulated within this dataset among “everyday” socially conservative Americans, neighborhood mothers, fathers, and grandparents. As such, the distinction Annie Kelly draws between “social conservatism” and the far-right appears to be growing more and more porous over time (2017). Such users, who define and construct their “networked self” by articulating and re-affirming traditional gender roles in their biographies, amplify content that is explicitly Islamophobic that focuses on the intersection of children, Islam, and multiculturalism or diversity in schooling systems.

For example, @fearless12342, re-Tweeted the following Tweet, from user, @based\_belgium; “When we where young we did school trips to the local Zoo, or to some sports domain, nowerdays kids visit Mosques in Belgium, and learn how to pray to Allah... #Islamization” (Belgium 2020), which includes a video of a group of people praying at a mosque. @fearless12342 describes herself as a “Wife and mother, American, Fully support #1A and #2A [US flag]” (Sunshine 2012). The engagement of users such as @fearless12342 with this content illustrates several points; firstly, that Islamophobic political discourse is not limited to a network of far-right extremists who belong to far-right political groups and parties but rather,

average Americans, who, in their everyday digital communication endorse and amplify Islamophobic political content thereby mainstreaming of this type of hate-speech (Mondon and Winter 2017). Secondly, these types of user connections, between American and Belgian users, demonstrates that there is transnational engagement and connection between far-right users outside of the context of formal far-right groups political organizations (Caian and Kröll 2015).

Examining another example of the Neighborly Racist user, @StaceyM78844177, we see that she fits within several of the key themes of the Neighborly Racist user. @StaceyM78844177 describes herself as a “[red heart] [US flag] [red heart] BoyMom & Wife [kissing lips] Lover of Tacos & Lazy Sundays [taco] Love my country and fellow Patriots!! #MAGA #KAG #2ndAmendment #Trump2020” (StaceyM78844177 2020). @StaceyM78844177, as demonstrated by her biography, does not explicitly support white supremacist nationalist movements, however, she appears sympathetic and motivated by the same gendered logics of preservation of the white traditional family that motivate white supremacists and nationalists (Hartzell 2018). Her inclusion of hashtags such as #MAGA #KAG #2ndAmendment #Trump2020 illustrates also the porous boundaries between American user-types such as the MAGA Devotee and the Neighborly Racist. @StaceyM78844177 is an ideal example of the way in which American user types, from the MAGA Devotee to Neighborly Racist, hold similar ideological and identification positions. Additionally, these types of users are easily primed to become radicalized within Islamophobic digitally networked communities.

This type of user, the Neighborly Racist, is perhaps the most troubling in the context of online radicalization, as this user type demonstrates the diversity and banality of racist, Islamophobic ideology on Twitter and suggests an increasingly convergence between mainstream social conservatism in the United States and the increasingly ascendent and violent

far-right. Savannah Badalich in discussing the specific trend of far-right radicalization of white women on platforms such as Twitter notes in her identification of a pathway of radicalization, the beginning step for users is to include gender traditionalist phrases in their biographies with users then algorithmically primed to engage with increasingly more extreme far-right accounts (Badalich 2019, 56). Badalich emphasizes that for white women “traditional gender roles are augmented with racist ideologies” (2019, 55). In this sense then, socially conservative white women, as identified by the Neighborly Racist type, demonstrate a clear overlap between ideologies of anti-feminism, gender traditionalism, and racialized Islamophobia, as is visible in @fearless12342, ’s emphasis on her identity as a wife and mother and her engagement with racialized Islamophobic discourse. In fact, @fearless12342 completes the trend of radicalization from Neighborly Racist to White Supremacist Nationalist. @fearless12342 later updates her biography to state “Pro-White and anti-communist” (Sunshine 2012)

Ultimately, I emphasize that xenophobic opposition to immigration and Islamophobia in particular is a constitutive aspect of far-right American political communities among all adherents from the socially-conservative, to MAGA supporters, to white supremacists, a trend documented by Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts (2018). This type of mainstreaming of Islamophobic content among everyday Twitter users, “who relay far right ideology without claiming to belong to any far right groups” ultimately “provide[s] improved visibility and enhanced legitimacy” for far-right political ideologies (Crosset, Tanner, and Campana 2018, 944). Furthermore, I emphasize that these users who situate themselves as everyday moms, dads, and neighbors, while not consistently including explicitly racialized political indicators in their biographies, by their absence and engagement with Islamophobic digital discourse in fact represent a contemporary trend of “color-blind” racism (Bonilla-Silva

2015), with their implicit whiteness becoming visible through their engagement with Islamophobic hate-speech.

In this sense then, the absence of political affiliations of the Neighborly Racist suggests the legitimation and naturalization of far-right ideology even among superficially “moderate” socially conservative user accounts on Twitter who then, over time, become primed to consume and engage with increasingly radical content that is reflected in updated biographies that illustrate a trend towards greater radicalization. While @fearless12342’s updated biography represents the quick path from “wife and mom” to White Supremacist Nationalist, I next discuss the MAGA Devotee user-type in greater detail to emphasize how a support for MAGA style politics and engagement with Islamophobic content serve as a bridge to violent, radical political beliefs.

#### *The MAGA Devotee*

The next user type I discuss is more explicitly political; the MAGA Devotee. The MAGA Devotee is an enthusiastic, fervent supporter of President Trump and the MAGA movement—evidenced by their usage of the #MAGA or #Trump2020 hashtags. This type of user demonstrates the next step of radicalization from the Neighborly Racist to a user who is explicitly political and engaged in far-right conspiracies. Badalich has noted the increased use of the #MAGA hashtag as an indicator among white female social media users as preceding their increased radicalization and support of white supremacist and far-right politics (2019, 60). Additionally, I argue that an adherence to conspiracy theories is an increasing hallmark of the MAGA Devotee.

Conspiracies include the Q Anon conspiracy and online movement as well as a support of the “Stop the Steal” conspiracy movement. The “Stop the Steal” conspiracy, fashioned and

bolstered by Trump, alleges that the 2020 Presidential Election was “stolen” by Democrats and their international Communist allies in Venezuela via the rigging of Dominion-manufactured voting machine to produce more votes for the Democratic Presidential nominee Joe Biden (Demsa 2021), although many iterations of the “Stop the Steal” conspiracy theory continue to proliferate. The “Stop the Steal” conspiracy, as well as the Q Anon movement, ultimately culminated in the violent January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Capitol Insurrection led by Trump supporters to stop the certification of the “stolen” electoral votes (Demsa 2021). More recently, Trump supporters and Republican members of Congress have suggested that the 2021 Capitol Insurrection was itself a conspiracy, a “false flag” operation led by Antifa, an alleged shadowy far-Left group that does not exist in a coordinated fashion, and the racial justice organization Black Lives Matter (BLM) (Herndon 2021)

The user @jrconse is a clear representative example of the interconnections between MAGA supporters, conspiratorial thinking, and Islamophobia. @jrconse describes himself as an “American dad, husband, Grampa, Catholic, USAF (ret) #2A #MAGA [US flag] #WWG1WGA #WakeUpAmerica #manners Take back control of our children’s education now” (jrconse 2020). This biography description echoes many of the unifying user traits of the Neighborly Racist user, such as an emphasis on traditional gender roles, Christianity, and a preoccupation with issues of children and their education. We see these themes emerge through @jrconse’s placement of dad, husband, and Grampa as the first identifiers in his biography followed by his religious adherence to Catholicism.

I emphasize that the racialized nostalgia politics of the MAGA movement are expressed as a direct reaction to liberal modernity and globalization thus aligning the movement within the context of the larger far-right (Michelsen and de Orellana 2019; 2020). The MAGA Devotee user



@suemilam2 illustrates the centrality of nostalgia even more clearly here in her biography; “[X] Lover of truth & my grandkids. [US flag] Forever Trumper [X] Christian, No DM [star] MAGA [flame] KAG [shooting star] [comet] Dems suck!!TRUMP 2020 [100] PATRIOT [US flag] American since 1663 [US flag]” (milam 2017). @suemilam2’s biography illustrates all these trends of traditional gender roles, Christianity, a preoccupation with issues of children, and fundamentally, a desire to return to a mythologized, white American past of 1663.

@suemilam2 loves her grandchildren, Trump, and Christianity, defining herself by a series of racialized and reactionary, gendered beliefs that culminate in a nostalgia for 1663 as period of patriotic American history. The year 1663 is distinguished by two events of note; King Charles the II’s establishment of the Province of Carolina in North America, a key moment for American settler colonialism, and: the year the Royal African Company (RAC) was granted a charter from King Charles II (Hywel 2005, 270). It is unclear what event @suemilam2 is referring to with her emphasis on 1663 as a pivotal year for patriotism, but emphasizing the frame of racialized nostalgia, it is impossible to separate the founding of the United States from racial capitalism—which the RAC represents as a company that shipped over 100,000 enslaved individuals (Mohamud and Whitburn 2018).

Ultimately, the “MAGAfication” of the Republican Party has demonstrated the collapse of a division between contemporary alternative conservative movements, mainstream Republican politics, and the far-right (Coppins 2018). MAGA, in the context of the United States, and in Germany as I discuss later, functions ultimately as a racialized, political reaction to particular “cultural aspects of modernity [such as] state-sanctioned legal equality, liberalism, socialism, social democracy, and multiculturalism” (Bar-On 2012, 26), and seeks to realize an “alternative modernity,” first theorized in the French New Right (Bar-On 2012). For American users within

this dataset, these emphases on Islamophobia, anti-feminism, anti-social justice movements, and anti-immigration constitute the bedrock of right-wing political ideology.

Considering immigration specifically, a desire for an idealized, white past, coupled with a support of social conservatism in the form of traditional gender roles manifests among users as feelings of white victimization or displacement and purports a fantasy for a “nostalgic way of life if only immigrants could be eliminated” (Santa Ana and González de Bustamante 2012, 279). For both Neighborly Racists and MAGA Devotees this form of racialized nostalgia is characterized as either implicit or explicit respectively, with MAGA Devotees making this argument for racialized nostalgia explicit in the usage of hashtags such as #MAGA; to make American great *again* like it once was. This emphasis on racialized nostalgia is certainly evident in the MAGA Devotee biographies and the Tweets they engage with, particularly content about Arab and Muslim immigration. This type of user, however, not only emphasizes their support for an idealized, white Christian American society emphasizing traditional religious institutions and fixed gender roles, but these users also increasingly identify with digital-born racialized fantasies or conspiracy theories—specifically Q Anon—with their participation an attempt to address and fight back against their own supposed victimization at the hands of elites.

Within both the American and German corpuses of Tweets, many users who signaled a support for MAGA or MGGGA expressed support for the Q Anon conspiracy theory and movement by including phrases such as, “#WWGI1GA” or “Q” in their biographies. “Q” refers to a supposed high-level military/government official who is providing information about Trump’s fight against the “deep state” in the form of anonymous posts on the platform 8Chan and “##WWGI1GA” refers to “where we go one, we go all” a slogan that purports support for following the Q Anon movement, users often also include phrase such “Q-Army” as well

(Planck 2020). These are all hashtags which, in the aftermath of the 2021 Capitol Insurrection, explicitly signal the conspiracy community as violent—this digital army turned real on January 6, 2021.

While this conspiracy group is fragmented and fluid (LaFrance 2020), its relevance here is related to its focus on children; it purports that there is a cabal of elites who sexually abuse children, torture them, and drink their blood that is alleged to possess the “chemical adrenochrome” which supposedly extends life (Friedberg 2020). This emphasis on children and blood drinking has clear historic overlap to earlier anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that purported Jews were engaged in “blood libel” rituals (Friedberg 2020). As such, these users, the MAGA Devotees, are identifiable not only through their intense support of Trump but also through their enthusiasm for historic far-right anti-Semitic conspiratorial tropes that are “remixed” on social media platforms in increasingly more virulent and violent forms and increasingly implicate Arab and Muslim communities (Allington and Joshi 2018; van Prooijen 2017).

This summary of the basic contours of the Q Anon movement is sufficient to emphasize a few points relevant to this dissertation’s focus on far-right digitally networked community discussion and framing of Arab and Muslim communities; firstly we see that the Q Anon conspiracy theories are similar to specifically Islamophobic conspiracy theories that purport global alliances between feminists, “Cultural Marxists,” Muslims, Communists, and Leftists in allegedly seeking to destroy Western, Christian civilization” (Ekman 2015, 1996; Hafez 2014, 492), and secondly, there exists a fundamental similarity between Q Anon conspiracies and Islamophobic conspiracies that purport the white family, and children in particular, is an object

under threat from foreign enemies (Törnberg and Törnberg 2016, 415). I outline this theme in detail in Chapter V.

Additionally, the cross-over between Q Anon adherents and MAGA Devotees, as well as a pattern of Q Anon supporters among the German Transnational Trumpist user I discuss later, evinces a fundamental focus in far-right digitally networked communities on the affective symbol of children and the white or ethnic German nuclear family. Children in danger, of either death, sexual violence, or religious conversion, is a connective theme that runs across both user types as a conversational topic. While the threatening figures may change; Democrats, Muslims, or Hollywood elites, the foundational conspiracy of children in danger remains a potent symbol in far-right circles who are particularly concerned with the proliferation and protection of the white, patriarchal family unit. Both @jrconse and that @Laurale71816951, MAGA Devotees and Neighborly Racists respectively, re-Tweeted of the same Tweet about the supposed Islamic conversion of Belgian children, illustrating similar forms of engagement and connection across these user types.

Ultimately, showing these linkages demonstrates the connections in conspiratorial thinking that can shift an everyday mom into a Q Anon supporter, MAGA adherent. However, I draw particular attention to the way in which these conspiracy theories place Muslim communities at risk of possible violence. Unlike Hollywood elites or Democratic politicians, Muslim communities, particularly in Germany, exist as a minoritized population and the possible connections between online-hate speech targeting Muslims and actualized hate-crimes targeting Muslim populations is a growing concern (Awan 2016a; Awan and Zempi 2017).

Other representative examples of the MAGA Devotee illustrate the connection between an emphasis on traditional gender roles, the white patriarchal family, Islamophobia, and violent,

far-right conspiracies. For example, user @Nextette's biography states he is "#Conservative. Family Values. Salute to our Police & Armed Forces. #RaisedRight, #BlackPilled realist. MAGA, Trump 2020" (Nextette 2020). The phrase, "#BlackPilled" relates to far-right "consciousness-raising" or more accurately, radicalization, that has different stages or colors of "pills." Before being "black-pilled" one must be "red-pilled." While Neighborly Racists may identify with similar socially conservative values, they do not use the lexicon of "pills" to describe their ideological position which is related to a more extreme, misogynistic internet subculture.

The emphasis on "pills" refers to a scene in the science fiction film, *The Matrix* (1999), where the lead character Neo has a choice of taking a red or blue pill; the red pill allows Neo to reveal reality as it really is however unpleasant it may be, and the blue pill facilitates the continuation of a blissful ignorance of reality (Wachowski and Wachowski 1999). Naturally, Neo chooses the "red pill" and begins his journey to save humanity. In the context of American far-right digitally networked digital communities, to be "red-pilled" is to become aware of lies spread by "leftist political ideologies, which, for the purveyors of hate refers to the entire spectrum of feminists, Marxists, socialists, and liberals" (Ganesh 2018, 34). "Black-pilling" is a new level of awareness, post red-pill, and suggests an awareness that supposedly genetically inferior men are doomed to involuntary celibacy, to be "incels" (Lindsay 2020, 101; Segalewicz 2020, 12). This emphasis on "pilling" is particularly ironic among far-right misogynists and gender traditionalists given that *The Matrix* (1999) directors Lilly and Lana Wachowski have stated that the "pill" serves as a metaphor for the transgender experience given their own experiences coming out as trans in 2012 and 2016 respectively (White 2020).

Among far-right communities, however, to be “black-pilled” represents becoming aware of the futility of fighting the systemic oppression of Leftists ideologies and, as Angus Charles Lindsay discusses, to become potentially at risk of planning and carrying out “violent retribution” against target populations to express this political belief of violent nihilism (2020, 101). The “incel” mass-murders carried out by Elliot Rodgers and Alek Minassian, both active within the far-right “Manosphere,” demonstrate the clear potential for violence among these members of this subsection of far-right digital communities (Dickson 2019). Such biographies emphasize both an explicit support for the heterosexual, white patriarchal family and an idealized vision of American as a white society potentially only achievable through violence.

Users such as @Nextette, ascribe explicitly to conspiracy theories that view the global system as “rigged” in some manner. Other users take conspiratorial belief and support of Trump further, such as @ShayAustin7 who describes herself in her bio as “Just living Day by Day ~ Grateful in Every Way ! [sparkle] QWhisperer [sparkle] ANON [sparkle] TRUMP-Girl 4GOD [sparkle] JohnFKennedyJr is ALIVE [sparkle] WWG1WGA [sparkle] IN GOD WE TRUST [red heart] I AM [Aquarius] [orthodox cross] [heart decoration] [place of worship] [menorah] [US flag] [two swords]” (ShayAustin7 2020). @ShayAustin7, whose account has since been suspended, signals her identification as a “TRUMP-Girl 4 GOD” and a belief in the conspiracy theory that the assassinated former President John F. Kennedy Jr. is in fact alive.

@Nextette, @jrconse, and @ShayAustin7 as MAGA Devotees all represent the correlation between a belief in racialized, gendered conspiracies and a support of Trump. Their appearance and engagement within the corpus of scraped Tweets also emphasizes their concern with the topic of Muslim immigration as part of a global threat. Farid Hafez notes this same trend among far-right European communities stating that “the imaginary of the Muslim has become an

enemy on a global scale, connected to leftist thought (Marxists) as well as to capitalism. Subsequently, this construction of the powerful, conspiratorial Islamic threat has become a regular feature in far-right ideology” (2014, 492). As such, for Trump supporters engaging with Islamophobic digital discourse on Twitter the lines between mainstream Republican conservatism, Islamophobia, and conspiracy are increasingly blurred—this is to say Trump is now extricable from the Republican establishment and Trump’s brand of MAGA style politics focusing on conspiracy is extricable from supporting him.

What I draw attention to here with this user type is that MAGA style politics, with the ascendancy of Trump to the Presidency in 2016, has been institutionalized in the United States as a foundational part of the Republican Party post-2020. Trump’s continued celebration within the Republican Party post-Capitol Insurrection is clearly documented by Republican voter preference for Trump as a future nominee and leader of the Party and state-level and regional Republican support of Trump and censure of his critics (Bacon Jr. 2021; Heer 2021; Liesman 2021). Additionally, we see the election of individuals such as Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene who has supported Q Anon and called for the assassination of Democratic leaders to the House of Representatives, as further evidence of a contestation between mainstream social conservatism and the far-right movement, with extreme far-right elements winning out (Hunt 2021; M. Rosenberg 2020; Steck and Kaczynski 2021).

### *The White Supremacist Nationalist*

Taking these socially conservative beliefs concerning racial homogeneity and traditional gender roles to their natural conclusion, we establish the emergence of the White Supremacist Nationalist user. White Supremacist Nationalist users identify themselves explicitly as white nationalists and white supremacists in their biographies by the inclusion of pro-white statements.

Stephanie Hartzell, in discussing the different branches of white supremacist and nationalist movements and affiliations, states that these various communities and ideologies are fundamentally linked by an “underlying logic...for all pro-white rhetoric, ideologies...all pro-white groups share a foundational commitment to a white supremacist ideology” (2018, 9), whether the establishment of a white racial state is explicit or implicit.

As such, I have categorized the appearance of any pro-white statements within user biographies as fitting with the White Supremacist Nationalist user-type emphasizing parallel political ideologies of white supremacy and re-surgent nationalism that emphasizes a distinctive form of American white supremacy that fits the concept of a white nation within a broader rubric of white, Western civilization. Neighborly Racists or MAGA Devotees, like members of the far-right, are distinguished by their “rhetoric[al] attempts to construct an ‘alternative’ political ideology using key tenets of white nationalism as its foundation” (Hartzell 2018, 11), however, they do not cross the rhetorical threshold of explicitly using pro-white language.

The question here is not of the different policy preferences between these users, but how they frame their ideological positions and identities. MAGA Devotees and Neighborly Racists, while emphasizing many of the same key themes as White Supremacist Nationalists, do not explicitly use whiteness as an identifier as they construct their networked identities within their biographies. This difference, while nuanced, is an important distinction when we consider processes of radicalization. As Ashley Mattheis has argued in discussing far-right white women, “there is a leap that must be made between mainstream racialized world views and white supremacist hate” (2018, 153). The question is, what precipitates this leap? As I argue here—it is engagement with racist, Islamophobic discourse as a gateway to more extremist white supremacist beliefs.



White Supremacist Nationalist users distinguish themselves from mainstreamed, racialized socially conservative views through an emphasis on racial and civilization conflict. In considering the tensions between the conception of a common Western civilization and the nationalist affiliations of far-right groups, Rogers Brubaker has noted that; "... 'the nation' is not disappearing, but 'the nation' is being re-characterized in civilizational terms" (2017, 1211). In this sense, civilizational conflict, racialized nationalism, and transnational far-right movements operate on parallel and complementary tracks. @real\_sindorei, for example, identifies themselves as a "truth seeker, defender of western civilization and white people" (Sindorei 2020). Another user, @BLcxQcHRxw2fC0V describes themselves as "Pro white and that all that matters [face with sunglasses] [face with sunglasses]" (Angrywhiteguy [angry face][angry face] 2020).

Within these examples there is a clear emphasis on the concept of a "white" civilization that is allegedly under threat from Muslims, immigrants, Jews, Feminists, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, liberals, Communists, and cosmopolitan, cultural elites. The engagement of these users with Islamophobic Tweets emphasizes that for White Supremacist Nationalists, Muslims pose a racial and cultural threat to "whiteness" and an imagined Western civilization. @hawkwindsean makes this trend quite explicit with his biography; "Anglo [English flag] a slave to globalism ,a witness to white erasure. The invasion continues" (SeeLatin crossFlag of EnglandID2020Transhumanism 2011). This is a persistent emphasis on a supposed white genocide or an invasion, which Andrew F. Wilson has argued is itself a unique, digital conspiracy (2018, 28). Emphasizing patterns of similarity between these user types, however, we see that White Supremacists Nationalists, like their conspiratorial brethren, the MAGA Devotees, stand in opposition to Hollywood elites, liberals, Feminists, and LGBTQAI+

communities, although White Supremacist Nationalist frame their conspiracies as explicitly targeting the white race.

What I draw attention to here in analyzing and categorizing these biographies is the way in which phrases and initial individual coded themes sediment into a focus on family, traditional gender roles, and global conspiracies that suggest connections across potentially disparate groups, such as white nationalist and seemingly suburban “apolitical” mothers and fathers. Ultimately, among these American user types, including the Far-Right Hindu Nationalist, there is a distinctive sense of one’s nation or “civilization” being under attack and a view that national patriotism is a form of identity under victimized or marginalization in society. I discuss the racialization of patriotism and discourses of Nazism and nationalism later in Chapter V that is particularly instructive in the German case, whereby many users seek to emphasize that their fervent nationalism is not fascistic.

*A Clash of Civilizations: Saffronization, Islamophobia, and Whiteness*

With this taxonomy of these users laid out, I now move to a conversation on Twitter that illustrates some aspects of the conversational dynamics between select users and how users of different types interact with similar Tweets. I trace how initially content produced from Far-Right Hindu Nationalist Twitter users becomes circulated across a far-right digitally networked community. A close examination of this Twitter thread reveals the way in which content is circulated among far-right users within the American dataset and also provides a partial answer to a key research question guiding this dissertation—how do far-right communities imagine Arab and Muslim communities? As a representative example, this Twitter thread reveals that Far-Right Hindu Nationalist users and white American far-right users imagine Muslims as a global and national threat, destabilizing society, drawing on existent Islamophobic tropes. While the

particular nation under threat may change, from India to the United States, these users coalesce around a racialized representation of Muslims as fomenting disorder and chaos. In discussing the content of conversations along with analyzing user types, I emphasize a “trace” based approach to analyzing far-right digitally networked communities, following the methodological procedures of Crosset, Tanner, and Campana, examining profiles in addition to online interactions (2018, 945). A more extensive form of thematic analysis is undertaken in Chapter V.

To analyze the communicative dynamics of this community in action, I begin with a Tweet from @Saffron\_Tweeter, an Indian Twitter user whose bio states, “Now also on Indian Version of Tooter with username @ ShandilyaSpeaks. Join me there also. Let's make Sanatan Rashtra a reality” (Saffron Tweeter 2020). Relevant here to the categorization of @Saffron\_Tweeter as a Far-Right Hindu Nationalist user type is the reference to Sanatan Rashtra, a political group in India that seeks to enact a form of Hindu nationalism (Vijaita and Pathak 2015). Members of this group have been involved in various instances of violence, including several murders, as well as a series of bombings in India (Vijaita and Pathak 2015), with some politicians arguing for a ban on the group as a terrorist organization (Express News Service 2019). The intricacies and networked dimensions of Far-Right Hindu Nationalists Twitter users is explored in the production and analysis of SNA visualizations in Chapter IV and further discussed in Chapter V, here, I focus on the type of content this user type circulates and other how other American users-types engage.

The Tweet from @Saffron\_Tweeter that brings together these various user types is a Twitter thread discussing a book titled, *Slavery, Terrorism, and Islam: The Historical Roots and Contemporary Threat* (2005), a text that styles itself as scholarly and research-based but is, in essence, a propagandistic treatise (Hammond 2005). @Saffron\_Tweeter begins a conversation

thread discussing the book stating that “Islam is not a religion, nor is it a cult. In its fullest form, it is a complete, total, 100% system of life,” @Saffron\_Tweeter goes on to Tweet, “Islam has religious, legal, political, economic, social, and military components” #Islamization” (Saffron Tweeter 2019b). The Tweets from @Saffron\_Tweeter emphasize the threat of Muslim migration and the supposed demographic wave of Muslims coming to the West—eventually concluding the Twitter Thread with the hashtags “# #Need\_For\_CAA\_NRC” along with “#Islamization” (Saffron Tweeter 2019a).

The reference to the CAA and NRC refers to a series of anti-Muslim policy interventions initiated by the BJP-led Indian government. The CAA refers to the Citizenship Amendment Act, passed recently in December 12, 2019, which requires individuals in India to produce a series of approved legal documents to prove their citizenship, however, non-Muslim immigrants and refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan and undocumented, non-Muslim Indian citizens are exempt from such requirements (Laliwala 2020). As such, the CAA effectively discriminates against Muslims and working-class Indians who do not possess legal documentation. The NRC refers to the National Registry of Citizens which the BJP moved to implement statewide in India, a registry initially executed in the state of Assam, after passage of the CAA which required Indians to demonstrate proof of citizenship status to be counted as citizens on the National Registry (Hameed 2019).

Kiran Vinod Bhatia and Radhika Gajjala, in analyzing the emerging effects of the CAA-NRC, note that these policy initiatives articulated by BJP, when examined in conjunction, evidence that “Muslim citizens of India (or immigrants already residing here) will face extreme and systemic marginalization; they may even be ripped of their citizenship status” (2020, 6287). The CAA-NRC is not only a legal manifestation of anti-Muslim bias but as Sarah Ford and

Emily Edwards have noted, the CAA-NRC is the culmination of the BJP's adherence to a form of "exclusionary religious nationalism that imagines India as a solely Hindu country" (Forthcoming). These policies sparked massive national and transnational protests by Indians, student groups, and other allied coalitions, in particular a collective of working-class, Muslim Indian women in Delhi named the "Women of Shaheen Bagh" who viewed these policies as discriminatory towards Muslims, a fundamental threat to India's secular constitution, and a threat to an Indian ethos of secularism and inclusion (Bhatia and Gajjala 2020, 6294) as opposed to the far-right, religious Hindu nationalism of the BJP (Edwards et al. 2020).

@Saffron\_Tweeter's Tweets about the possible Islamization of society are not in and of themselves surprising, but rather, the resonance of @Saffron\_Tweeter's posts with an American audience suggests that what appeared to be a national Indian digital political conversation focused on the pro and anti-CAA-NRC movements, was in fact attracting both white American and Indian American far-right audiences. Tweets from @Saffron\_Tweeter were clearly speaking to a national Indian audience, the inclusion of hashtags such as #Need\_For\_CAA\_NRC, illustrates this, however, we see that themes of fear over cultural change, racialized discussion of terrorism, and demographic threats are not limited far-right Hindu nationalist audiences in India. As Leidig has outlined, Islamophobic tropes are flexible in translocal applications (2019, 79). As follows, I discuss key players engaging with @Saffron\_Tweeter's thread and how they fit into a taxonomy of American users.

@Saffron\_Tweeter provides a twenty-one Tweet thread on the topic of Islamization, however, I focus on the most resonant Tweets in the thread that were re-Tweeted and appeared in my scraped corpus of Tweets ranging from April to August of 2020. In one of the first Tweets @Saffron\_Tweeter quotes the author of the book *Slavery, Terrorism, and Islam: The Historical*

*Roots and Contemporary Threat* (2005) Peter Hammond, “Open, free, democratic societies are particularly vulnerable. He [Peter Hammond] says ‘When politically correct, tolerant, and culturally diverse societies agree to Muslim demands for their religious privileges, some of the other components tend to creep in as well’ #Islamization 5/n” (Saffron Tweeter 2019d).

Examining the context of this Tweet, a few key points emerge. Firstly, a dialectical positioning of Muslim societies as the opposite of Western nations—that Western nations are supposedly “politically correct,” tolerant, and interestingly culturally diverse, and that Muslim nations are homogenized as regressive, intolerant and highly religious. While this Tweet simply regurgitates well-worn racialized tropes about Muslims in the form of contemporary “cultural racism” that connect back to historic forms of Orientalism, Islamophobia, and civilizationalist rhetoric (Buettner 2016; Ekman 2015; Hafez 2014), the engagement with this Tweet by highly religious, conservative, gender traditionalist American users is notable particularly for their emphasis on their own religious freedoms.

This Tweet signals a series of fundamental ideological inconsistencies—that the far-right is critical of liberal modernity particularly feminism and LGBTQIA+ rights, while also suggesting as a political force the far-right is protecting liberal, democratic values. However, these ideological inconsistencies are a hallmark rather than an aberration of far-right Islamophobic discourse. Brubaker notes this paradox thusly stating that far-right, religious and social conservatives articulate a modified secularist, modern position as a means of “minimizing the visibility of Islam in the public sphere. Liberalism – specifically, philo-Semitism, gender equality, gay rights, and freedom of speech – is selectively embraced as a characterization of ‘our’ way of life in constitutive opposition to the illiberalism that is represented as inherent in Islam” (2017, 1194). Far-right discourse does not have to be ideologically consistent to be

effective, rather its mutability to speak to different audiences in different contexts signals its affective strength. In certain cases, far-right users emphasize their social conservatism, in other cases they emphasize their commitment to Western democracy and modernity.

Further examining this thread from @Saffron\_Tweeter, it is clear that this type of content motivates far-right white Americans and Indian Americans. For example, @jrambo727, whose biography states that “It has been said that when human beings stop believing in God they believe in nothing. The truth is much worse: they believe in anything. #Christian #MAGA” (jrambo727 2020), also engages with this tweet. Examining @jrambo727’s profile further, this user has 5,115 followers, a much larger reach than @Saffron\_Tweeter’s 2,307. I make this point not to emphasize metrics of followers as a means to statistically categorize the significance and influence of users, but rather to highlight a form of dynamic transmission or flow across far-right Hindu nationalist and far-right white and Indian American Twitter communities, @Saffron\_Tweeter is the origin point of Islamophobic discourse, but this message is shared to a likeminded public, Christian MAGA followers and American Hindu nationalists, through the engagement of @jrambo727. In this sense, Indian Far-Right Hindu Nationalist users not only bridge far-right users across Indian and American Twitter publics, but these users undergird the manifestation of a global, multi-racial Islamophobic far-right coalition of users that includes white, Indian American, and Indian users.

Considering the transmission of (mis)information on Twitter, @ClaraLKatzenmai’s engagement with @Saffron\_Tweeter’s content illustrates most clearly how Islamophobic hate speech is a shared communicative practice that links together Indian, Indian American, and white American users, here signaling a transnational digitally networked connection.

@ClaraLKatzenmai describes herself as, “[X] PATRIOT stands with our greatest ever President

TRUMP. I LOVE AMERICA. <https://t.co/JvLiNWE4BQ> WE NEED TO STAND UNITED #MAGA #KAG [X]” (ClaraLKatzenmai 2020). @ClaraLKatzenmai has 38,745 followers—clearly more than a “micro-influencer” and thus reaches a large number of users (Anger and Kittl 2011, 3). @ClaraLKatzenmai’s biography emphasizes her support of Trump, patriotism, and a desire to #KAG or “Keep America Great.”

The link in @ClaraLKatzenmai’s biography goes to her account on the social media-platform Gab, a social media site that styles itself as an alternative to Twitter under the guise of allowing total free speech due to an absence of moderation policies. As such, Gab has become a haven for white supremacists, misogynists, and Holocaust deniers who have been permanently banned from Twitter for violating its hate-speech policies (Canales 2021). Since President Trump’s ban from Twitter for posting Tweets that encouraged violent action against the United States federal government that culminated in the 2021 Capitol Insurrection on January 6, 2021, both his followers and former colleagues have flocked to Gab, although Trump himself has yet to make the switch (Mak 2021). Critical here in @ClaraLKatzenmai’s biography is the way in which it reveals a blurring of boundaries between White Supremacist Nationalists and MAGA Devotees, as both user types emphasize a form of racialized patriotic nationalism, and both types of political activists participated in the offline 2021 Capitol Insurrection (Biesecker et al. 2021).

Continuing to follow the Tweets from @Saffron\_Tweeter, we also see an emphasis on terrorism and racialized nationalism. In discussing Hammond’s book, @Saffron\_Tweeter uses decontextualized statistics to falsely suggest that Muslims are more violent and increase the threat of terrorism, Tweeting: “At 40%, nations experience widespread massacres, chronic terror attacks, and ongoing militia warfare, such as in: Bosnia — Muslim 40% Chad — Muslim 53.1% Lebanon — Muslim 59.7% #Islamization #Need\_For\_CAA\_NRC 13/n” (Saffron Tweeter



2019a). Naturally, these manipulated statistics do not engage with the historic source of potential state-destabilization in majority Muslim-nations; this is to say Western colonialism and American coup attempts, an omission that Lila Abu-Lughod has explored elsewhere in contemporary discussions of the supposed “destabilized” nature of majority Muslim societies (2013). Here, @Saffron\_Tweeter suggests that as the percentage of Muslims in countries grows, states experience more violence, thereby attempting to justify the passage of the CAA-NRC and the exclusion of Muslims from Indian civic life as an issue of national security.

The final Tweet I discuss in this section illustrating the communicative connections between various white and Indian American and Indian far-right Twitter users is the last Tweet in @Saffron\_Tweeter’s thread which states: “...He further says “But their birth rates dwarf the birth rates of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and all other believers. Muslims will exceed 50% of the world’s population by the end of this century #Islamization #ISupportCAA\_NRC 21/21” (Saffron Tweeter 2019c). This Tweet explicitly addresses the supposed demographic fears of Muslim immigration and alleged changing racial and religious composition of nations, a phenomenon that has been discussed as the “browning of Europe” in the context of migration of between European nations and the Global South (Rashad 2003).

Users who engaged with this Tweet include, @HembG, now since suspended, whose profile states “Jesus Christ is Love & The Only Way to God.#LoveTrump. #LoveUSA. #LoveGodsChildren. Words are powerful. With them we do much good or much damage.#ChooseGood. Q” (HembG 2020), with support for MAGA and Q Anon appearing again. @snadp also re-Tweets @Saffron\_Tweeter and describes themselves as an “American patriot, [red heart] President TRUMP and BILL BARR! NRA Member, Pro-Life. Love Capitalism, Legal immigration...lobster hooping and Paris. #BuildTheWall #KAG” (Laurel 2020). By excavating

both user types and the types of Tweets users engage within the context of this representative Twitter thread, we see the emergence of transnational far-right digitally networked communities that span the Global North and South.

This section on a taxonomy of users is most clearly embodied by @jrconse, the Catholic veteran and American Dad who is a Q Anon supporter (jrconse 2020). We see that American Twitter users engaged in far-right digital communities emphasize as key facets of their networked identities Christianity, traditional gender roles, and a support of Trump's MAGA movement and violent conspiracy theories such as Q Anon. The content that these users engage with, however, emanates from Far-Right Hindu Nationalists. What I have demonstrated in this section is that content produced from Far-Right Hindu Nationalists is circulated and filtered through white American far-right and socially conservative Twitter networks. In Chapter IV, I discuss the emergence of Indian-based far-right Islamophobic networks.

Additionally, I emphasize how hate-speech made in a national Indian political context concerning Muslim immigration and the CAA-NRC on Twitter resonates beyond national borders. As such, this user taxonomy documented in this chapter challenges a conceptualization of contemporary Islamophobia and Islamophobic far-right digitally networked communities as a predominately nationalized, or even a "civilizational" Western European and American phenomena (Brubaker 2017). This discussion has also sought to emphasize that the type of user engaged in racialized conversation about Arab and Muslim immigration is not restricted to prominent far-right figures or individuals who explicitly ascribe to far-right political parties—rather Islamophobia is increasingly transnationalized and mainstreamed across the Global North and South.

In Chapter IV, I discuss and analyze the spatial connections between network actors and engage in SNA using a Name Network formation of these communities to identify visually the origin source of (mis)information and hate-speech and identify influential users in these networks. In Chapter V, I discuss what knits these disparate communities together in terms of emergent conversational themes, focusing on the topics of COVID-19, and women and children as affective symbols, and digital conspiracies. As follows in this chapter, I transition to a discussion of a taxonomy of German Twitter users and a conversation that illustrates the communicative dynamics of this digitally networked community, emphasizing the similar types of discursive engagement and the appearance of a transnational MAGA movement that links German and American users together under a rubric of shared ethnic and white nationalism.

#### *The Heimat Enthusiast*

In articulating a German taxonomy of users, several unique user-types emerged from coding that both paralleled and diverged from the American user types and illustrated particular elements unique to far-right German political identifications. The user types fall into four types: Heimat Enthusiasts, Alleged Anti-Totalitarians, Neighborly (German) Racists, and the Transnational Trumpists. Unlike the American Twitter user taxonomy, the German Twitter users do not show a clear linear path of possible radicalization from socially conservative to AfD voter to (Neo) Nazi, for example. However, this taxonomy of users does illustrate how far-right Islamophobic content is circulated and reveals that Islamophobia is mainstreamed in German political discourse in so far as a broad range of users, often with no far-right political persuasion, engage with virulent, racialized content.

I begin with a discussion of the Heimat Enthusiast. *Heimat* translates to “homeland” in German, but users of this persuasion also reference *Heimat* in a broader sense of an imagined

Western European civilization. This user is defined by their patriotic support of Germany, their sense of passionate support of a German *Heimat* or *Vaterland* (fatherland). This user, who is a passionate supporter of the German nation, must be contextualized against the German nation's contemporary "heightened anxieties about nationalist sentiment and politics in the postwar period" (Shoshan 2016, 203). This is to say that intense national patriotism in Germany in the contemporary period is always read against the historical backdrop of the Third Reich and WWII. A more reserved form of nationalist sentiment has historically been expected in the post-war period.

However, these *Heimat* Enthusiasts demonstrate a form of geographical, cultural, and political possession towards their homeland that parallels American possessive logics of whiteness in terms of physical space and culture (Bonds 2019; Lipsitz 1998), but manifests as a form of German ethnic possession, a dynamic discussed earlier in Chapter I in the context of histories of immigration in Germany and the United States. *Heimat* Enthusiasts presuppose a strong connection to Western Europe as a cultural, racial, and religious concept but go on to assert a total rejection of European integration, referring to the integration of European-Union (EU) member states. The hashtag #Dexit frequently appears among these users, which refers to a possible German exit of the EU similar to Great Britain's "Brexit" from the bloc (DW 2019).

This attempt to both "defend Europe" against Muslim immigrants and reject EU multilateralism is particularly potent in the context of the steady weakening of the EU as a result of Great Britain's removal from the bloc and the threat of a French pull-out as a result of the rising influence of Marine Le Pen's far-right anti-immigration anti-EU National Rally Party in France (Dijkstra, Poelman, and Rodríguez-Pose 2019). Germany, as a founding EU member state, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have been viewed on the continent as holding the

EU framework together against a rising tide of European far-right populism (Mikhina, Mikhin, and Shulezhkova 2018). As such, the appearance of anti-EU sentiment within these user biographies suggests the possible resurgence of far-right German ethno-nationalism and a rejection of EU integration as a framework because it allegedly weakens national sovereignty.

The Heimat Enthusiast is well represented by user @DerPatriot444 who describes himself with the biography; “*Deutschland meine Heimat! NO ISLAM! Unser Deutschland zuerst! Deutsch und frei wollen wir sein!*” (National 2020). Which translates to “Germany is my homeland, ‘NO ISLAM!’ our Germany first, German and we’re going to stay free!” Such a biography is typical of the Heimat Enthusiast who asserts both a sense of German nationalism as well as an approval for the imported lexicon of President Trump, evidencing a symbiosis between German and American far-right movements. Finally, among these types of users there is a recurrent positioning of Islam as a foreign element—this is to say that Islam and Muslim communities are not part of an authentic Western European or German homeland. Such a position erases Germany’s long history of immigration of Muslim Turkish communities and a growing population of Muslim Turkish-Germans from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onward (Münz and Ulrich 1998; Şen 2003).

A similar type of Heimat Enthusiast is user is @Nutzer\_019 who states “HEIMAT-UND KULTURLIEBHABEND, AUSLÄNDER JA, ABER ZU VIEL IST ÜBERFREMDUNG. #TIERSCHÜTZER #MENSCHENRECHTLER” (#Widukind [blue heart] [rainbow] [German flag] [Israeli flag][Armenian flag][Taiwanese flag][Wallis and Futana' [Indian flag] [Greek flag][flame][snowman] [globe][statue of liberty] 2021). This translates to “Lover of Homeland and Culture, foreigners yes, but too much is over-foreignization. #AnimalRights #HumanRights.” Alexa Lenz has noted that the rehabilitation of the Nazi-era term *Überfremdung*

once used to describe a supposed infiltration of “alien” races and Jews in Germany in the 1930s is now increasingly used in mainstream conservative German political discourse (2017). Lenz notes that

The word “Überfremdung” works similarly by implying that there is an abundance of strangers invading the ‘German race.’ What seems to have changed, however, is the definition of the out-group or the enemy. Promoted by PEGIDA and the AfD, the new threat are Muslim immigrants and the idea of the “Islamization” of the Western culture. Thus, this becomes a powerful example for the political myth of the clash of civilizations between Islam and the West (2017).

As Lenz chronicles in her discussion of the terminology of the phrase *Überfremdung*, the Heimat Enthusiast user-type articulates this exact claim to an ethnically pure, Christian German homeland and situates Muslim immigrants and Islam more broadly as alien to Europe and Germany, demonstrating clear rhetorical historical continuities to the racialization and Othering of Jews in the 1930s. Farid Hafez, in discussing contemporary manifestations of far-right European politics notes that in Western Europe the far-right situates “Islam as a threat to ‘the spiritual foundations of the West’” (2014, 484), which, I emphasize for both German and American users appears as more cultural than spiritual in the contemporary context.

#### *The Neighborly German Racist*

Another common user type that appeared in the German corpus of Tweets was very similar to the American Neighborly Racist and is classified as the Neighborly German Racist. These users, like their American counterparts, emphasize their affiliation with traditional gender roles and frame their concerns over society as benignly middle-class and neighborly, focused on children, schooling, and community issues. In practice, however, these users engage with highly

racialized and explicitly Islamophobic Tweets, images, memes, and news stories. One such user that represents this categorization is @rosmarietoggwe1, who describes herself as; “*Verheiratet, erwachsene Kinder, bin für die Familie, gegen Kindstötung im Mutterleib, vertraue auf Gott. Bitte bleibt mir mit Gender vom Leib!*” (Toggweiler 2020), which translates to “Married, with grown children, I’m for family, against abortion, and a believer in God. Get that gender away from me!” As an anti-abortion, Christian @rosmarietoggwe1 likely refers to her opposition to contemporary feminist and queer movements and theories that emphasize a right to one’s gender identity expression and the performativity of gender (Butler 2011). Similar to the American Neighborly Racist, the Neighborly German Racist represents the connection between socially conservative values of family, Christianity, traditional gender roles alongside anti-feminist and Islamophobic political positions (Törnberg and Törnberg 2016).

As such, concern over socially conservative issues related to abortion, gender expression, and Christianity operate in a similar fashion in Germany as in American far-right circles. Some users within this category make the connection between the patriarchal family unit, traditional gender roles, and Islamophobia more explicit in their biographies. User @letstalkabout4 states in her biography, “*Ich mache mir große Sorgen um meine Kinder & die Länder [German flag][Austrian flag] [blue heart] die ich liebe! Der ISLAM und die Unbedarftheit unserer Politiker sind der Grund meiner Sorge!*” (letstalkabout4 2020). This translates to “I’m very worried about my children and the lands I love! Islam and the naivete of our politicians are my greatest worries!” Here we see a direct and explicit linkage between far-right ideology, ethnic nationalism, Islamophobia and the patriarchal family unit.

Users who espouse forms of socially conservative values in their biographies and emphasize their roles as mothers, fathers, etc., frequently cast Islam as a threat to children and

the local neighborhood community. Children for both German and American Twitter users are motivating affective symbols within Islamophobic online discourse, who like white American women and ethnic German women, are seen as in need of protection by far-right movements from the supposed sexual or religious violence of Muslims (Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018; Boulila and Carri 2017). Gabriele Cosentino notes that far-right conspiratorial stories are frequently “charged with affective and aspirational values” that resonate with users (2020, 67). In the case of German and American users, children serve as this affective symbol.

For both the Neighborly Racist and the Neighborly German Racist user, virulent forms of racialized nationalism are mediated through the image of the family. Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz in discussing the linkages between post-9/11 homeland security culture and maternalism in the United States, note that “[h]omeland security culture refers to a vision of nation and national belonging that celebrates nativism, nationalism, indiscriminate patriotism, and an adherence to resurging conservatism and normative ‘family values’” (2019, 21). In this sense both male and female identified users situate their identities as mothers and fathers as pivotal to securing the American and German homeland from a culturalized Muslim threat, thereby “perform[ing] citizenship through domesticity” (Fixmer-Oraiz 2019, 4), through the circulation of Tweets, posts, videos, images, and memes of children in potential crisis of religious conversion. Domesticity is racialized, politized, and mediated through user-biographies and performed virtually in these digitally networked communities as users emphasize their identities as mothers, fathers, husbands, and wives.

#### *The Transnational Trumpist*

Compared to the Neighborly German Racist user, the Transnational Trumpist appears as a more highly politicalized user-type, but, as I will discuss, themes of children and family also



predominate within these biographies. The Transnational Trumpist refers to a German user who is a supporter of Trump and calls to adopt and inaugurate a MAGA movement in Germany, a “MGGA” movement, possibly led by the far-right party the AfD. @Orlanetta demonstrates this form of intense ethnicized nationalism and a transnational support of Trump; “I [red heart] Trump - the greatest President in history! #DrainTheSwamp #AmericaFirst #Trump2020 #AfD #MerkelMussWeg #ClimateRealism #Entgrünifizierung” (Orli 2020).

The last hashtags in the biography translate to “#Merkel’sGottaGo” and “de-greening” or “de-greenification.” The first hashtag references a critique of German Chancellor Angela Merkel who leads the mainstream conservative party, the Die Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU), and has supported the entrance and resettlement of Syrian refugees in Germany (Ostrand 2015). “De-greening” or “de-greenification” refers to a possible elimination of the Die Grünen, a national political party in Germany which advocates for progressive causes including environmentalism and other social justice issues (European Greens 2017). This type of Transnational Trumpist user not only supports a form of ethnicized German nationalism and Trump, but also frequently espouses support for various conspiracy theories in their biographies. “Climate realism” is another example the conspiratorial leanings uniting the Transnational Trumpists and the MAGA Devotees, with the hashtag suggesting the user believes in a form of climate denial of the realities of global warming (Haskins 2019).

Other types of Transnational Trumpists are more explicit and extreme in their conspiratorial beliefs such as @MetelingS, who describes themselves thusly; “*Patriot...für Deutschland Fan AFD Trump Urban Salvini Le Pen Israel 5G soll verboten werden allgemein Musik Politik News Politik & Staat*” (Christina 2020), which translates to “Patriot for Germany,

fan of the AfD, Trump, Urban, Salvini, Le Pen, Israel, 5G should be totally forbidden, music, political news, politics and government.” The names in the biography refer to a series of far-right authoritarian leaders including Trump, Viktor Orbán of Hungary which is misspelled as “Urban,” and Marine Le Pen of France. Most interesting in the context of Islamophobic discourse and the COVID-pandemic in this biography is the comment about forbidding 5G technology. This refers to an emergent conspiracy that 5G, a form of technology that facilitates the functionality of broadband cellular networks, either causes cancer, is a cover for spying on citizens, or most outlandish of all, is part of an evil plot led by Microsoft founder and philanthropist Bill Gates whereby Gates has included microchips in the COVID-19 vaccine that will be activated by 5G technology to then surveille citizens (Bruns, Harrington, and Hurcombe 2020; Evstatieva 2020). These 5G/COVID-19 conspiracies are also connected to Sinophobic conspiratorial beliefs that suggest that the state of China was involved in the supposed “production” and spread of the COVID-19 virus (Bruns, Harrington, and Hurcombe 2020). I discuss these topics in greater detail in Chapter V.

A subset of this user-type does not necessarily explicitly contain phrases such as “Trump” or “MAGA” in their biography but is linked to Trump through professed support of the Q Anon conspiracy theory of which Trump is a key actor and hero. While the German Q Anon supporter does not constitute a separate user type, the frequent appearance in a German corpus of Tweets for support of Q Anon or the #WWG1WGA is notable and evidences a transnational connection beyond far-right political movements into a more complex, fragmented, and transnationalized digital network of violent conspiracy movements. The user @galgo\_lady illustrates this trend with her biography that states “*Aufmerksam und kritisch. #WWG1WGA #AfD #Qanon #followthewhiterabbit #redpill #patriot*” (galgo\_lady 2020). Which translates to

“alert and critical,” and goes on to reference a series of hashtags related to the Q Anon movement and the American far-right’s “pill-based” awakening. What this type of user demonstrates is that transnational far-right conspiracy theory groups and Islamophobic digitally networked communities are fundamentally imbricated and share a common vocabulary even if they are literally speaking in different languages.

### *The Alleged Anti-Totalitarian*

The last user type that appears in the German corpus of Tweets is superficially very divergent from the American White Supremacists Nationalist user type, this is the German Alleged Anti-Totalitarian. However, the absence of explicit (Neo) Nazi users within the corpus of Tweets is not surprising in so far as due to Germany’s history of Nazism, the post-war reunified state has articulated a series of strict laws governing hate-speech compared to the other free-speech models of Western European democracies and the United States (Delcker 2020). The open advocacy of (Neo) Nazism within the German Twittersphere thus is less common than American discussion of white nationalism online. While the AfD and far-right, nationalist politics more broadly remain a potent electoral force in Germany (Klikauer 2018b), the nation is increasingly seeking to confront and address the resurgence of far-right extremism.

The AfD is now under monitoring and investigation for violating the German constitution by the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Schmitz 2021), and, the federal state is aggressively rooting out far-right extremists and (Neo) Nazis in the military (Bennhold 2020). Comparatively, as I have argued in the Introduction, far-right positions and white nationalism in the United States have been increasingly institutionalized, mainstreamed, and celebrated over the course of the Trump presidency, ultimately culminating in the 2021 Capitol Insurrection that was discursively

supported by many Republican lawmakers and minimized after the fact as a form of legitimate protest rather than a violent riot (Edmondson and Broadwater 2021; Fernando and Nasir 2021).

In Germany, while the AfD is certainly a far-right ethno-nationalist party, it has not advocated for open anti-constitutional violence against the state—even as it is alleged to have violated the constitution through its transgression of the constitutional German right to human dignity through the party’s racialized denigration of refugees and minimization and denial of the Holocaust (Schmitz 2021). Interestingly, only analogous incident to the 2021 Capitol riot in Germany was the arson of the German *Reichstag* in February of 1933 which precipitated Hitler’s rise to power and was blamed upon German Communists by the rising Nazi party (Mommsen 1985), similar to Republican claims that “Antifa” stormed the capitol on January 6, 2021 (Dems 2021).

With this discussion of the divergences between German and American national acceptance and support of extreme white nationalist and (Neo) Nazism laid out, I now move to discuss the Alleged Anti-Totalitarian. Users of this type describe themselves in their biographies as against totalitarianism or against extremism, which, perhaps seemingly suggests their political moderation. However, these users emphasize Islam as a totalitarian political, cultural, and religious ideology. Hans-George Betz has described this discursive tactic among Western European far-right groups as waging a war against “Green Totalitarianism” (2016). Users of this category describe themselves in a similar form as @LeeGesundemitte; “*Kein Unterschied zwischen Rechts,-& Linksradi kalen, radikalen Humanisten & radikalen Moslems*” (Spiegelvorhalter 2020). This translates to “there’s no difference between right and left radicals, radical humanists, and radical Muslims,” emphasizing a false equivalence between various political factions and “radical” Islam.

These users also style themselves as political moderates rather than far-right extremists. @Fermodes emphasizes their moderation in a profile that states, “*Bin weder Extremist, noch Radikaler und erst recht kein Nazi - ich bin einfach nur politisch Rechts angesiedelt. #deutschland #AfD #grundgesetz #verfassung*” (Der Erwachte (ツ) 2020), which translates to “I’m neither an extremist nor a radical and certainly not a Nazi, I am simply politically right-wing #Germany #AfD #BasicLaw #Constitution.” Suggesting here that this user views a support for ethno-nationalist political policies as not extreme or evidence of (Neo) Nazi sympathies but simply a position of social conservatism.

Many users also explicitly state that they view Islam as a totalitarian ideology, such as users @R1chtungsweiser, who uses his profile to rail against Islam; “*Der Islam ist eine totalitäre Ideologie und hat in Europa nichts verloren. Stoppt die Islamisierung unserer Heimat. Selber denken, Meinungen hinterfragen.*” (Richtungsweiser 2020b). This translates to, “Islam is a totalitarian ideology and has no place in Europe. Stop the Islamization of our homeland. Think for yourself and ask questions.” What unites this user type is a consistent insistence upon their supposed political moderation and disdain for all extremist belief while featuring frequent appearances of extreme anti-Muslim language.

With these German user types outlined, in the next section I discuss an example of a conversation that shows how various user types interact. I outline how and what type of Islamophobic digital content circulates through this community which serves as a precursor to my discussion of the influence of (mis)information, fake news, and conspiratorial, decontextualized news stories with a network of far-right German Twitter users in Chapter IV. For now, I provide an example of dubious journalism that brings these user types together, a

news story focused on a Mosque in the German city of Duisburg which became a major recurrent theme in the German corpus of Tweets.

“Der Islamischen Republik Deutschland” (*IRD*): *Mosques and (Mis)information*

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020 @Netzdenunziant Tweeted, ““*Eine weitere Aufnahme der islamischen Machtdemonstration aus Duisburg. Der Muezzin der Merkez-Moschee beglückt die weltoffene Nachbarschaft der Islamischen Republik Deutschland (IRD) mit seinem Ruf zum Gebet. #NichtMeinDeutschland #Islamisierung* <https://t.co/YPnu8vSvsH>” (Klarname 2020). This translates to, “Another recording of the Islamic demonstration of power. The Muezzin of Merkez-Mosques pleases the cosmopolitan neighborhood of the Islamic Republic of Germany with his call to prayer.” The Tweet features a video of a minaret in the city Duisburg with the original video sourced from user @AbiAltun, who identifies themselves as affiliated with the Mosque in Duisburg (ALTun 2015). This video of the Mosque is re-appropriated by @Netzdenunziant, who describes themselves as as “*Überzeugter AfD-Wähler, Reputationsmanager für grüne Vielflieger und Lieferant für politische Jagdmunition. Langstreckenluisas Videobiograf.*” (Klarname 2018), an “Enthusiastic AfD Voter and reputation manager for green frequent flyers and a supplier of political ammunition and videographers.” The Tweet focuses on the presence of mosques in German cities and the aural call to prayer. The content of the Tweet traffics in far-right Islamophobic discourse emphasizing physical manifestations of Muslim religiosity and a connection between cosmopolitanization and racial and religious diversification. Finally, the emphasis on a fear of *Überfremdung*, or over-foreignization is clear, which suggests that the presence of Muslims in Duisburg leads to the Islamification of Germany—the “Islamic Republic of Germany.”

However, what is most notable is the way in which this Tweet attracts interest and engagement across all user types including that Heimat Enthusiast, such as @Heimatmausoleum who describes themselves as “Law and Order; Pro: Heimat – *Contra: Extremismus und Fanatismus jeglicher Couleur; Politik, Literatur, Musik* [German flag] [Austrian flag] [Italian flag] [Iraqi flag]” (Hansen 2020), or “Against extremisms and fanaticism of every color, politics, literature, and music,” with the flags Germany, Switzerland, Italy and France emphasizing a claim to a common Western European civilization culture. @Netzdenunziant’s Tweet also resonates with less overtly political users, such as @HerwigMartin or a Neighborly German Racist who describes himself saying, “*Ich sollte aufhören, mich über Sachen aufzuregen, welche mich selbst wahrscheinlich eh nicht mehr betreffen - aber es geht nicht: 2 Kinder 4 Enkel 2 Urenkel...*” (Ich bin’s 2020), which translates to “I should stop getting upset about things that don’t affect me, but I have 2 kids, 4 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.” This type of self-identification emphasizes a connection in far-right circles between family, children, and the possibility of *Überfremdung* as threatening both the ethnically pure German nation and the ethnically pure German family.

A final user of note engaged with this conversation is the Alleged Anti-Totalitarian, whose biography, not surprisingly, appears very totalitarian. @PeterSc20850307 describes himself as having “No Mercy 4 Extremists, *DIE WELT BRAUCHT KEINE VERLOGENEN MUSLIME DIE STÄNDIG NACH TOLERANZ VERLANGEN UND NULL DER SELBIGEN ENTGEGENBRINGEN*” (PeterSc20850307 2020), which translates to, “THE WORLD DOESN’T NEED ANY LYING MUSLIMS. THEY ASK FOR TOLERANCE AND RETURN ZERO OF THE SAME BACK.” The level of contradiction of these types of users is intense, with @PeterSc20850307 claiming to have no mercy for extremists and going on to advocate the

extreme position of ethnic cleansing of Muslims. While no Transnational Trumpists interact with this specific Tweet from @Netzdenunziant, @Netzdenunziant is a recurrent figure in the German corpus of Tweets and produces other Tweets that focus on topics which resonate particularly with the Transnational Trumpists, specifically conspiracies related to COVID-19.

In concluding this section, I draw attention to a final theme that emerged from coding user biographies—not a new user type but a symbol that appears, for example, in the user biography of @AdAGer365 who re-Tweeted @Netzdenunziant’s Tweet about the Mosque in Duisburg. This is the Maltese Cross Emoji. @AdAGer365’s biography states; “[Maltese Cross] Good old Germany [Maltese Cross]” (AdAGer365 2020). The Maltese cross paired with the German flag Emoji was a frequent occurrence. The symbol of the Maltese Cross is an Emoji in Unicode, which is the “computing industry standard for the consistent encoding, representation, and handling of text expressed in most of the world's writing systems” (Aliprand 2000). Emojis, or Emoticons, are a type of Unicode block code containing Emoticons or Emojis, and most Emojis reference benign symbols of animals, faces, hearts, or flags. However, there are more obscure Emojis such as the “Maltese Cross” Emoji, number U+2720 in Unicode script (“Unicode Character ‘[Maltese Cross]’ (U+2720)” 2018). This Emoji is a crucial “trace” in recontextualizing the identifications and political affiliations of far-right Twitter users (Crosset, Tanner, and Campana 2018). Examining the context of this Emoji, while it is officially classified as a Maltese Cross within Unicode, it is analogous in form to the Iron Cross, a symbol used in 19<sup>th</sup> century German military medals that was also utilized during the Third Reich (Kulish 2008). Today the Maltese cross Emoji has been classified as a white nationalist symbol in American digital contexts (ADL 2021). By using the Maltese Cross Emoji, German Twitter users re-



approximate the German Iron cross, and emphasize a nostalgia for Nazi-era Germany— “Good old Germany.”

In this way, a closer examination of user biographies reveals not only a recycling of imagery and memes in the far-right, but a contemporary re-appropriation of imagery and political phrases, such as #MAGA or the Iron Cross, which signal the emergence of a form of far-right transnational politics that is rooted primarily in a fetishization and nostalgia for an idealized period of white American racial and ethnic German supremacy. All these German user types ultimately emphasize their support of an ethnicized form of German nationalism, and while they do not demonstrate a linear path toward radicalization as the American users do, the diversity of user-types suggests that among these users, Islamophobia is a shared political grammar.

The similarity in language and emphasis on a shared ethnically, religiously pure German, Christian homeland or *Heimat* unites German users across various positions and identity categories and suggests that for far-right parties and communities in Germany, Islamophobia is a core ideological and cultural issue that is tied to other themes of Christianity, social conservatism, anti-abortion sentiment, and gender expression. In this sense then, what the user taxonomy in Germany reveals is the entrenchment of Islamophobic political discourse that unites a series of Germans from neighborhood moms, to “Make Germany Great Again” folks, to AfD supporters. Additionally, interconnections between German and American Twitter users who identify with and amplify violent conspiracy theories such as the Q Anon conspiracy theory demonstrates that far-right linkages between Germany and the United States extend beyond formal far-right political social movements and organizations to more fragmented, digitally-based conspiratorial communities (Hafez 2014, 497).

*Conclusion: Transnationalizing and Categorizing Far-Right Users*

In this chapter I have discussed, analyzed, and categorized dominant user-types engaged in far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities on Twitter that emerged from a close reading and coding of users from an American and German corpus of Tweets that tracked the hashtags #Islamization and #Islamisierung hashtags respectively. Drawing from the field of SNA, I examined Twitter profiles of users to analyze the way in which users articulated a “networked” self (Papacharissi 2011, 309), thereby revealing key identity markers of users engaged within these digital spaces to illuminate patterns and similarities. In analyzing and documenting the way in which these users presented their “networked” selves I identified emergent ideological trends that united these seemingly disparate users together—primarily a support for socially conservative politics, traditional gender roles, MAGA-style politics, and violent conspiracy theories.

Adopting the method of a “trace” based approach from Valentine Crossett, Samuel Tanner, and Aurélie Campana to analyze user profiles and thereby illuminate both the themes that constituted far-right propaganda and hate-speech as well as the type of individuals these topics resonate with, I have documented a taxonomy of American and Germany Twitter users that fall into a total of eight categories; White Supremacist Nationalists, MAGA Devotees, Neighborly Racists, Far-Right Hindu Nationalists, and Heimat Enthusiasts, Transnational Trumpists, Neighborly German Racists, and Alleged Anti-Totalitarians, thereby building off of the work of Imran Awan, who has researched and articulated taxonomies of Islamophobic user-types on Twitter and Facebook (2016a; 2016b). By engaging in taxonomical classification as guided by feminist grounded theory focused on German and American classifications, I have

provided a new dimension of classification that is transnational and attuned particularly to issues of gender and everyday Twitter communication.

In examining and curating a taxonomy of users, I have documented the mainstreaming of Islamophobic hate-speech among users who do not express explicit political affiliations with German and American far-right groups in their biographies, a finding that substantiates existing literature on the mainstreaming of Islamophobic hate speech in public, political online discourse on social media platforms, thereby suggesting that everyday users rather than formal political parties and politicians remain a key public among which this process of discursive “mainstreaming” occurs (Mondon and Winter 2017; Oboler 2016).

I have also outlined how both American and German Twitter users engaged in far-right digitally networked communities emphasize particular racial and ethnic possessive claims to an American and German homeland respectively and cast Muslims and Islam as culturally, religiously, and racially “Othered.” I have also documented the emerging phenomenon of a transnationalization of MAGA style politics, of which Islamophobic sentiment is a key facet. As such, we see that nationalistic politics, just like global forms of Islamophobic political rhetoric, may be re-fashioned and adapted to local contexts (Leidig 2019). Finally, I have also discussed the critical linkages between socially conservative identifications related to religious affiliation and traditional gender roles that correlate to positions of anti-feminism, anti-LGBTQIA+, and anti-Muslim sentiment.

Ultimately, I have argued that a study of actors engaged within Islamophobic far-right digitally networked communities reveals an epistemic fetishization of an idealized, nostalgic form of a white racial and ethnic German past defined by racial homogeneity and gender traditionalism, of which Muslims as citizens and immigrants are a great disrupter. This is the

fundamental theme that unites both German and American users of all political persuasions and user types—a desire to return to an imagined white or ethnically pure racial past. This form of racialized nostalgia is not merely discursively exclusionary—it is explicitly connected to the contemporary political affiliations of users to violent conspiracy groups such as Q Anon and the MAGA movements that may seek to make the “past” a reality through political activity and political violence.

Conspiratorial belief in the historic and on-going loss of an imagined white American or ethnic German homeland ultimately motivates and links together Islamophobic digital discourse with a belief in global forms of conspiracy that purport a linkage between Muslims, Feminists, Communists, “Cultural Marxists,” Jews, Democrats, “Greens,” and other cosmopolitan elites as allied in threatening the racial and ethnic homogeneity of the nation through the potential threat to the family unit—specifically sexualized threats against white American and ethnic German women and sexualized or conversion threats against children. I discuss the theme of conspiracy in greater detail as a fundamental pathway one can follow when reading the map of far-right digitally networked communities I have curated in Chapter IV and Chapter V.

In conclusion, the mainstreaming and transnationalization of Islamophobia among Twitter users in Germany, the United States, and India, and the ubiquity of this type of hate-speech of Muslims threatening an American, German, or Indian “way of life” may lay the ideological ground-work for more localized forms of offline violence targeting Muslim communities, a symbiotic dynamic Imran Awan and Irene Zempi have discussed (2017). I emphasize this point by drawing attention the blurring of boundaries between “offline” and “online” political communication and activism, and I argue that the growth of Islamophobic online discourse among far-right Twitter users thus facilitates the articulation of affective,

digitally networked communities that may increasingly shift into grounded forms of far-right political activity or violence. As was made clear in the 2021 Capitol Insurrection in the United States, the activities and online discourse of far-right groups on various social media platforms—even seemingly “online” movements such as Q Anon—may be tied to material instances of extraordinary, racialized violence.

The next chapter maps actors within far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities shifting from a granular analysis of these users to a visualization of entire networks through the production of twelve Name Network visualizations of users who used the hashtags #Islamization and #Islamisierung. This next chapter analyzes both the constellation of communities within the broader network as well as prominent actors or Twitter users within the community and reveals new contours to these digitally networked communities focusing on origins of (mis)information and the relationship between Islamophobia and the Global North and South.

## CHAPTER IV. MAPPING GERMAN AND AMERICAN FAR-RIGHT ISLAMOPHOBIC DIGITALLY NETWORKED COMMUNITIES

### *Introduction*

In this chapter I analyze twelve Name Network graphs produced from data scrapings of the hashtags #Islamization and #Islamisierung over the course of six months to visualize the contours of German and American far-right digitally networked Twitter communities. Following a close reading, coding, and taxonomical classification of user-types in Chapter III that focused on a granular analysis of user biographies and conservations, this chapter shifts from a “trace-based” methodological approach to a social network analysis (SNA) of communities through visualizations to identify network structures and to track how information is transmitted across communities (Crosset, Tanner, and Campana 2018).

To produce these visualizations, I select a data scrape that contains the highest number of Tweets from each month of March, April, May, June, July, and August of both the German and American corpuses of Tweets. In doing so, I produce visualizations to reveal the contours of community networks and examine how information is circulated by identifying connections between users in the networks, and to identify the influence of actors—users—within these far-right digitally networked communities. As such, this chapter is devoted to understanding how network actors are connected, how these Islamophobic far-right digital publics are structured, and how information moves within these communities. Furthermore, in this chapter I employ statistical measures to identify sub-communities within the larger network and to measure the influence of actors within the network.

Drawing upon the insights of Dhiraj Murthy who has articulated the necessity for a mixed-methods grounded theory approach to analyzing Twitter communication I combine a

close-reading of Tweets with SNA visualization and analysis (Murthy 2017). Murthy has argued that researchers studying Twitter should not aim to simply “code individual tweets, but to view tweets as part of a larger tweet ‘context’...it is important to also understand the user who tweeted as well as the larger contexts they sit within” (2017, 564). Following a feminist grounded theory methodology, I combine the coding of individual Tweets and user biographies with SNA visualization to provide this larger communicative context these users exist within.

To visualize networked Twitter communities, I take scraped data from Netlytic in the form of GraphML files and import it into the open-source data visualization software program, Gephi. By combining different methods—of close textual reading and SNA—I seek to address a critique of normative SNA, that network visualization and analysis is too descriptive and lacks the implementation of a critical analytical lens (Shahin and Dai 2019, 20). Saif Shahin and Zehui Dai have argued that researchers seeking to integrate critical approaches into SNA must engage in comparative approaches to data analysis to “build theory” instead of simply describing digitally mediated realities (2019, 20), a perspective Murthy has endorsed as a key component of a mixed-methods grounded theory approach as building theory through analysis of Twitter communication (2017, 572).

As such, this dissertation does not simply describe and analyze far-right Islamophobic Twitter conversations, as is undertaken in Chapter V, or classify users that make up these networks, as discussed previously in Chapter III, but rather this work documents and conceptualizes how information circulates within these digitally networked communities. If as Shephard et al. argue, we need to engage in “concrete action for intervening in the increasingly unsafe spaces of social media” (2015, 8), then a key part of addressing unsafe spaces and hate-speech is identifying how hate-speech circulates among these networks thus allowing us to

identify possible concrete platform-level policies including content moderation and the articulation of new user policies.

However, as I will argue in this chapter, the networks of transmission documented via SNA visualizations in this dissertation suggest that Islamophobic hate-speech cannot simply be addressed by existent moderation policies and instead reveals a more fundamental and epistemic crisis of racialized nationalist ideology that is both institutionalized and organic—not the result of a series of discrete, legible, identifiable “bad actors” on Twitter. Twitter is merely the site or landscape where far-right networks manifest, these far-right political ideologies espoused by users simply become visible through the affordances of the platform. As such, as I discuss, content moderation may only address the symptom of far-right violent Islamophobic speech but not the underlying ideological pathology of these beliefs in Germany and the United States.

In the Introduction, I outlined the way in which I conceptualized far-right Twitter networks as types of “publics” that came into being through the circulation of texts (Warner 2002b), here as Tweets. In this chapter, I extend this focus on publics, uniting Warner’s theoretical approach with emerging critical SNA perspectives that situate Twitter communities as forms of discursive, political, and at times national, publics (Shahin and Dai 2019; Shahin 2020; Zheng and Shahin 2018). I build upon the work of scholars who have specifically used the tool Gephi to study and visualize Twitter communities such as Jean Burgess and Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández who have argued that digitally networked communities on social media platforms such as Twitter may be understood as publics or “emergent socio-political assemblages with shared or interlocking concerns who know themselves as, and act as, publics through media and communication” (2016, 80). In the case of this dissertation, these publics emerge through the



platform Twitter and the communication practice of micro-blogging or Tweeting (Zhao and Rosson 2009).

The way in which users become a temporary community is through the shared engagement with the hashtags #Islamization or #Islamisierung. Axel Bruns and Jean Burgess have identified this practice of hashtagging on Twitter as a mechanism within the platform that allows users to curate and create “ad hoc” publics (2011, 2). Hashtags “bundle” together Tweets on a unified theme or topic and allow users to engage directly with each other (Bruns and Burgess 2011, 5). However, as I noted earlier in Chapter II, I emphasize that digitally networked communities are not manifestations of direct coordination or planning between users or necessarily indicative of offline far-right coalitions. The network visualizations I produce of these far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities do visualize linkages made visible by shared engagement with the comparative hashtags of #Islamization and or #Islamisierung, but the linkages are only able to represent these digitally networked communities as snap-shots in time that illuminate a broader trend of racialization of Muslim communities on the Twitter platform by far-right users. Furthermore, what this chapter focuses on is not how users engage with a set of common themes, Chapter V details this form of analysis, but here I examine how the shared practice of hashtagging creates a network structure that places users in forms of temporary yet ideological significance discursive connection.

The question of who is connected to whom and how is not necessarily geographic, although this is a relevant question. Rather, these SNA visualizations illustrate how different network actors across an ideological spectrum are connected. I produce Name Network visualizations which are a specific form of SNA visualization which illustrates who mentions whom on Twitter, using the “@” mechanism to tag a user. As Anatoliy Gruzd and Caroline

Haythornthwaite describe, a Name Network “technique examines the content of the messages and connects one person to another if they mention, reply, or repost another person’s tweet” (2013, 5). As such, this type of network visualization visualizes who is connected to whom in the network—something not immediately visible through a close-reading of Tweets. When analyzing the scraped Twitter data identifying user biographies the influence and significance of other users is not necessarily apparent nor are the connections between users in the corpuses of Tweets immediately visible. Identifying these connections and information pathways requires looking at network structures through data visualization.

Gruzd and Haythornthwaite note that the “configuration of connections is all-important in social networks. These structures show how actors are connected over the whole network, and thus what paths and obstacles there are for contact, information, and resource flow” (2013, 3). As such, SNA analysis in the form of Name Networks visualizations is perfectly positioned as a method to allow one to identify how users are connected and thus how information travels through the networks between origin sources and amplifiers. Comparatively, in Chapter III I analyzed the content of information and the identities of users that revealed on a detailed, granular level the transnational linkages between Indian and Indian American far-right Hindu nationalists and far-right white American users and the Transatlantic MAGA-fication of German users. However, excavating these structural patterns is somewhat limited by the nature of close reading. Network visualizations will demonstrate how users are linked spatially within networks and reveal the most influential network actors, thereby illuminating not only the community’s structure but how it functions.

Stuart Palmer, in arguing for the utility of SNA notes that “[t]hese network data inherently created by social media tools represent the connections between participants as they

interact and, via network analysis, they can be made visible to reveal the previously elusive social processes at play, and to identify strategically important components and participants in the social network” (2016, 88). As such, SNA visualizes potentially elusive communicative process of these far-right digitally networked communities on Twitter. However, just as SNA provides a different dimension to community interaction, historically methods of data visualization are imbricated within (neo)colonialist, white-dominated, Western epistemologies and specifically within colonial projects (Friendly 2006). Data visualizations in their traditional formulation purport a “quality of objectivity” (Kennedy et al. 2016, 716). To address these positivistic assumptions of data visualizations I draw upon the work of Catherine D’Ignazio to produce feminist data visualizations by centralizing a series of key principles which I emphasize for this project specifically as considering context, embracing pluralism, and examining power and aspiring to empowerment (D’Ignazio 2015).

This manifests in my work as comparing data visualizations to scraped data to identify not only the structure of the community at a certain time, but what Tweets and conversation promoted those connections thereby considering context. Embracing pluralism is connected to producing comparative graphs from an American and German context. Finally, realizing the aim of examining power and aspiring to empowerment manifests as identifying origin sources for (mis)information and hate-speech to possibly identify mechanisms to mitigate these types of discourse. However, as I will argue in this chapter, addressing these trends of Islamophobic and other forms of hate-speech may not be solely addressed through platform moderation or user-policy tactics.

Ultimately, in examining political communities on Twitter and forms of political communication it is imperative to provide context, examine multiple vantage points, and

interrogate power which can be done when a “researcher...examine[s] the individual interactions they are seeing in the network in order to avoid misrepresenting the results” (Gruzd, Mai, and Kampen 2017, 525). What I emphasize in this chapter is that data visualizations are not “one-to-one descriptions” of reality (D’Ignazio 2019), however, as a form of feminist method SNA visualizations “as a method [can] identify connections between different entities” (Dame-Griff 2019, 235). Visualizing community actors in Name Network visualizations is merely the first step in this chapter to revealing how actors are connected, why they are connected, and how they exchange information.

With this situation of my application of SNA visualization in the context of feminist methodological approaches to data visualization provided, I shift to a discussion of the mechanics of my visualization production before moving into an analysis of the twelve graphs. Visualization as feminist method occurs in two ways, firstly by producing the graph according to selected specifications most appropriate for small to medium networks within the software Gephi, and secondly, by reading the visualization as a form of argument that reveals the knowledge production process (Klein 2014). In the case of this dissertation, this argument is that far-right digitally networked communities on Twitter are transnationalized communities with linkages extending across the Global North and Global South.

### *Crafting (Aesthetic) Graphs*

In producing the twelve graphs I use the Yifan-Hu Proportional lay-out to visualize the scraped data as a Name Network. The Yifan-Hu Proportional lay-out is a force-directed graph. Most fundamentally, a force-directed graph will “calculate the positions of each node by simulating an attractive force between each pair of linked nodes, as well as a repulsive force between the nodes” (Wu 2015). As such, force-directed graphs help us understand and identify

more clearly the connections between nodes in the network, in this case a node is represented by an individual Twitter user. Nodes or users that are less connected are pushed apart. Therefore, nodes that are visualized as close together in a data visualization have a higher degree of connection and engagement. Edges are lines which represent how individual nodes are connected.

The Yifan-Hu Proportional algorithmic lay-out was developed by scholar and data scientist Yifan Hu to optimize and increase the efficiency of force-directed graphs as large networks with numerous nodes can trigger long algorithmic run-times (Hu 2011; 2006). The Yifan-Hu Proportional lay-out algorithm is unique because it has a “better optimization of distances between nodes, with outer nodes and central nodes spaced appropriately” than the original Yifan-Hu lay-out (Cherven 2015, 76), this translates into a data visualization with a higher degree of legibility. The speed of the Yifan-Hu Proportional lay-out is best suited to small to medium networks (Cherven 2015, 96). Each imported GraphML file is up to 1000 Tweets, as such, the Yifan-Hu Proportional lay-out is best optimized among various force-directed lay-outs to visualize user connections for this project. Other scholars have utilized the Yifan-Hu Proportional lay-out to identify and analyze Twitter communities (Palmer 2016).

To create data visualizations, I use the open-source data visualization software Gephi which is a program designed to run graph and network analysis. Gephi CTO Mathieu Bastian and his collaborators note that Gephi is designed to allow users to engage in both “interactive exploration and interpretation of networks” and to provide “access to network data...for spatializing, filtering, navigating, manipulating and clustering” of networks (Bastian, Heymann, and Jacomy 2009, 361). As such, Gephi as a software supports the importation of scraped Twitter data from Netlytic which collections initial impressions of Twitter networks and basic

connections. Exporting scraped data from Netlytic in the form of an initial Name Network as a GraphML file and uploading the file to Gephi allows a user to engage in more sophisticated exploration, interpretation, and manipulation of the imported network.

I emphasize here that manipulation does not mean a fundamental altering of the visualization, and as Klein and D'Ignazio have argued, data visualizations even in their most "objective" presentations are fundamentally subjective, manipulated objects (D'Ignazio 2015; Klein 2014). Manipulation in this case means employing different statistical measures to interpret the graph, producing graphs with particular algorithmic lay-outs, sizing nodes, and identifying sub-communities by color to increase the legibility of the visualization in line with this dissertation's particular research questions. Yifan Hu has argued that the "usefulness of...visual representation is dependent on whether the drawing is aesthetic" (2011, 1), and while aesthetics are naturally subjective, I attempt to make aesthetic and affective data visualizations while also "reduce[ing] the complexity of the visual representation, using abstraction and compression techniques" to improve legibility for the viewer (Hu and Shi 2015, 115). As such, I conceptualize various graphical manipulations of these twelve data visualizations as a means to reveal different dimensions to the graphs as texts. Applying a statistical measure or algorithmic lay-out is similar to engaging in a Marxist or Postcolonial reading of a text to identify different themes and connections. While the text or data itself has not changed, through the different application of various theoretical apparatuses or statistical measures different parts of the text become visible to the researcher.

The measures I use to produce and analyze the twelve graphs after applying the Yifan-Hu Proportional lay-out include applying different measures to the network built to identify the number of communities within a network and the influence and prestige of various network

actors in producing and disseminating information. After applying the Yifan-Hu Proportional lay-out, I adjusted the sizes of the nodes, or Twitter users, based on degree. The larger the degree of a node the more connections it has with other users, as such larger nodes are more connected than smaller nodes. Measuring nodes by degree essentially measures the influence of users within the network. I then partition the nodes according to their modularity class; partitioning nodes means splitting the nodes into various communities based on their modularity class. In the graphs each modularity class is assigned a different color. Modularity class as a measure reveals to what extent clusters of connected users represented distinct subcommunities within the larger network (Gruzd, Mai, and Kampen 2017, 524).

The modularity class of the network is an important measure in the context of this work because it illustrates how single network or hashtag publics are in fact composed of multiple smaller publics or subcommunities. Only through producing a SNA visualization is it possible to identify the multi-scalar dimensions to these communities. By partitioning nodes based on modularity class and coloring each group, I identify the possibility of multiple communities within a single network. In addition to partitioning nodes via modularity class, I run statistical measures on the network's modularity—a higher value, closer to 1, means more division between communities, and a lower value means the network is more tightly clustered around key actors.

In addition to the measure of modularity, I run statistical measures on the density of the network, or how close actors are to one another within the network (Gruzd, Mai, and Kampen 2017, 524). Graphs with a density closer to 1 are considered denser. Density measures how tightly interconnected a network structure is. Therefore, if a graph has a lower density it is likely because most network actors are only connecting within their subcommunities, not across the

entire graph structure. The final statistical measure that is relevant to this chapter is identifying the in-degree and out-degree of network actors. In-degree measures how much a node is connected to; the higher a node's in-degree measure the more popular or prestigious this network actor is. Conversely, out-degree measures how much a node connects to other actors, an actor with a high out-degree suggests this user has a great awareness of other users and is a large promoter or disseminator of information within the network (Gruzd, Paulin, and Haythornthwaite 2016, 61).

As such, tracking the in-degree and out-degree measure of particular nodes within the network may reveal what type of network actors are most influential in Islamophobic digitally networked communities, which users are the origin sources of Islamophobic hate-speech, and what types of users spread or share this type of discourse. By combining these algorithmic and statistical affordances of Gephi, visualizing a Name Network graph with the force-directed Yifan-Hu Proportional lay-out, sizing nodes by degree, partitioning by modularity class, and running statistical measures including density, modularity, and in-degree and out-degree we are able to visualize more clearly the contours of these Islamophobic digitally networked publics and to trace the pathways and processes for how hate-speech and (mis)information is circulated by users.

The following three sections include *Early Spring Graphs*, *Late-Spring Early Summer Graphs*, and *Late Summer Graphs* featuring two graphs per month of March and April, May and June, July and August from the German and American corpuses of Tweets. While I select a data scape from the same month for the German and American corpuses of Tweets they are not on the same day. Different days provoke different levels of conversation among German and American users, as such, each month for both the German and American corpuses of Tweets the day with



the most conversation is selected. In the subsequent sections I present the graphs, describe and analyze my findings, and finally, I outline a conclusion including major themes and patterns that connect the graphs.

*Early Spring Graphs*

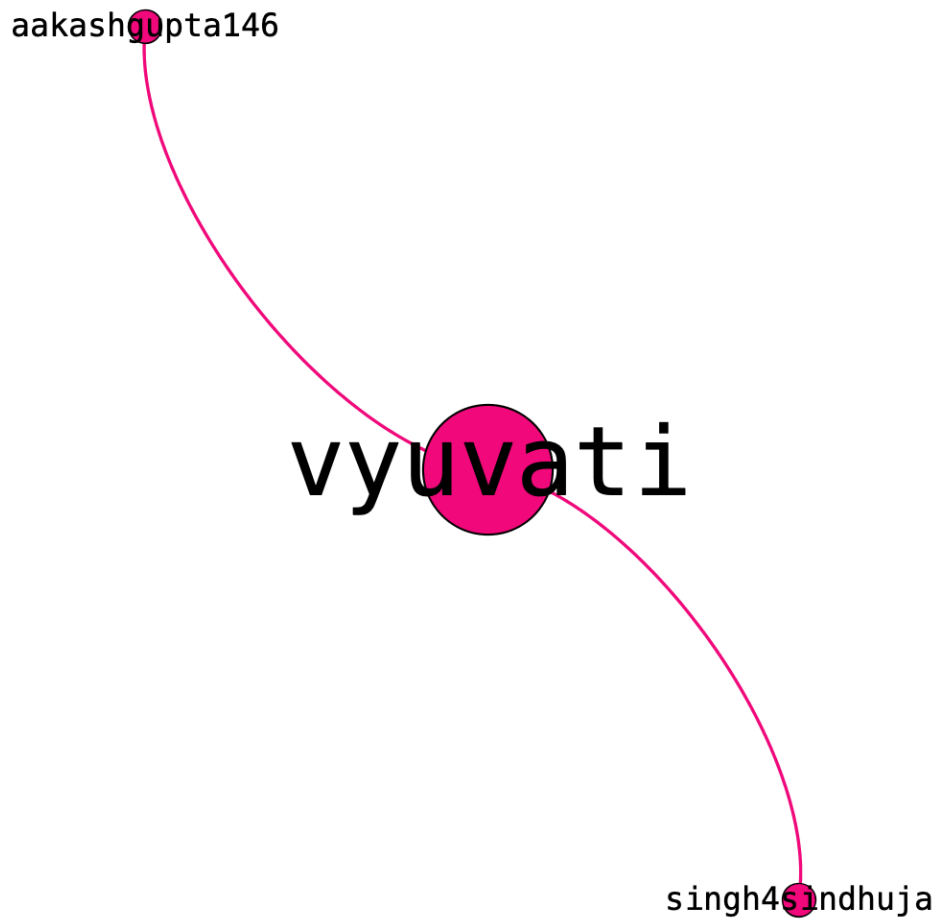


Figure 1. Graph A USA March 25, 2020.

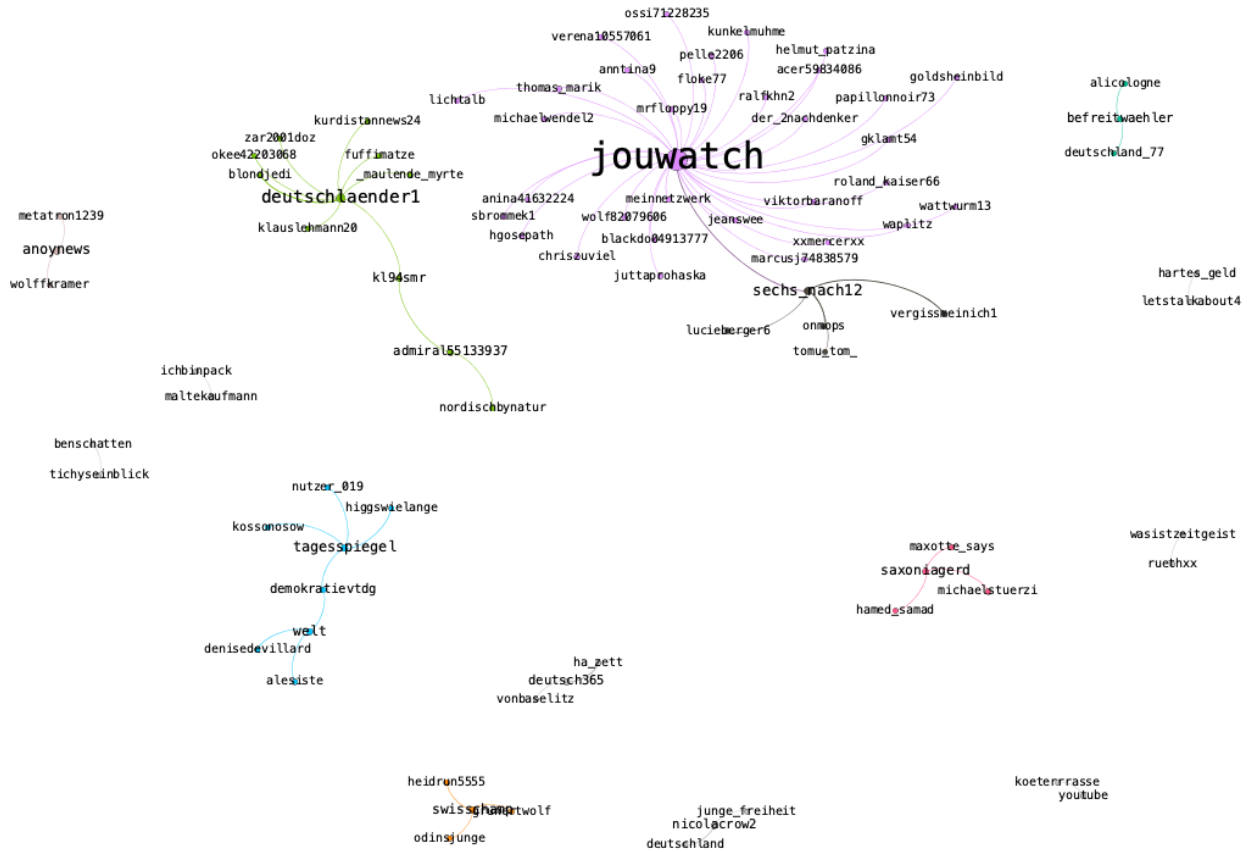


Figure 2. Graph B Germany March 27, 2020.

Before detailing the specifics of Figures 1 and 2 I note there that while in the case of the German graphs the users and broader network structures adhere closely to a digital community of German Twitter users, in the case of the scraped American data a series of transnational global connections emerged featuring users from Nigeria and India. While the initial focus of these data

scrapes was to identify the way in which German and American far-right Twitter users engaged in Islamophobic discourse, Nigerian and Indian users emerged as key actors within these network structures and merit attention and analysis as they illustrate the transnationalization of far-right Islamophobic discourse and key linkages between the white and Indian American far-right community and far-right Indian Hindu nationalists. In adopting a feminist grounded theory framework, I have thus necessarily broadened my initial lens to consider and articulate these linkages between the United States, Nigeria, and India that emerged from the visualization of the scraped data (Charmaz and Belgrave 2019)

The first graphs I present are labeled Graph A and Graph B, presented above. The German graph, Graph B, is from a scrape on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 which included a total of 261 Tweets. Graph A depicts the American from March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 which included a much smaller scrape of 18 Tweets. I begin by discussing Graph A, which presents a miniature network of three network actors with a density of 0.333, matching up to the three users, and only one community as per the modularity measure. @VYuvati stands at the center connecting the other users, @aakashgupta146 and @Singh4Sindhuja both of which are now currently suspended or have been deleted by the user. However, in the scraped data, @VYuvati's information has been preserved with a reported location "Sanatan Hindu Rashtra" (VYuvati 2020a), which as discussed earlier in Chapter III is a violent, far-right Hindu nationalist organization (Express News Service 2019).

Looking at the conversation that connects @VYuvati with an out-degree of 2, @Singh4Sindhuja, and @aakashgupta146 the preserved Tweet from @VYuvati states "@Singh4Sindhuja @aakashgupta146 India needs Hinduised dictatorship very badly or we may lose this nation. Democracy and Secularism are fertilizers for #Islamization and annihilation of

peaceful nation” (VYuvati 2020b). While this is merely a miniature network, looking at the content of the Tweet connecting these network actors we see a clear continuity in the identification of the Far-Right Hindu-Nationalist type. Furthermore, in visualizing this small network it is clear that Indian users are engaging with the hashtag, #Islamization, to engage a nationalist political conversation on Twitter. In this initial visualization and identification context, Graph A sets the standard for future visualizations of networks from the American corpus of Tweets as manifesting a strong global and transnational dimension of Islamophobic political discourse on Twitter. These trends will become apparent in future visualizations that are discussed in further sections.

Shifting to a discussion of Graph B from the German corpus of Tweets, this visualization represents a much larger network than Graph A. This graph shows a high degree of modularity, 0.762, which means the subcommunities show a greater degree of division, users are not all connected to one another but rather more highly networked within different groups. Examining the number of communities ensconced within the network there are 15 distinct communities within the structure. Looking at the lay-out of the graph, despite the fact that we see multiple sub-clusters, there is one larger community centered around the biggest node: @jouwatch, with the top in-degree measurement of 33 as the most influential node in the network. @jouwatch is the account for the far-right, German news outlet *Journalistenwatch*, which translates to Journalist Watch (Journalistenwatch 2012). The user with the next highest in-degree of 4 is the account @Tagesspiegel, the account for a German mainstream, legacy news publication the *Daily Mirror* based in Berlin (Tagesspiegel 1945).

What I draw attention to here in this visualization is the influence and centrality of far-right digital news outlets such as @jouwatch within this Islamophobic digitally networked

political community. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Far-Right Hindu Nationalist user types appear as major origin sources and connective accounts in the context of American and Indian Islamophobic hate-speech, but these accounts are primarily attached to individual users and influencers with no attachment or connection to a news organization—however dubious the organizations may be. Within the context of the German corpus of Tweets, the origin source and most influential user accounts were not unaffiliated individuals, but rather institutionalized accounts, even if the institutions are themselves highly biased, conspiratorial, and untraditional news organizations such as *Journalistenwatch*. This difference, made visible through network visualizations, suggests that the process by which Islamophobic discourse is circulated across American, Indian, and German digitally networked publics is different in Germany in so far as formal news institutions drive the conversation within this national Twitter public.

@jouwatch is at the center of Graph B but re-appears as a key network actor in other visualizations, so a more detailed examination of the news outlet is necessary. *Journalistenwatch* was founded in 2011 and is financially connected to an American Islamophobic conservative think-tank, the Middle East Forum, which has been described by the Georgetown University Bridge Initiative, a multi-year research project on Islamophobia, as a “right-wing anti-Islam think tank that spreads misinformation, creates ‘watchlists’ targeting academics, and advocates hawkish foreign policy” (Bridge Initiative Team 2018). As recently as 2016, the Middle East Forum listed *Journalistenwatch* as one of its supported projects (Schmidt 2017). Clearly, from a financial perspective Transatlantic, far-right connections between Germany and the United States emerge with Islamophobia as the major locus. Nico Schmidt, a reporter for the mainstream German newspaper *Die Zeit*, in an investigative report on *Journalistenwatch* discussing these financial connections emphasized the emergence of a transnational German-American *Neue*

*Recht* or New Right. In categorizing *Journalistenwatch*, Schmidt notes that the “*Gewöhnlich schwankt der Tenor der Texte zwischen Islamkritik und kuscheligem AfD-Rechtspopulismus*” (2017), or that the “tenor of texts varies between criticism of Islam and cozy, AfD right-wing populism.”

In a study on the relation between far-right news outlets, social media platforms, and far-right transnational politics in Western democracies, Annette Heft, Eva Mayerhöffer, Susanne Reinhardt, and Curd Knüpfer note that in the German case *Journalistenwatch* is a key player on Twitter for both German and American far-right audiences (Heft et al. 2020a; Heft et al. 2020b). Further identifying the prominence and influence of far-right news outlets, Heft et al. note that *Journalistenwatch*, while not the most connected or prestigious outlet, stands out for its constant production of Tweets and its centralized position within far-right Twitter networks (Heft et al. 2020b; 2020a). As such, the data visualizations produced in this chapter concur with Heft et al.’s work and emphasize that within the specific context of Islamophobic digitally networked publics on Twitter *Journalistenwatch* is the major player among German Twitter users, as demonstrated by its in-degree measure and centrality within the larger subcommunity on the network. As such, these initial visualizations of Graph A and Graph B, of both the German and American networks, set up a series of initial trends and patterns—of the transnational dimensions of Islamophobic discourse and the influence of far-right German news outlets—that continue in additional visualizations.

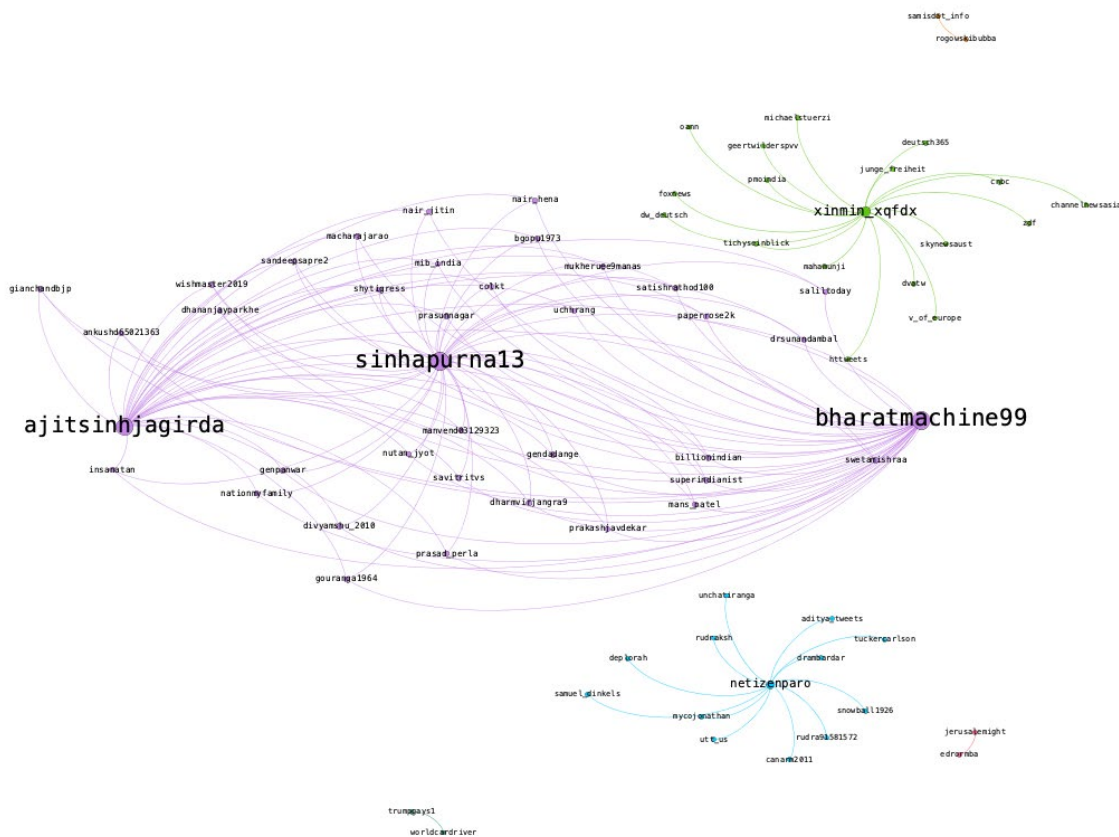


Figure 3. Graph C USA April 7, 2020.

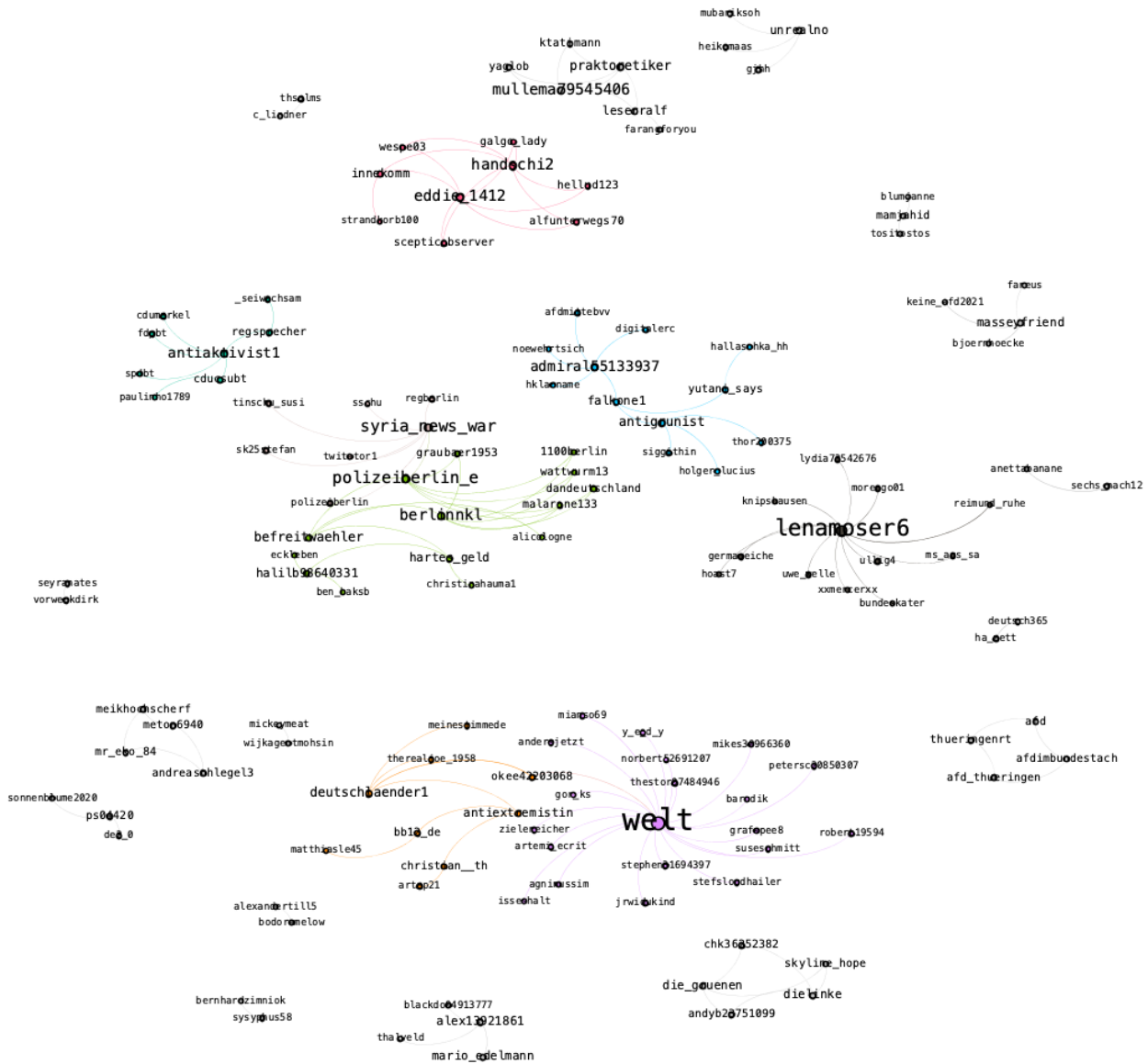


Figure 4. Graph D Germany April 7, 2020.

Moving to the next visualizations, we have Graph C and Graph D from the month of April. Graph C visualizes the American data scrape for April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020 which includes a relatively small sum of 47 Tweets but shows a much more robust graph and a centralized network. What is immediately apparent is that the three biggest nodes are @AjitsinhJagirda, @sinhapurna13, and @BHARATMACHINE99, which upon further investigation into the profile



descriptions are all Indian and Indian American accounts (BHARATMACHINE99 2020; Jagirdar 2013; Ms. Purna/Otun 2014). The largest in-degree measure is 13 for @sinhapurna13, who stands at the center of graph. In this visualization, the influence of Indian and Indian American Twitter users is clear. There are a total of six communities within this graph with a modularity of 0.383, which suggests a more connected network structure on some level, and a density of 0.026 indicating that they graph is more fragmented and dispersed. The peripheral placing of some communities visualizes this type of communicative fragmentation—these users are only making connections within their subcommunities.

The central node of one of these peripheral communities is @NetizenParo with an out-degree of 12, a user discussed in great detail in Chapter III as a key producer of far-right Islamophobic hate-speech and a user representative of the Far-right Hindu Nationalist User type. Trends from Chapter III, of the connection between Far-Right Hindu Nationalist users to other far-right American users are made visible here. For example, we see that @NetizenParo is connected to the user @DeploraH, a play on the word “deplorable” which Hillary Clinton used to refer to Trump supporters that Trump supporters have since embraced (Reilly 2016). @DeploraH, in her biography, clearly falls into the category of MAGA Devotee, with her biography description stating “Jewish Conservative & Patriot for Liberty and Freedom YouTube: <http://bit.ly/2RiqkpW#ScrewIslam#ScrewCommunism#MAGA>” (LibertyAndFreedomWillPrevail 2019).

This visualization ultimately represents two important patterns in Islamophobic discourse as manifested in the American corpus of Tweets: firstly, that Indians engage with the hashtag #Islamization as a means to racialize the presence of Muslim communities in India, and secondly, that Indian Americans such as @NetizenParo serve as conversational centers for

Islamophobic discourse among other white far-right American users. As such, these visualizations demonstrate the emerging transnational, far-right connections between India and the United States that are developed through a shared grammar of Islamophobic language. While scholars have documented the emergence of European-American Islamophobic far-right movements and digital communities (Caian and Kröll 2015; Froio and Ganesh 2018; Heft et al. 2020b), Indian American far-right connections is a still evolving area of search (Leidig 2019, 79).

A final note on this graph is the appearance of an account in the periphery of @Trumpgays1. While this community is tangential to the more established communities within the network centered around @NetizenParo and @sinhapurna13 for example, I draw attention to it here because it represents a similarity between European and American Islamophobic far-right discourse—the instrumentalization of LGBTQIA+ rhetoric among some far-right groups and activists who emphasize their opposition to Islam because they “ostensibly [support a] liberal defense of gender equality, gay rights, and freedom of speech” (Brubaker 2017, 1193). Caterina Froio and Bharath Ganesh have noted this trend among European far-right political parties who incorporate “liberal and civic characteristics of national identity such as women’s rights, animal well-being and halal slaughter, and LGBTQ rights to paradoxically present the initiator on the far right as the only, ‘authentic’, defender of the nation’s reputation of tolerance” (2018, 528). While this community is peripheral the larger network, the simple of appearance of the handle @Trumpgays1 illustrates that a similar emerging formulation of American far-right discourse that emphasizes its protection of modern, liberal Western society against a supposedly regressive, Muslim community. As such, this brief example simply demonstrates the flexibility and mutability of far-right digital discourse in incorporating a variety of groups—from

neighborhood moms and dads to white supremacists to the queer community—under a shared banner of Islamophobic discourse.

Transitioning to a discussion of Graph D which represents a visualization of German data from April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020 with a total of 1,000 Tweets we identify the continuation of patterns present in earlier graphs. Graph D has a very low density of 0.007 which suggests that the larger network itself is diffuse and fragmented, each community is siloed into their own conversational clusters. There are 24 communities in total within this network with a modularity of 0.911. The top in-degree measures feature users including @welt, a mainstream German news organization with an in-degree of 20 (WELT 2007), @LenaMoser6 with an in-degree of 12, an account that has since been suspended but features a biography that indicates this users is a Transnational Trumpist and Q Anon supporter; “*Patrioten aller Länder vereinigt EUCH! Pro Trump, Pro Orban, Pro Salvini, [laughing crying face] WWG1WGA, InGodWeTrust, DrainTheSwamp! GodBlessGermany! POTUSthankYou! Trump2020 [German flag]*” (LenaMoser6 2020). This translates to, “Patriots from all lands unite yourself!”

The Tweet from @LenaMoser6 is no longer available due to suspension or deletion but what attracted significant attention was users re-Tweeting @Reimund\_Ruhe’s Tweet which mentioned @LenaMoser6; “*@LenaMoser6 Leider, Leider, - wie lange noch ? Mit jedem Tag mehr #Merkel-Regime wird Deutschland weiter beschädigt [swearing face] #Massenmigration #Umvolkung #Islamisierung #Deindustrialisierung Abschaffung der #Demokratie und #Meinungsfreiheit ! #MerkelMussWeg wird tägl. WICHTIGER #Steinmeier auch!*” (Reimund\_Ruhe 2021), which translates to “Sadly, sadly – how much longer? With every day more of the Merkel regime, will Germany be damaged. Mass migration, population, Islamization, deindustrialization, abolition of democracy and freedom of opinion. Merkel’s gotta

go is more important with everyday! Steinmeir also!” Here, Steinmeir refers to German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Der Bundespräsident 2021). Without the added context of @LenaMoser6’s Tweet, we may say that her high level of influence within the degree represents trends of intense governmental critique of Merkel, likely related to Merkel’s previous policy decisions to allow the entrance of asylum seekers into Germany. This Tweet demonstrating the connection to @LenaMoser6 illustrates a partial thread of the connection between users—we see an association made by far-right German users between immigration, deindustrialization, and supposed democratic and demographic decline, themes that are constitutive in American far-right discourse that link together immigration with globalization and a supposed loss of American manufacturing jobs. Because of @LenaMoser6’s suspension, however, we can only intuit her perspective and her position within the conversation. As such, this demonstrates the limitation and ephemeral nature of far-right Twitter discourse and the difficulty in the reconstruction of these spaces even through methods of SNA visualization.

The third and final user of note with an in-degree 7 is @PolizeiBerlin\_E, which is the official Twitter account for the German Berlin Police Department (Polizei Berlin Einsatz 2014). These top three in-degree users represent different types of users; an institutional news organization, a far-right conspiracy theorist, and a governmental agency, the Berlin Police. Digging into the context behind these users, a more unified narrative of this visualization emerges which relates to the presence of mosques in Germany and the safety of worship practices during COVID-19. I further discuss these themes in Chapter V but provide a condensed outline of these dynamics as they pertain to this visualization which demonstrates more fundamentally how information flows in German Islamophobic digitally networked publics from

news organizations to far-right users back then to institutional actors in the form of government agencies, departments, or political parties.

The focus on @welt in this graph is related to the publication of a story from @welt titled “*Wenn der Muezzin „Bleibt zu Hause!“ ruft*” or “When the Muezzin calls out ‘Stay home!’” (WELT 2020). The story focuses on the threat of COVID-19 spread through religious gatherings of all types and discusses how a ban on congregating for religious purposes has strained the communal aspects of religious communities. @welt appeared as such an influential network actor because of this story, users were connecting back to @welt because it was the origin source of the news article. Far-right users then picked up on the story titling of “Muezzin,” emphasizing that Muslim communities in particular contributed to COVID-19 spread because of traditional practices of communal prayer.

Connecting directly to this story within the same data scrape, @PolizeiBerlin\_E Tweeted, “*Bei Gebetsrufen versammelten sich heute vor einer Moschee in #Neukölln ca. 300 Personen. Dem Imam, dem OA @BerlinNkl & unseren Kolleg. gelang es nur zum Teil, die Anwesenden zum Abstandhalten zu bewegen. Das Gebet wurde im Einvernehmen mit dem Imam vorzeitig beendet. #covid19*”, which translates to “Today about 300 people gathered in before the New Cologne Mosque. The Imam, the OA, @BerlinNkl, and our colleagues only partially were able to get those present to keep their distance. An agreement with the Imam was reached to end the prayer early #covid19” (Polizei Berlin Einsatz 2020). As I further explicate upon in Chapter V, the spread of COVID-19 in Germany and supposed Muslim gatherings became a key topic of conversation. What these top three in-degree users illustrate here is that perfectly legitimate news stories and events—the issue of religious communities during the pandemic and a potential mass gathering in the New Cologne neighborhood—become fodder for far-right users to frame the

stories using the #Islamisierung hashtag. This will be a recurring dynamic within the German graphs, of the re-appropriation of news stories by far-right users to advance Islamophobic framing that elides an obvious breach of Twitter's terms of service regarding hate-speech, harassment, or incitement of violence. Additionally, we see that transnationalized users like @LenaMoser6 command attention and influence with the network structure, suggesting a symbiosis between far-right German political beliefs, the MAGA movement, and conspiracy theories.

Finally, considering a recurrent user in the graph, we see the re-appearance of @Deutschlaender1 which also appeared in the last graph who is visible as the center of a mini community. Despite the peripheral nature of @Deutschlaender1 within the overall network structure, this user boasts the second highest out-degree of 5 which suggests it is driving the spread of (mis)information even though it appears peripheral on the graph. @Deutschlaender1 makes its aim explicitly clear in its user-biography where it describes itself as "*Stimme des Volkes / Gegen Überfremdung*" or "Voice of the people / against over-foreignization" (Deutschländer 2014).

Ultimately, the key take-away from this particular graph is that it demonstrates the influence of sub-communities within German Islamophobic digitally networked communities—this is to say that Islamophobic hate-speech in Germany is diffuse and fragmented among a variety of different communities on Twitter rather than focused around key network actors. The scattered nature of this digitally networked community demonstrates both the ubiquity of Islamophobic hate-speech among German users and illustrates the challenges of content moderation. If (mis)information and hate-speech are centered around certain high-profile network actors, then account suspension may address the problem. When Islamophobic hate-

speech is organic, diffuse, and fragmented on platforms such as Twitter it may become more difficult to identify and address.

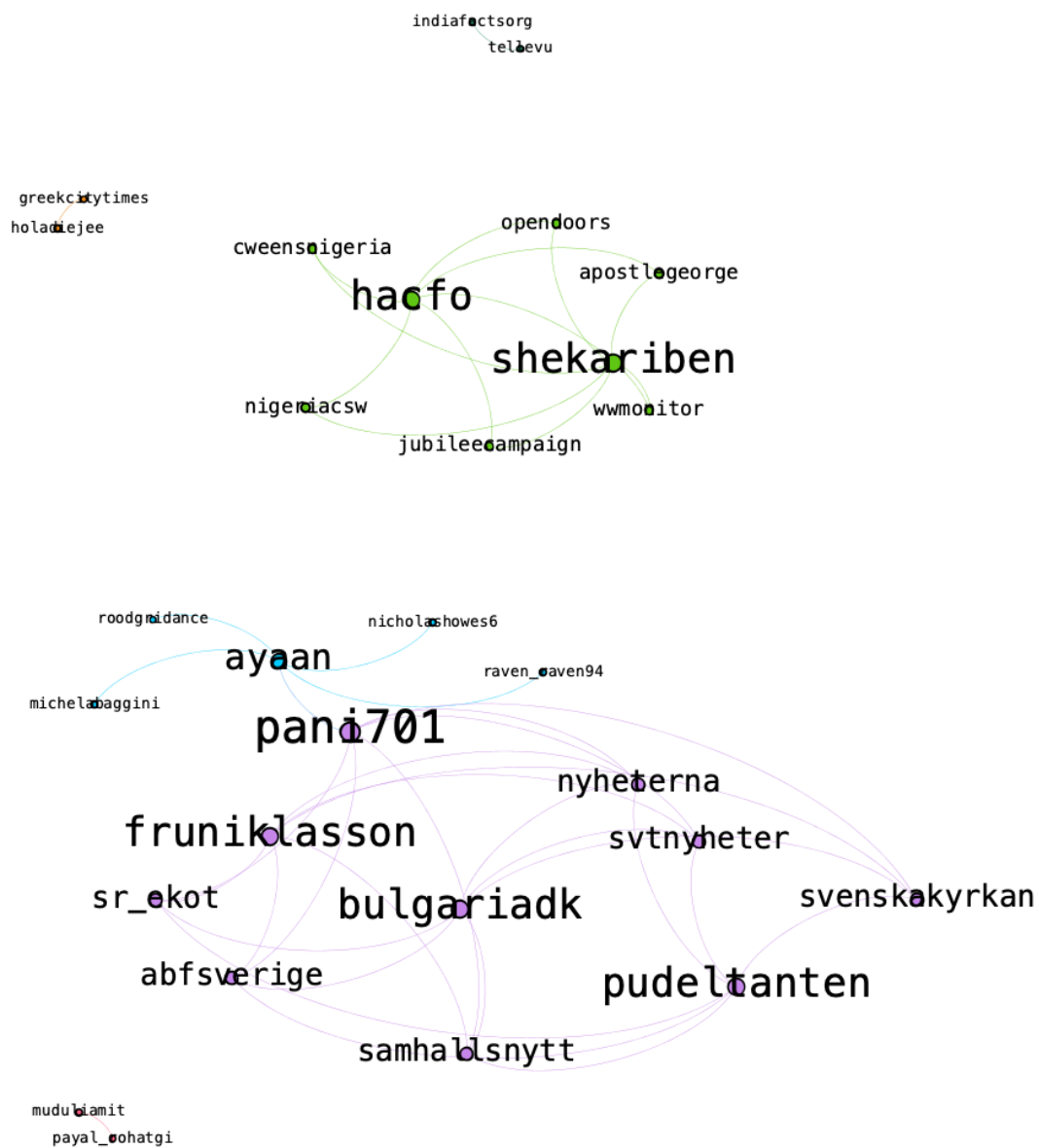


Figure 5. Graph E USA May 8, 2020.

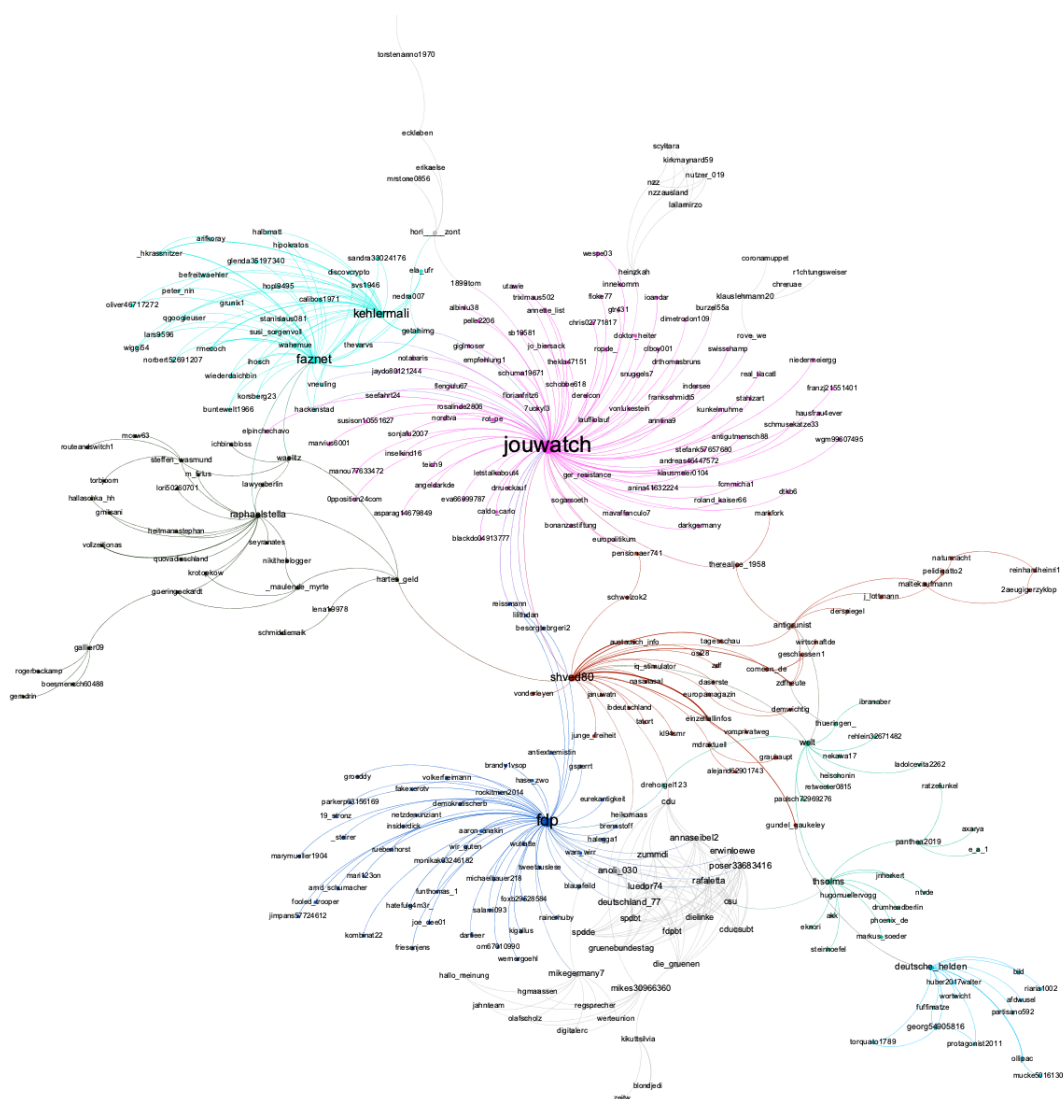


Figure 6. Graph F Germany May 1, 2020.

The next graphs I consider are from the months of May. I first address the American graph from May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Graph E, which has a small number of people with a total of 186 Tweets, however, it represents critical trends which include the transnationalization of Islamophobic discourse across the United States, Europe, India, and Africa. There are a total of six communities in the graph with a modularity of 0.581 and a density of 0.054 suggesting a more integrated community network although one where its communities do not feature a great



deal of cross-over as demonstrated by the low modularity measure. Additionally, in the periphery, @IndiaFactsOrg appears as a key network actor among various Indian nationalist accounts with an in-degree of 1. @IndiaFactsOrg was a recurrent user-account identified through the close reading of American Tweets as a major source of Islamophobic (mis)information shared under the guise of “facts” (IndiaFacts 2013). What is unique about Graph E, however, is the appearance of a cluster of Nigerian accounts within this visualization, as demonstrated in the green cluster. From this point onward, in certain months, specifically in following Graph G, an American graph June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020, from conversation centers around Nigerian politics with the hashtag #Islamization.

The sudden appearance of Nigerian Twitter users as a central cluster using this hashtag requires a brief and expanded explanation of the ethnic and religious history and contemporary political tensions in the country to fully contextualize this trend. Between 1865 and 1960, Nigeria was subject to British colonization, however, ethnic and religious tensions between the predominately Muslim North and Christian South have focused primarily on conflict involving Hausa-Fulani settlers from the North and indigenous, predominately traditional Christian groups in the Middle Belt of the country (Harnischfeger 2006, 37). Historically, Hausa-Fulani political dominance in the state was ungirded by British colonial support of this group (Harnischfeger 2006, 42). After the independence movement and a period of military rule, in 1999 Nigeria shifted to a form of democracy whereupon several states in the North implemented Islamic religious laws (Harnischfeger 2006, 44). Samuel Désiré Johnson, in nuancing the ethnic and religious tension in the state, notes that “Islam was thus associated with the dominant ethnic group [and] the political power of the Fulani gave them control of the region” (2017, 264). In this way, for Christian Nigerians not of the dominant Huasa-Fulani ethnic group, the possibility

of religious conversion or Islamization is associated with a possible “Fulanization” of society (Johnson 201, 265).

This very brief discussion of the relation between Islamization and “Fulanization” provides some context for Nigerian usage of the hashtag #Islamization as a means to critique contemporary Fulani dominance in the government and reveals how in Nigeria religious tensions between Christians and Muslims are located within a unique, national context of colonization in comparison to American and German discussions and usages of Islamization. German and American usages of this hashtag emphasize a racialized, Islamophobic form of discourse that seeks to target predominately minority and immigrant communities within the nation-state. In India while the religious tensions between Muslims and Hindus are indigenous to the state, Hindu nationalists possess overwhelming political power in India through the BJP-led government.

Comparatively, in Nigeria the situation is more complex with ethnic tensions overlaid upon religious differences. As such, the discussion among Nigeria Twitter users of Islamization in this and subsequent graphs focuses on the political marginalization and persecution of Christian minority groups by a Fulani-led government that alleges to holds sympathies with Nigerian Muslims. While there is a comparable usage of the hashtag #Islamization with clear parallels between India, the US, and Germany in terms of far-right, racialized nationalism, Nigerian Twitter users deploy this hashtag in a nationally specific way even as they connect to a larger transnational Islamophobic digitally networked community. I will outline the major players and conversational dynamics that define this Nigerian digitally networked community later in this section.

Shifting to Graph F, this visualization features a German data scrape from May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. This chart is extremely fragmented with a density of 0.004 and a modularity of 0.817. With a total of 29 communities, this indicates that communities show extremely limited inter-communal engagement. To better visualize the most relevant communities, in this graph I filtered out peripheral communities who comprised less than 5% of the network. Additionally, because this network was much larger than others, I utilized the Yifan Hu lay-out instead of the Yifan-Hu Proportional lay-out to produce this visualization. The network actors with the highest in-degree measures include @jouwatch, at 90 degrees, which clearly demonstrates its prestige and influence in the community. The Tweet that garnered such attention in connection to @jouwatch was a story about supposed Islamization in schools, the viral story being a news interview with the principle of a Mainz school who wore a t-shirt with the Arabic script that read “Hidaya,” which means guidance (Jouwatch 2020). This far-right focus on children and schooling will be further discussed in Chapter V. I draw attention to the news story here as it demonstrates what type of content @jouwatch produces that is most resonant with users. Within the American dataset there is a similar anxiety or emphasis on children, schooling, and multiculturalism that will be discussed in Chapter V.

The next highest in-degree measure within this data visualization is @fdp with 56. This is the account of the Frei Demokraten Partie (FDP), a mainstream pro-business, free market German political party. The focus and influence of @fdp within this visualization is connected not to any @fdp business polices, but a series of statements issued by the party supporting religious freedom and the right to worship for Muslim and other faith communities during COVID-19. Additionally, other far-right users were discussing a supposed connection between the party and the Union of European Turkish Democrats (UETD), recently renamed the Union of

International Democrats (UID). The Tweet that sparked connection and focus on @fdp is from @AntiExtremistin with a small out-degree of 1, an account that corresponds to the Alleged Anti-Totalitarian user-type: *“Die FDP möchte Gebetsrufe des Muezzins dauerhaft erlauben. Die @fdp Politikerin Betül Cerrah macht Lobbyarbeit für die UID/UETD. Die AKP Organisation wird vom #Verfassungsschutz beobachtet. [person with headscarf] #Islamisierung* <https://t.co/FWV3qNHPXx> (AntiExtremistin 2020). The Tweet translates to “The FDP are pleased to allow the call to prayer on a permanent basis. The @FDP politician Betül Cerrah is lobbying for the UID/UETD. The AKP organization is being monitored by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Islamization.” The latter half of this Tweet focuses on local FDP politician Betül Cerrah, who is a frequent target of far-right German websites (Hemmelrath 2016), alleging she is a lobbyist aligned with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The (UETD)/(UID) mention refers to this alleged lobbying relation between the FDP and Turkey, with the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution monitoring this group for alleged democratic violations (SCF 2018).

The Tweet from @AntiExtremistin is notable because of the sustained focus of far-right German users on Muslim religious activities during COVID-19. The actual statements from the FDP, such as from their Instagram, are merely banal statements in support of religious prayer for all faith communities calling for the same public health criteria to apply to mosques and churches (fdp\_krefeld 2020). This focus on the @fdp account demonstrates another trend of how far-right German users circulate and share information; news and information from institutional or mainstream sources such as political parties or governmental agencies, like the Berlin Police, becomes re-circulated through a racialized, Islamophobic lens through the usage of the hashtag. In this way, far-right users respond to, modify, and appropriate Tweets and news stories on

Twitter to further their own ideological aims. Ultimately, the major take-away from Graph F, with the centrality of @jouwatch and @fdp as major nodes within the network, is that news sites, institutional agencies, and political parties play a key role as origin sources of information for far-right German users.

### *Late Spring Early Summer Graphs*

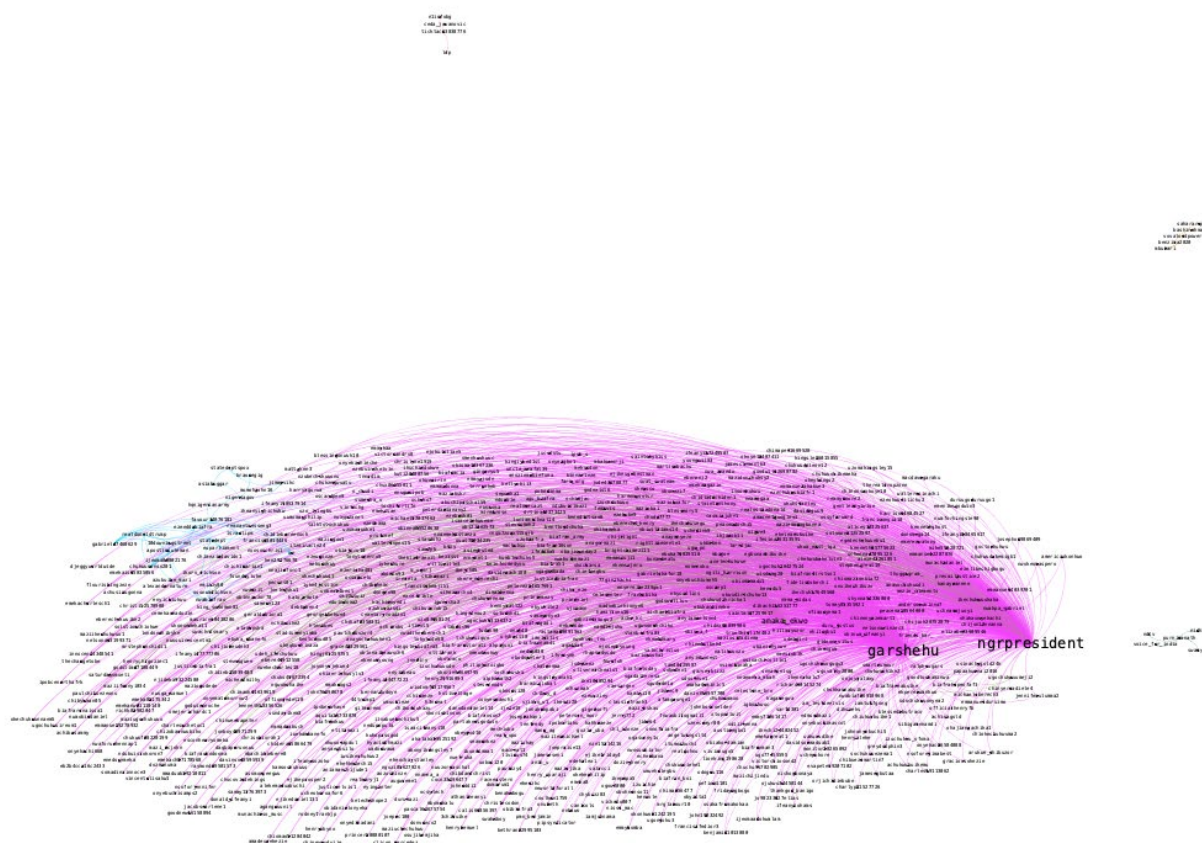


Figure 7. Graph G USA June 17, 2020.

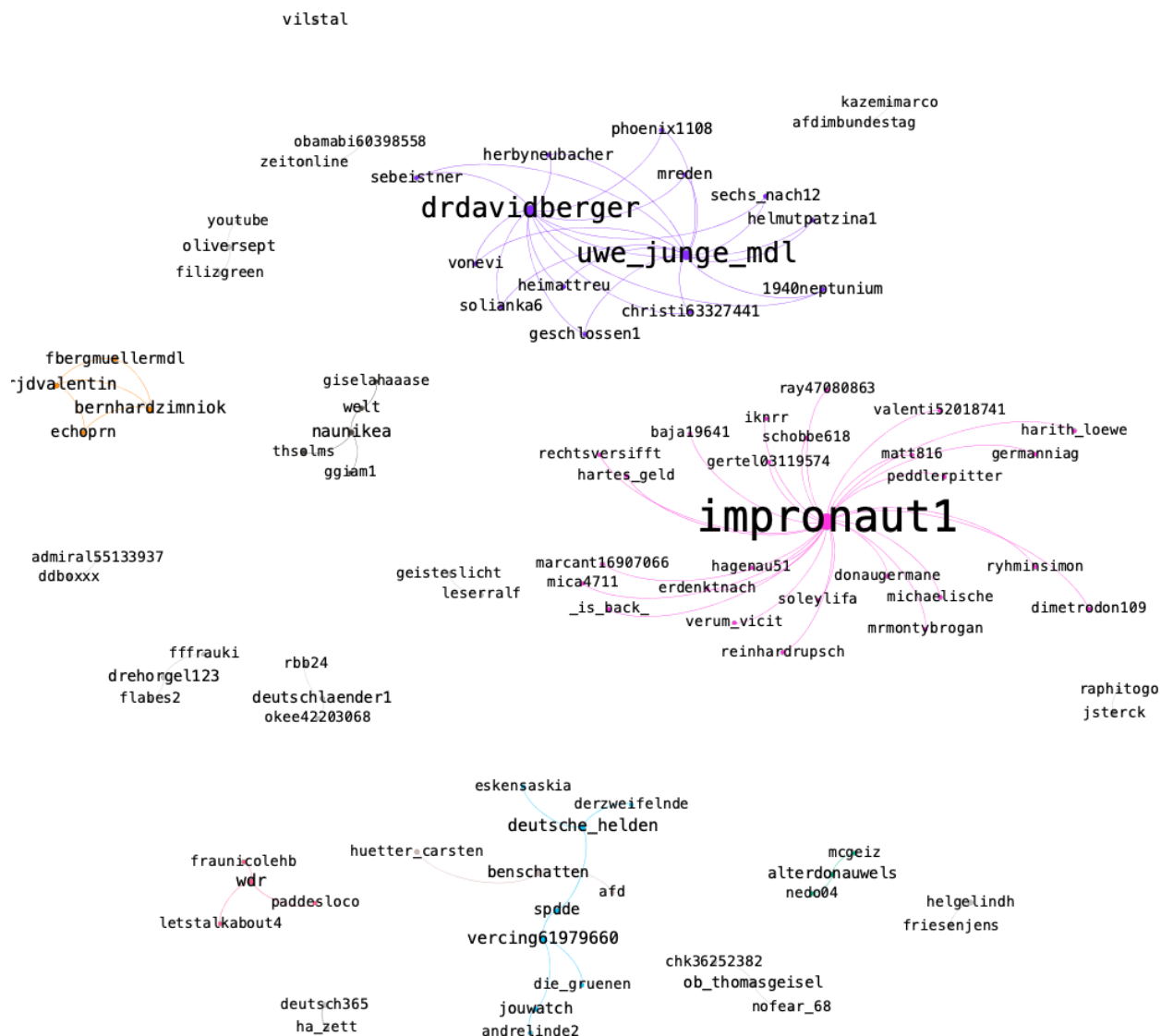


Figure 8. Graph H Germany June 5, 2020.

Above is Graph G, from the American corpus of June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020 with a total of 1000 Tweets. This is a particularly aesthetic graph, while very fragmented with a density of 0.003, we see most nodes are connecting back to two network actors, @NGRPresident and @GarShehu, which is the Twitter account for Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari and Garbu Shehu the Official Spokesperson to the President of Nigeria, respectively (Buhari 2014; Shehu 2015), both

with in-degree measures of 855. While there are some peripheral communities on the side, with the graph featuring a modularity of 0.127 with a total of 6 communities, I focus my attention on the central pink network. The first question this type of visualization prompts, is, what conversation was occurring to connect so many user accounts back to the President Buhari and his spokesman Garbu Shehu using the hashtag #Islamization?

As was clear in the CSV files of this particular data scrape, a vast majority of accounts were Re-Tweeting this message; “Let it be known to @GarShehu who accused #IPOB of LYING on #Christian persecution in #Nigeria that PERSECUTION is: When the @NGRPresident proclaimed #97versus5 When Danjuma, OBJ, PANDEF, CAN, others decried #Islamization & When Christians are killed in the North with impunity” (Ejimakor 2020). Within a few lines of text from @AloyEjmakor there are multiple dynamics at play. Untangling this Tweet in the context of transnational Islamophobic discourse reveals the unique situation of Nigerian Twitter users in relation to Muslim communities, Twitter activism, and hashtag re-appropriation. #Islamization, in this case, is used among supporters of the Nigerian Biafran independence movement to connect to the Christian right in the United States for visibility and aid in their national political cause. In order to demonstrate transnational dynamic, however, I first decode and contextualize the Tweet from @AloyEjmakor below to explain these connections.

As previously discussed, Nigeria was colonized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the British who relied up on the support of indigenous tribes such as the Hausa-Fulani to secure their dominance at the expense of other ethnic groups (Harnischfeger 2006, 42). Fulani-Hausa political control was accompanied by the implementation of Islamic customs and Sharia law in the region (Harnischfeger 2006, 42). British support of the Fulani-Hausa was a strategy of in-direct colonial

rule and effectively exacerbated existing ethnic and religious tensions in the country setting the stage for future conflicts. In 1960, Nigeria became an independent state. However ethnic and regional tensions between the North and South culminated in political violence and a coup d'état in 1966, which then spurred a series of shifts between military rule and constitutional governance throughout the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Nayar 1975). One particularly violent incident during this period was a conflict between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Eastern Region which proclaimed its independence as the Republic of Biafra in 1967 but did not achieve lasting sovereignty (Nayar 1975). In 1999, upon the death of military dictator Sani Abacha, his successor General Abdulsalami Abubakar, imperfectly transitioned the state to civilian democratic rule that has since struggled with conducting free and fair elections (Obi 2011).

Presently, the country is led by President Muhammadu Buhari and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Among Southern Christians in the nation, there is a sense that Buhari and the PDP have not been attentive to their perspectives. For example, in 2001, rather than supporting a repeal of Sharia law and an Islamic court system implemented in the Northern region of Kaduna, the PDP compromised by having Sharia law in these areas apply exclusively to Muslim citizens, to the frustration of non-Muslim citizens in the region (BBC News 2001). This is a brief example that illustrates the on-going tension between the PDP and Christian Nigerians who perceive the ruling party and Buhari as indifferent to the policy-preferences of a Christian electorate.

With this necessary context laid out, I return to decoding the Tweet that, when deconstructed, reveals several key themes including the digital activism of pro-Biafran Twitter users and intense intra-state tensions between the PDP, Fulani Muslims, and Christian Nigerians—not an expected theme from this dataset but an important emergent topic. While



many of the Twitter accounts are linking to the account @NGRPresident, President Buhari, the key action is focused on Buhari's Spokesperson, Garba Shehu. Again for context is the tweet; "Let it be known to @GarShehu who accused #IPOB of LYING on #Christian persecution in #Nigeria that PERSECUTION is: When the @NGRPresident proclaimed #97versus5 When Danjuma, OBJ, PANDEF, CAN, others decried #Islamization & When Christians are killed in the North with impunity" (Ejimakor 2020)

In an interview discussing alleged targeting killings of Christian farmers in the nation, Garba Shehu suggested that the political group, Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), had been manufacturing a paid media campaign highlighting the killings for Western aid and to discredit the Buhari administration (Premium Times 2020). Shehu is quoted as stating that IPOB and Christian NGOs in the country were "using the cover of Christianity and calling for a U.S. Special Envoy to be appointed to stop the 'genocide' of Christians in Nigeria. But the real purpose is to drive a wedge between the Nigerian government and its U.S. and UK/European allies" (Terhemba Daka 2020).

IPOB is a Biafran separatist organization composed predominately of members of the Igbo group (Ugorji 2017). The 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War, or the Nigerian-Biafra War, centered on a conflict between the Nigerian state and the Biafra region in Eastern Nigeria that attempted to secede, however, the movement was unsuccessful (Onuoha 2018). Today, the IPOB is the leading organization advocating for Biafran separatism (Nwofe 2019, 26). Among Southern and Eastern Nigerians, particularly Christians and Biafran supporters, there is a contemporary sense of their marginalization within the PDP-Buhari administration (Amamkpa and Mbakwe 2015, 16).

Considering these ethnic and religious tensions focused on a perception of Fulani-Muslim dominance, the appearance of Nigerian activists and Twitter users within this corpus of data is thus not surprising, especially when we consider the way in which pro-Biafran activists have been highly digitally engaged on social media platforms, leading digital activist campaigns and movements for the IPOB cause on Twitter and other social media platforms (Nwofe 2019; Nwofe and Goodall 2019). As such, identifying a viral Tweet using the hashtag #Islamization criticizing both President Buhari and his Spokesperson Garba Shehu fits within an existing pattern of pro-Biafran digital activism. However, the emphasis on supposed Islamization via the #Islamization hashtag connects this digitally networked community focused intensely on the national political situation in Nigeria with a transnationalized American far-right Twitter network. As I discuss in a Graph I, these Nigerian Twitter users in fact explicitly connect to the leading figure of the American far-right—President Trump where they attempt to again international visibility regarding supposed Christian persecutions.

In this Tweet, users are thus emphasizing that the Buhari administration is minimizing instances of religiously motivated violence targeting Christians. The Tweet goes on to cite the infamous #97versus5 comment from Buhari. In a 2015 speech, Buhari disregarded his commitment to representing a plurality of constituents outside his own supporters, suggesting that constituents in areas that gave him 97% of the vote will not be treated the same as constituents in areas that gave him 5% of the vote (Nwangwu 2018), suggesting a pattern of disregard for minority voices by the Buhari administration. The other relevant information mentioned in the Tweet is Buhari's supposed dismissal of charges of Islamization from Nigerian political figures and organizations including Danjuma, OBJ, PANDEF, and CAN. Danjuma refers to the Nigerian General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma, a philanthropist and former

Minister of Defense for the former Christian President Olusegun Matthew Okikiola Aremu Obasanjo, known as OBJ (Daniel 2019; Ty Danjuma Foundation 2020). PANDEF refers to the Pan Niger Delta Forum, an NGO (Akpan-Nsoh 2018). Finally, CAN refers to the Christian Association of Nigeria, a Christian ecumenical body (CAN, n.d.). Christian groups have been critical of Buhari since continued attacks from Islamic extremist groups in the Northeast and conflict between Christian farmers and Muslim herders in the central region whereby Buhari has been accused of unfairly sympathizing with the predominately Muslim Fulani herders as a fellow Fulani himself (Anna 2019).

The issue of supposed targeted attacks on Christian farmers is not merely a national Nigerian issue, however. During Buhari's visit to the US in 2018, then President Trump brought up the issue of targeted killings of Christian farmers (BBC News 2018b). Trump's comments about the plight of Christian farmers have been supported by Christian leaders in Nigeria as a "vindication of their own claims" (BBC News 2018b). However, as contemporary journalists have noted, any notion of a simplified conflict between Christian farmers and Muslim herders does not match with the complex regional realities that have included "many killings on both sides in this conflict" (BBC News 2018b). Trump's support of Christian groups at home and abroad and racialized critiques against Muslims and Islam have thus positioned him as an ally for Christian Nigerians on Twitter—a dynamic that that will play out later in Graph I.

In summary, with this background provided, this Tweet may be deconstructed to illustrate how Christian and Biafran Nigerian Twitter users are critical of the Buhari administration and his spokesman Garba Shehu for supposedly suggesting that IPOB and other Christian groups are falsely publicizing news of targeted attacks on Christian farmers, tying Shehu's comments to an

alleged pattern of governmental disregard for minority and Christian rights and issues in the state in favor of supposed Fulani and Muslim concerns.

Essentially, what we see here in these graphs that involve a majority of Nigerian Twitter users is a manifestation of historic ethnic, religious, and political tensions in Nigeria that are played out through a contemporary political conflict involving the Buhari government which is more directly aligned with Muslim and Fulani concerns. This digitally networked community is transnational in the sense that Biafra activists and anti-Buhari Twitter users, as shown in Graph I, will connect to former President Donald Trump in an attempt to gain international visibility and support. The usage of the #Islamization is nuanced here—as “Islamization” in Nigerian society is deeply imbricated within the state’s colonial history and Fulani-Hausa dominance. Additionally, the documented violence carried out by the Islamic fundamentalist group Boko Haram illustrates a broader tension in society about indigenous Islamic revivalism in the state (Adesoji 2010). As such, the appearance of Nigerian nationalist communities within this corpus of data provides an additional global dimension to a discussion of Islamophobic hate-speech. I argue that the usage of #Islamization within a Nigerian context is not the same as the meaning of the hashtag in American, Indian, German, and European contexts. Rather, in using this hashtag Nigerian Twitter users emphasize a uniquely national context that highlights ethnic and religious conflict rather than the issue of race and immigration, even as this discussion becomes transnationalized in subsequent graphs.

Shifting to a discussion of the German Graph H, this visualization was produced from a scrape of Tweets from June 5, 2020 of 174 Tweets and shows some key aspects of far-right Islamophobic German digitally networked communities. The graph features 20 communities, a low density of 0.01, and a modularity of 0.831. Of interest here is the appearance of two

peripheral users accounts: @Deutschlaender1 and @chk36252382. While these users are marginal in the context Graph H, from a close reading and coding of the German Tweets, these users appeared frequently in multiple data scrapes. Conversely, considering the most influential nodes, the largest node is @Impronaut1, a user who has since been suspended. Additionally, @drdavidberger and @Uwe\_Junge\_MdL appear as key network actors, users who identify as an anti-Merkel publicist and an AfD politician and former military official, respectively (Berger 2010; Junge 2016), both with in-degree measures of 12.

This graph represents the way in which far-right Twitter networks in Germany, while including many types of Twitter users, center around far-right influencers in the form of established journalists, politicians, or institutional actors. In the case of far-right German, Islamophobic digitally networked Twitter publics the origin source of conversations begins with institutionalized actors—such as verified Twitter accounts or news sites—with then everyday users amplifying the content. @Impronaut1, one of the most central nodes also have the highest out-degree of 25, which suggests it is both highly influential due to its node size as well as a key network actor that connects to other users.

Frequently network actors with the highest out-degree have been suspended, such as @Impronaut1 or @LenaMoser6. Seemingly this might suggest that Twitter's moderation policies function to target (mis)information spreaders. However, the problem appears that the barrier to attain a high out-degree is extremely low. One must only connect heavily with other users; simply being very active on Twitter allows one to achieve a high-out degree. Achieving a high in-degree requires some level of influence, trust, and popularity among the community. In other words, with every suspended high out-degree user another account can quickly usurp this position and continue to amplify the (mis)information produced by high in-degree users. In

Graph J, I discuss in further detail these types of conversational dynamics that promote activity among both high in-degree and out-degree users.

*Late Summer Graphs*

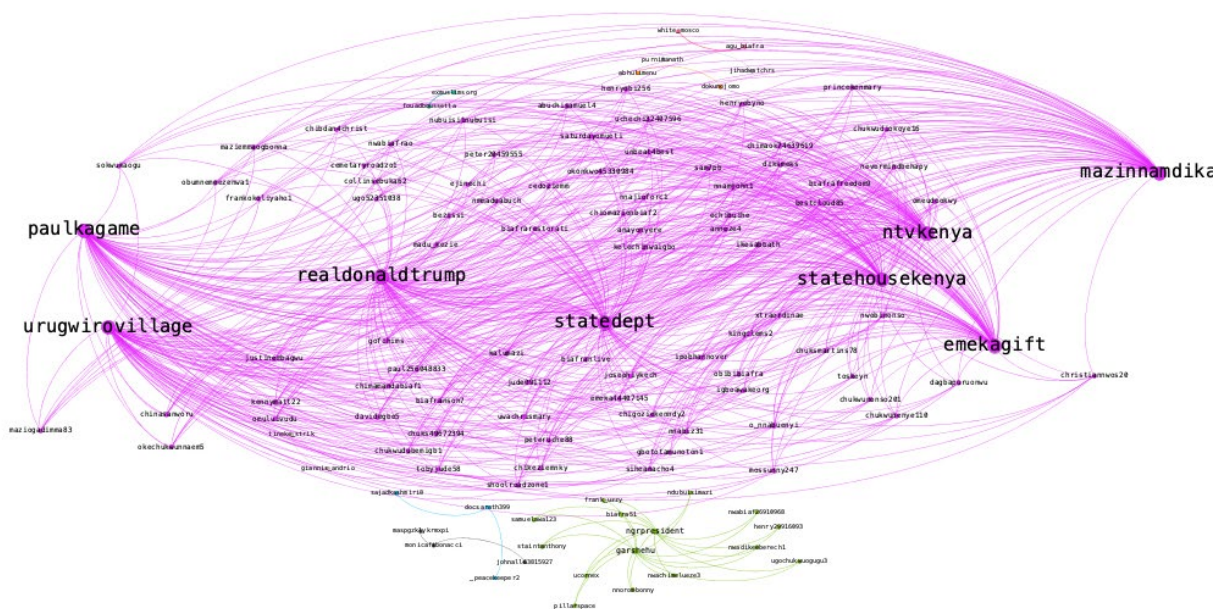


Figure 9. Graph I USA July 4, 2020.

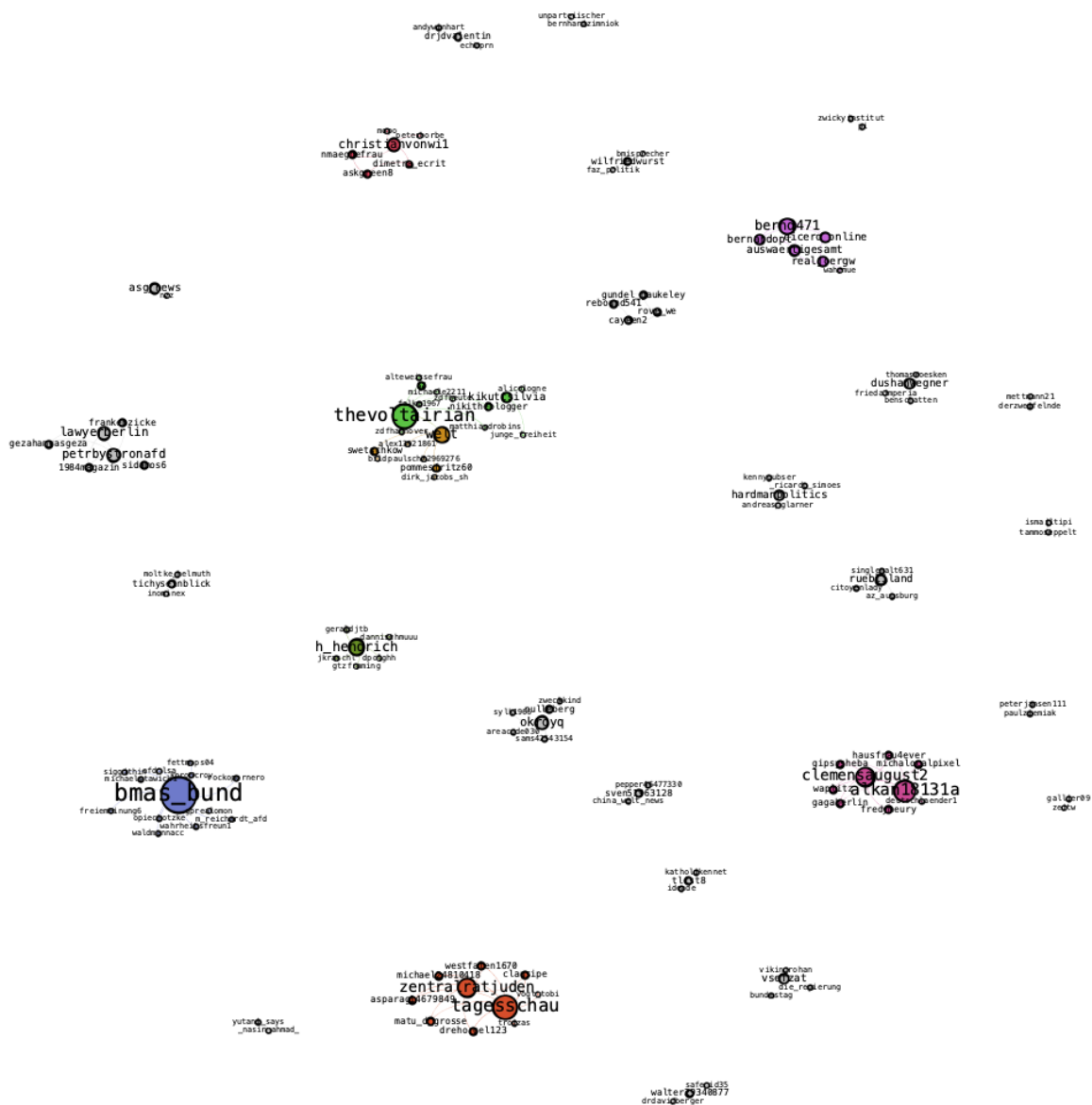


Figure 10. Graph J Germany July 27, 2020.

Shifting to a discussion of the late summer graphs, first I consider the American Graph I from July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020. This graph includes a scrape of 1000 Tweets and has a density of 0.048 and a modularity of 0.102 with a total of 9 communities. Continuing the previous discussion of Graph H that featured the central presence of Nigerian Twitter users, this graph presents a similar community whereby Nigerian Twitter accounts dominant the network structure. This graph,

expanding upon the theme of transnational connections between anti-Buhari and pro-Biafra Twitter users and the Trump administration visualizes most clearly these transnational anti-Muslim connections. Major nodes within the graph include @StateDept, which is the handle of the US State Department, former President Trump’s now suspended Twitter account @realDonaldTrump, and finally @StateHouseKenya, which is the account associated with the President of Kenya. This highly aesthetic graph visualizes a highly connected discussion among the center community—all with in-degree measures of 82.

This Tweet comes from a self-identified Biafra activist with a low out-degree measure of 8, @ChinasaNworu (Nworu 2015): “#IPOB calls for #Christians to stand up against #Islamization of #Nigeria @realDonaldTrump @EmekaGift @StateDept @MaziNnamdiKanu @StateHouseKenya @UrugwiroVillage @PaulKagame @ntvkenya <https://t.co/GwpQ7ocG5q>.” As is clear with the Tweet and Graph I, the accounts named by @ChinasaNworu appear as major nodes within the visualization. The Tweet calls for the IPOB to stand up against supposed Islamization and connects to various political leaders including Trump, as well as leaders and media outlets in Kenya and Rwanda. @EmekaGift is another Biafra activist (Gift 2011), @MaziNnamdiKanu refers to Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the current IPOB leader (Kanu 2018), @UrugwiroVillage refers to the Twitter account of the President of Rwanda Paul Kagame (Presidency | Rwanda 2011), @PaulKagame refers to the personal account of Rwandan President Paul Kagame (Kagame 2009), and finally, @ntvkenya refers to a national Kenyan television station NTV Kenya (NTV Kenya 2009), with each of these users with an in-degree measure of 82.



In this sense, this Tweet represents a form of both African regional and global activism focused on the theme of supposed Christian persecution. The link in the Tweet goes to a press release from IPOB whereupon the organization states:

We are calling on Judeo-Christians in Nigeria to stand up against the upcoming jihadists soldiers scattered all over Nigeria to Islamize the country. The country is clearly coming to an end; Christians must not allow Islam to humiliate them again in Nigeria. All politicians in Biafra-land must come out and defend their land because Fulani has taken over (IPOB PRESS RELEASE 2020).

As such, this Tweet, and the graph presents a complex assortment of interlinking themes all correlated under the grammar of #Islamization. Specifically, this Tweet and the IPOB press release emphasizes the theme of “jihad,” a discursive tactic used by far-right German and American Twitter users. However, in Nigeria this theme is connected to real rather than imagined ethnic and religious conflicts in the country. The connection to American accounts such as Trump and the State Department signals that Biafra activists seek to strategically play upon an American Republican affinity for Christianity as a means to suggest a transnational Christian experience of peril at the hands of Muslims. While the context in Nigeria is nationally unique, again, the shared grammar of Islamophobic language demonstrates a connection between the digital Biafra community and far-right American networks despite the nuanced national contexts.

Ultimately, despite the fact that these various accounts were linked together with @ChinasaNworu’s Tweet, we see different users clustered in slightly different spatial areas with Trump and the US State Department at the center, and the Kenyan accounts clustered together in a similar fashion as the Rwandan accounts. This partitioning of the community visualizes that

just as the overall network structure is transnational, within the digital landscape of Twitter national communities still re-emerge and are re-constituted discursively within virtual spaces. As such, when considering visualizing Name Network structures and tracking specific hashtags, it is crucial to engage in a multi-scalar analysis of these networks identifying both the networks structure as well as the content of the conversations.

The next graph I discuss is Graph J from the German dataset. It is from July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and features a scrape of 318 Tweets. The graph appears very dispersed with a density of 0.007 and a modularity 0.929, which includes 29 separate communities. Examining the top in-degree users, however, a narrative emerges. The top in-degree is 12 with the user @BMAS\_Bund, which is the official Twitter account for the German Federal Ministry of Labor and Domestic Affairs (BMAS 2013). The Tweet focusing on @BMAS\_Bund is from user M\_Reichardt\_AfD, an AfD politician (Reichardt 2014), again emphasizing the importance of institutionalized sources within the German network structure. The Tweet states: “*Eine #Islamisierung findet nicht statt? Dürfen wir schon von einer Übernahme bedeutender Funktionen im @BMAS\_Bund durch #Islamisten sprechen?*” (Reichardt 2020). The Tweet translates to “Islamization isn’t taking place? Do the important functions of the @BMA\_Bund take place through Islamic speech?” and links to a news article about the appointment of a German Muslim, Nurhan Soykan, to the Religion and Social Policy Department of the agency (Balcerowiak 2020).

Additionally, there is another user with the second highest in-degree of 8, @tagesschau. @tagesschau is a mainstream national and international German news agency (tagesschau 2007). This account boasts a high in-degree of 8, like in other graphs, because users are replying and connecting due to a news story, here a story about the *Präsident des Zentralrates der Juden*, the President of the Jewish Center Josef Schuster, discussing the issue of anti-Semitism in Germany

(tagesschau 2020). While this appears to be a normal news story, far-right German users were connecting to @tagesschau and offering commentary on the Josef Schuster's discussion, arguing that Schuster had no right to draw attention to anti-Semitism in Germany because of his support of immigration, suggesting that Muslims, not native Germans, are the cause of anti-Semitism in the country.

The Tweet from @Westfalen1670 with an out-degree of 2, states: ““@tagesschau Wer den Import von Antisemiten befördert und aufkommenden #Antisemitismus dazu benutzt den politischen Gegner der #Bundesregierung zu diskreditieren, der ist eine Marionette und keine Vertretung seiner Gemeinde @ZentralratJuden #Islamisierung <https://t.co/M8E4YLWSOZ>” (Westfalen1670 2020a). Which translates to “Anyone who supports the importation of anti-Semitism and uses emerging anti-Semitism to discredit the government is a puppet and not representative of his community.” @Westfalen1670's comments about Schuster being a “puppet” and minimizing actual record high instances of anti-Semitic violence in Germany as the fault of the Jewish community because of their support for immigrants, predominately Muslim asylum seekers who are supposedly anti-Semitic, is extremely disturbing given the Germany's past history of genocide (DW 2021).

Furthermore, @Westfalen1670's comments seem completely divergent from his biography which states; “*Feuerwehrbeamter, Realist. Westfale seit 1670. Freue mich über jede neue [Star of David] [menorah] in [German flag]. Halte dt. Medien für manipulativ & den Islam für eine gefährl. Ideologie*” (@Westfalen1670 2020). This biography translates to, “fireman, realist, Westphalian since 1670. I'm happy about every new [Jew] in [Germany]. I hold the media to be manipulative and for Islam to be a dangerous ideology.” As I previously discussed in Chapter III, ideological contradiction is a hallmark of these far-right digital communities with

this fundamental contradiction on display with @Westfalen1670 denigration of German-Jewish leaders in this Tweet and purported joy over the growth of the German Jewish community in his biography.

What is important in this case is that within this network structure the origin source of (mis)information and conspiracy is not necessarily always from far-right websites or far-right influencers. Rather, the origin source of Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic, digital content can be reputable news stories that are then injected with conspiratorial framing from users such as @Westfalen1670. This Tweet signals a profound cross-over between Islamophobic and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that Jewish leaders in Germany are “puppets” looking to discredit their own government and that in supporting immigrants they have orchestrated violence perpetuated against their own community in an elaborate plot to critique the German state.

This framing also positions Muslim immigrants as the source of anti-Semitism in Europe, which is a complex, nuanced issue some scholars have examined in relation to larger issues of conflict between Israel and the Muslim Arab world (Jikeli 2015). However, @Westfalen1670’s Tweet completely elides the long history of native German anti-Semitism nationally, in the former East, as well as contemporary anti-Semitic attacks. As such, in one simple Tweet, @Westfalen1670 accomplishes a huge ideological leap—that Muslims immigrants, not Germans, are the source of anti-Semitic violence in Germany and that German Jews are in league with Muslim immigrants to discredit the German state. Additionally, this is the first time anti-Semitism has appeared explicitly as a central theme within the German corpus of Tweets. Thus far, issues of anti-Semitism and conspiracy have appeared in the context of a global framing of conspiracy. In the next chapter I explicate the connections in greater detail between

Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-progressivism in the context of conspiracy and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, this chart reveals the challenges of content moderation on platforms such as Twitter. While many individual user accounts have been suspended over the course of this dissertation project for violating Twitter's terms of service, the issue of how far-right, radicalized users re-appropriate normative news stories, sources, and videos on the website presents a more fundamental challenge to curbing Islamophobic and anti-Semitic hate speech. It may be relatively easy to ban individual accounts or even to emphasize the content published by accounts such as @jouwtach is "disputed" (Roth and Pickles 2020), however, the gap between Twitter's "Hateful conduct policy" and the content I have archived and identified in the corpus of Tweets is broad. Twitter states that:

You may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease... You may not use hateful images or symbols in your profile image or profile header. You also may not use your username, display name, or profile bio to engage in abusive behavior, such as targeted harassment or expressing hate towards a person, group, or protected category (Twitter 2021).

In their policy, Twitter goes on to emphasize that it aims to prevent abuse of groups that have been "historically marginalized," which Jews and Muslims in Germany and in the US would qualify as. However, Twitter will only act upon hate-speech if it contains a specific "violent threat" towards a particular group or individual such as references to mass murder or violence targeting a specific group, incitement of violence against specific groups, or

*repeated* racialized slurs, suggesting single use of slurs or hateful imagery is acceptable (Twitter 2021).

Despite these broad policies, Twitter has a poor record of enforcing its own standards of conduct on the platform, with Amnesty International studying and identifying the violent, recurrent, toxic abuse is allowed unchecked on the platform (Dreyfuss 2018). In the case of this Tweet from @Westfalen1670, such content does not overtly fall into the category of direct violent threats or incitement, or even the category of slur. However, with the context of Germany's history of anti-Semitism this Tweet it is clearly a racialized attack on a Jewish leader suggesting he is a "puppet" that denies the documented realities of anti-Semitic violence. As such, what I draw attention to here is that like most of the other representative Tweet examples used in this dissertation, these "viral" Tweets remain available on the platform and do not violate Twitter's terms of service even as they are clearly racialized critiques and attack various historically marginalized communities. In the case of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic discourse, platform moderation policies appear explicitly designed to elide dealing with implicit, contextual forms of hate-speech.

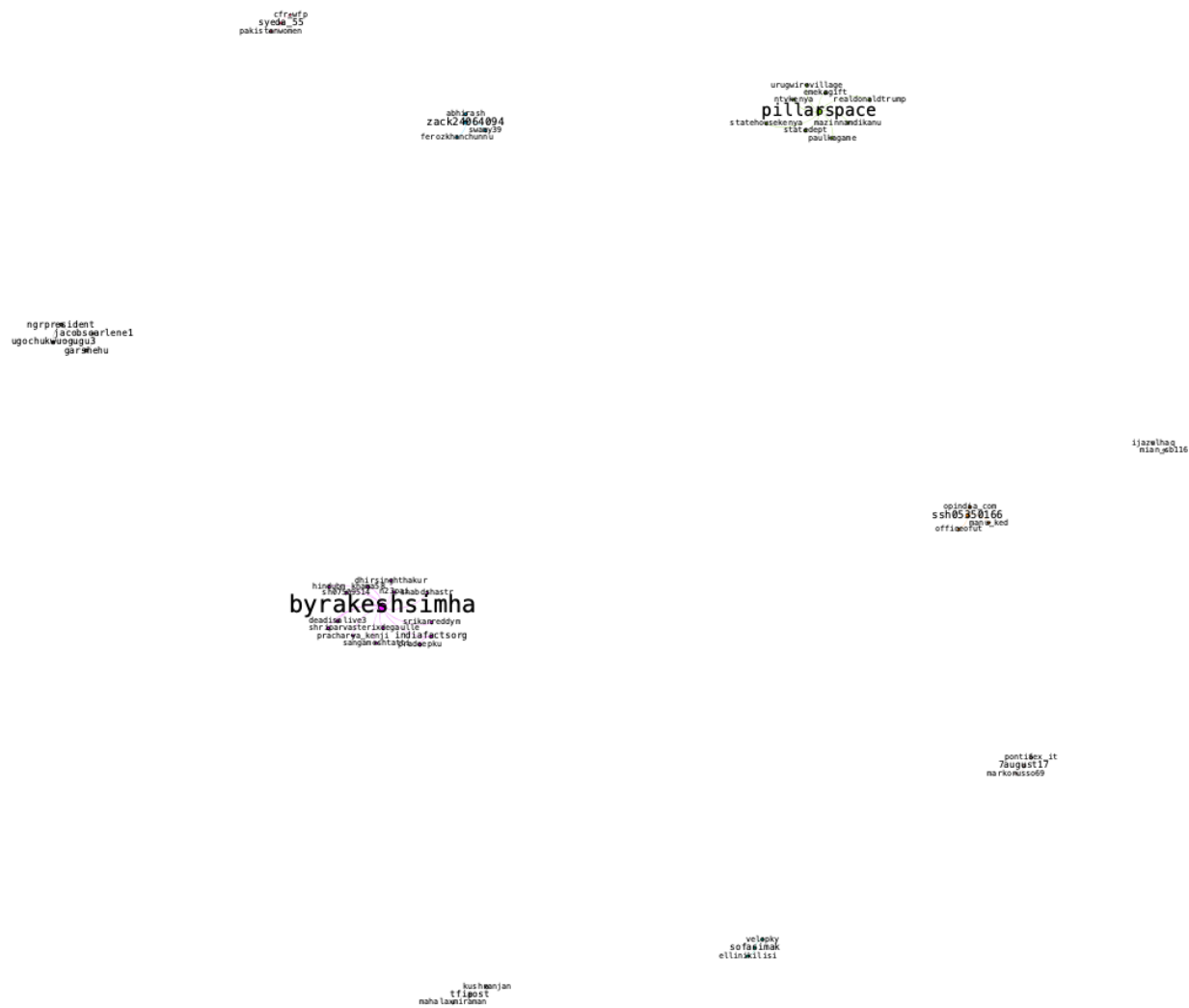


Figure 11. Graph K USA August 24, 2020.

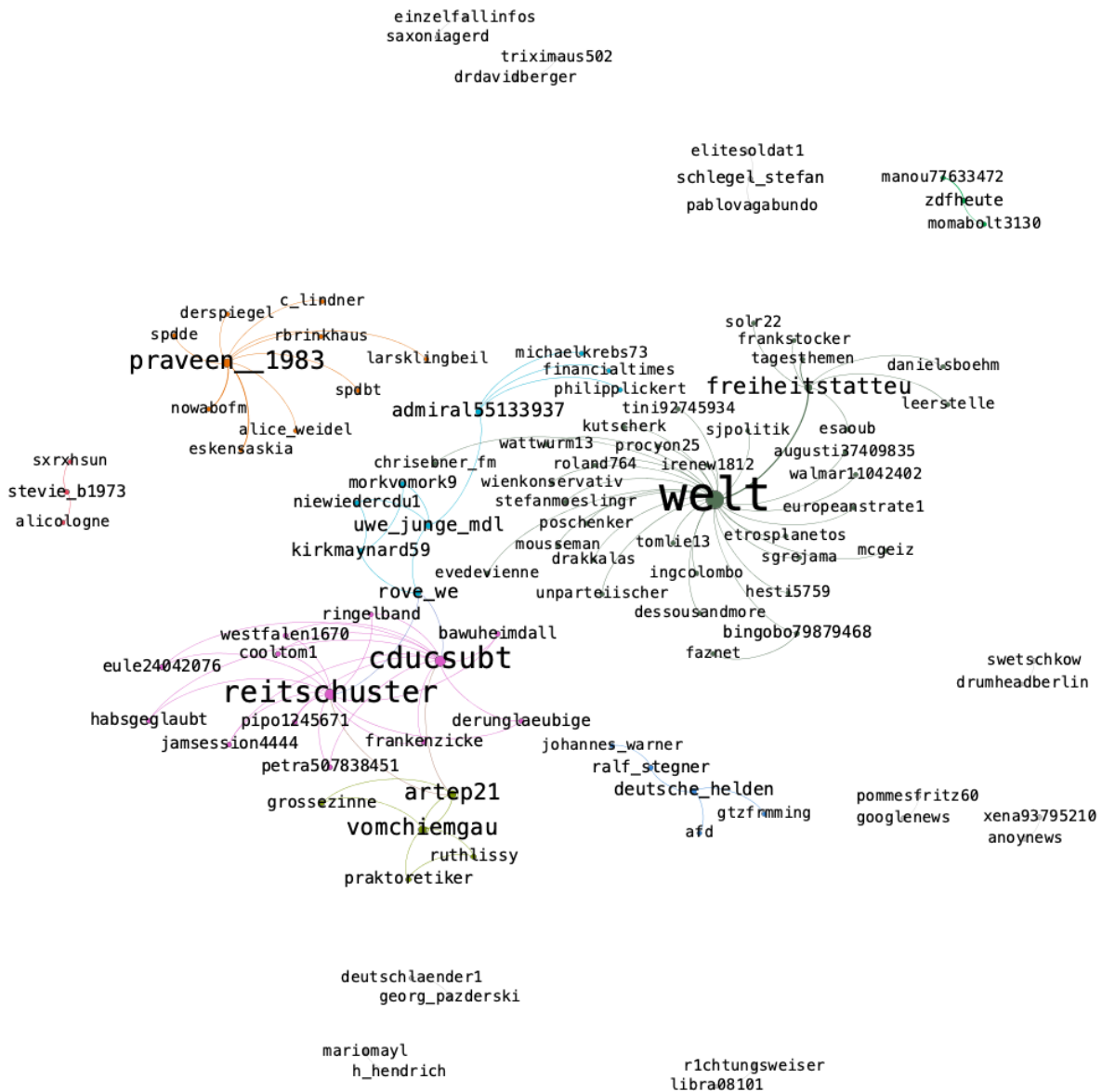


Figure 12. Graph L Germany August 8, 2020.

Shifting to a discussion of the last graphs from August, I first discuss the US graph from August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020 for some final thoughts on the global nature of Islamophobic digital discourse on Twitter. This graph features a low density of 0.017 and a modularity of 0.815. With 10 communities, as is visible, the graph is highly fragmented, so I focus on two relevant groups with



the highest in-degree measures: the Indian and Nigerian communities within the network structure. The first community of note is the connected by the user with the top in-degree measure of 13, @ByRakeshSimha which is connected to the Hindu nationalist account @IndiaFactsOrg with an in and out-degree of 1, another account that purports to publish objective, professional information but is a far-right, Hindu nationalist publication (IndiaFacts 2013).

The conversation that centers @ByRakeshSimha actually stems from a Tweet from @IndiaFactsOrg which states: “The takeaway for India is that a rapidly growing Muslim minority should never be taken lightly, writes Rakesh Simha. @ByRakeshSimha #Islamization #Muslims #Riots #IndianDemographics #Lebanon #Muslims #Jihadis <https://t.co/rAcVrbILVv>” (IndiaFacts 2020b). Here, we see the pattern of Far-Right Hindu Nationalist accounts publishing misleading stories about the instability of Muslim nations and fear-mongering about an increase in Muslim citizens in the Indian state as a supposed security issue—the hashtags of #Islamization #Muslims #Riots makes this connection explicit. This final graph and the specific sub-community drives home the global nature of Islamophobic digital discourse on the platform.

The other community of note here is the upper right-hand corner and features several accounts from previous Nigerian networks structures including Donald Trump, the Kenyan State House, etc. The community clusters around another Biafran activist, @PillarSpace with an out-degree of 8, who describes himself as “I AM A FREEDOM FIGHTER, I LOVE MY NATION BIAFRA” (Pillar’s SpAcE 2019). The Tweet that brings these various accounts together again focuses on the supposed Islamization of Nigeria and IPOB, stating that “#IPOB calls for #Christians to stand up against #Islamization of #Nigeria @realDonaldTrump @EmekaGift @StateDept @MaziNnamdiKanu @StateHouseKenya @UrugwiroVillage @PaulKagame

@ntvkenya <https://t.co/GwpQ7ocG5q>” (Pillar’s SpAcE 2019). Here, I again emphasize the importance of situating discussion of Islamophobic digital discourse within a multi-scalar context that accounts for the local, national, and global iterations and dimensions of the #Islamization hashtag. Additionally, a final point I make is that while Tweets such as this can appear simply jumbled together with the inclusion of multiple user accounts through the text of the Tweet, a visualization of the community uncovers the global connections which ideologically link together Biafra activists, Christian Nigerians, and the Trump administration.

I now shift to a discussion of the final German graph from August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020, which like the American graph, summarizes larger patterns identified in the visualizations. This graph has a density of 0.01 and a modularity of 0.772 with 17 communities. In this graph, we see recurring actors previously identified in this chapter and Chapter III including @Deutschlaender1 and @R1chtungswieser, as well as far-right news websites like @anonymnews. Repeating key trends, the top in-degree user for this graph is @welt with an in-degree measure of 27. The Tweet that causes the major linkages from @welt focuses similarly on issues of Muslim demographics, here in Lebanon. The Tweet states: *“Als der #Libanon noch eine christliche Mehrheit hatte, war er die „Schweiz des Nahen Ostens“, seit die Islamisten dominieren geht es bergab, jetzt droht der Staatsbankrott. #Islamisierung <https://welt.de/wirtschaft/article212450215/Libanon-Die-Schweiz-des-Nahen-Ostens-will-sich-an-China-verkaufen.html>... via @welt”* (Ebner 2020). The Tweet states, “When Lebanon had a Christian majority, it was the ‘Switzerland of the Near East,’ since Islamic dominance things have gone downhill with bankruptcy. Islamization.” The Tweet then links to an article about the then recent explosion in the Lebanese port of Beirut (Stocker 2020). The article discusses the explosion and makes an argument that since the Muslim population of Lebanon has risen the state has become increasingly destabilized; a specious

argument that flattens and ignores the state’s unique challenges related to civil war, globalization, and refugee movements into the country (Faour 2007). As discussed in Chapter III, this type of argumentation is not based upon the historical realities that Western nations—through processes of (neo)colonialism—have destabilized Muslim majority states through their own foreign intervention. As such, we see that this type of argument about demography appears in multiple contexts—American, Indian, and German, thus demonstrating discursive patterns across these different national Islamophobic contexts.

Continuing to examine Graph L, we also see a large subcommunity centered around @cducsubt, which is the Twitter handle of the CDU-CSU faction in the German Bundestag including the CDU and its partner party in the state of Bavaria, the Die Christlich-Soziale Union (CSU) (CDU/CSU 2009). Interestingly, the focus on the @cducsubt also includes a discussion of Lebanon. The Tweet that spurs focus on @cducsubt as well as the account @reitschuster, which is in the same community, both with an in-degree of 13, originates from the user @Westfalen1670 again, stating: *“Eine Teil des Textes aus einem Artikel von Boris @reitschuster über #Beirut. In 30 Jahren braucht der Leser nur noch ‘Libanon’ streichen und ‘Deutschland’ einfügen. Dank #SPD #Merkel & der @cducsubt”* (Westfalen1670 2020b). @Westfalen1670, as a user with 1494 followers essentially amplifies the accounts of @cducsubt and @reitschuster, when he Tweets: *“A piece of the text of the article from Boris @reitschuster about Beirut. In thirty years, the user will just have to delete Lebanon and replace Germany. Thanks #SPD, #Merkel, and the @cducsubt.”* @Westfalen1670 appears in the pink community, but is a smaller node compared to the @cducsubt and @reitschuster in terms of degree size with an out-degree of 2. However, it is the commentary and connections @Westfalen1670 makes that are absolutely critical as they spur discussion and conversation amongst the larger network structure

community. Finally, @Westfalen1670 links together CDU Chancellor Angela Merkel, with the Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (SPD), the second major center-left political party in the country, and lastly the @cducusbt which is the CDU-CSU governing alliance. Within this Tweet @Westfalen1670 thus blames the major governing parties for the supposed future Islamization of Germany.

*Conclusions: Far-Right Islamophobic Network Structures*

In this chapter I have discussed and analyzed twelve Name Network Visualizations from a corpus of scraped data tracking the hashtags #Islamization and #Islamisierung. I have produced multiple data visualizations using the Yifan Hu Proportional lay-out looking at specific statistical measures to analyze each community. Examining density, I have illustrated how network actors are either tightly connected as a single community or dispersed in fragmented groups. Identifying modularity, I have identified the number of subcommunities within a network structure. Finally, in identifying the in-degree and out-degree of certain network actors I have analyzed the influence and connectivity of users, deconstructing how certain users serve as origin sources and other users serve as information amplifiers. In producing these graphs, I have sought to visualize and explore how Islamophobic digital content is circulated through these Twitter publics. Complementing a previous taxonomical classification of Twitter users in Chapter III, this SNA analysis of network visualizations has provided a new scalar dimension to these understanding these communities.

This chapter has revealed that in the case of the German graphs, far-right German Islamophobic digital publics are complex, fragmented communities that cluster and form around real-world events related to political policies or COVID-19 that involve German Muslims or Muslim immigrants. Furthermore, in the German case, it is clear that both (mis)information in

the form of dubious journalism from outlets such as @jouwtach and authentic mainstream news stories from reputable outlets such as @welt are equally picked up by far-right users who provide their own racialized, Islamophobic, inaccurate framing of headlines and stories. The stories that resonate with users based upon contextual analysis of Tweet content from the graphs focuses primarily on visible and aural displays of Muslim religiosity in Germany such as the presence of muezzins or prayer gatherings. In the context of the COVID-19 public health crisis, however, these issues of public worship have an additional dimension related to the pandemic. The theme of COVID-19, race, religion, and conspiracy is further explored in Chapter V examining these stories and Tweets in greater depth.

In the context of the German graphs, these visualizations reveal that while the network structures are at times diffuse in the sense that many graphs feature a low density, these users primarily identify themselves as Germans and focus their sources and conversation upon a German national context. As such, the community appears to be somewhat nationalized but subdivided. In no German graph do we witness a comparable trend of transnational engagement as is visible in the American graphs. In this sense then, information transmission of Islamophobic digital content among German digitally networked publics on Twitter is a distinctly national problem. However, as we saw with the manipulation and re-appropriation of news stories from mainstream German news outlets, this does not mean content moderation or management of these communities is more straightforward. The issue is not the total dominance of far-right users such as @jouwatch or @anonynews, but rather average, everyday users such as @Westfalen1670, which act as information amplifiers and transmitters of Islamophobic content. Finally, the practices of individual users in amplifying Islamophobic and anti-Semitic content do not fall within Twitter's terms of service which fails to address or may be strategically

articulated to elide dealing with contextual or implicit issues of hate-speech, violence, or (mis)information. Ultimately, the most disturbing pattern of the German graph series is the ease at which everyday users are able to re-appropriate mainstream news stories or information for their own purposes to further disseminate racist, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic discourse on the platform.

This is particularly concerning because while Twitter can ban users from the platform for specific violations of its policies, its hate-speech policies are not operationalized to address the racialized, conspiratorial, Islamophobic conversations users engage in and around hashtags such as #Islamisierung. Through the simple act of adding the hashtag #Islamisierung to a Tweet and “@”ing accounts, far-right German users are able to create new narratives, networks, and realities. As I will discuss in the following chapter, these conversations are increasingly conspiratorial and mainstreamed on Twitter.

In the case of the American series of graphs, a clear transnational dimension to the visualizations appears. We see that multiple graphs visualize the network influence of Indian and Indian American far-right Hindu nationalist accounts; the most influential network actors are the Far-Right Hindu Nationalists with the highest in-degree measures. In addition, the larger node size of these accounts, as partitioned by degree, demonstrates that these accounts are the most central to the overall network structure and serve as origin sources of information. In the graph visualizations white American users are still part of the network structure, however, they are less influential—consumers not producers of Islamophobic digital content.

Furthermore, the American series of graphs visualized another critical dimension to Islamophobic digitally networked communities on Twitter—this was another Global North-South connection in the form of Nigerian Twitter users using the #Islamization hashtag to engage

in political discussion of the Buhari administration and ethnic and religious conflict in the context of Muslim and Christian Nigerians and the pro-Biafra movement within the state. While I would not classify the conversations of pro-Biafra activists and IPOB supporters in the relevant graphs as Islamophobic in the same vein as American, European, and Indian conversations, their strategic connection to former President Trump's Twitter account and the State Department's Twitter handle suggests that these activists were interested in making a global connection to a far-right American administration to operationalize and make use of the intense Christian conservatism and Islamophobic foreign policies of the Trump administration for their own aims. As such, in identifying this Global North-South connection of the graphs derived from the American corpus of Tweets, I suggest that American Islamophobia in terms of the state and foreign policy is recognized and instrumentalized not only in a nationalist American context but is being utilized in a global Christian activist context in Nigeria.

Ultimately, we see in the case of the German graphs the influence of everyday users in re-appropriating stories and content from mainstream sources for Islamophobic aims. Additionally, in examining the German graph content, several themes emerged from the central stories discussed: primarily the presence of mosques and COVID-19. These themes are discussed in the next and final chapter. In the case of the American graphs, we saw the influence of transnational Twitter networks, both the influence of Far-Right Hindu Nationalist users within the American network structures as well as the Nigerian-American connections which demonstrate the mutability of hashtags in global digital contexts and the connections between Christian Nigerians and pro-Biafra networks and the far-right American Trump administration. In the following chapter, I examine in detail several conversational themes that emerged from curating a taxonomy of users and producing Name Network Graphs, focusing on the stories and

content that appeared in user conversations. With major network actors identified in Chapter III, I have articulated a map legend, and with this discussion of structures of information transmission in Chapter IV I have outlined the contours of the map. In this final chapter subsequent chapter, I outline the pathways one can tread on when reading a map of Islamophobic digitally networked communities.



## CHAPTER V. TRAVELING ACROSS FAR-RIGHT DIGITALLY NETWORKED COMMUNITIES

### *Introduction*

In this final chapter, I outline a series of pathways one can travel when examining a map of far-right digitally networked Islamophobic digital communities. In Chapter III, I examined the different network actors that comprise these communities outlining a taxonomy of users and highlighted some emergent themes from Twitter conversations. In Chapter IV I visualized twelve Name Network graphs to identify the most influential network actors and traced how information is transmitted across networks. Chapter III and IV have served as a map legend identifying relevant players on the map and the physical terrain of this digital landscape respectively. The final part of this dissertation examines pathways or routes one can take when traversing these maps. In this chapter I return to the basic principles of feminist grounded methodology to excavate key themes as derived from articulating a series of initial codes in research memos analyzing the textual content of Tweets (Braun et al. 2019; Braun and Clarke 2006; Charmaz and Belgrave 2019; Charmaz 2006).

As Crosset, Tanner, and Campana have discussed in their trace-based methodological approach, recontextualization is a critical process of understanding far-right digital networks (2018, 941). In this chapter, I take up Crosset, Tanner, and Campana's methodological approach of analyzing user-posted content (2018, 947), specifically Tweets, and identify when possible their origin source to off-platform websites. In this sense, while still focused on Twitter as the primary platform setting, this chapter also engages with a broader digital far-right ecosystem. Examining where memes and news stories emerge from, I aim to recontextualize Islamophobic digital content posted by frequently anonymized users on Twitter thereby uncovering linkages

between far-right Twitter communities, conspiratorial news sites, political parties, and political figures. This chapter thus uncovers key themes that define Islamophobic Twitter content and connects these themes to other forms of far-right hate-speech. The key three themes that emerged from coding American and German Twitter conversations manifested as COVID-19, women and children, and conspiracies.

While these themes are distinct, they are fundamentally imbricated and related to a broader pattern of a gendered, racialized far-right anxiety over modernity, specifically the reproduction of the white or ethnic Germany family and the reproduction of Western Christian civilization. COVID-19 as a global crisis event serves as the background whereupon these anxieties are mediated and projected; specifically, where the affective images of women and children are deployed, and global conspiracies are explained and explored. These three themes, COVID-19, women and children, and conspiracy, knit together German and American Islamophobic political discourse and reveal the transnationalization of increasingly violent and historical far-right conspiracy theories that target not only Muslims but other communities such as Black Americans and Jews.

Earlier in Chapter III, I discussed how representations of women and children were deployed as “affective symbols” to mediate Islamophobic, racialized anxiety (J. Johnson 2018). In this chapter I outline specifically how user-generated content that focuses on women and veiling and children and education, while focused seemingly on contemporary issues related to COVID-19 and urban spaces, harkens back to a longer historical tradition of German and American anxiety over both the presence and visibility of Muslim women in society. Additionally, I document the rising significance of far-right German and American women in advancing racist, Islamophobic arguments under the guise of protecting women’s rights. These

discussions of women and children also feed into the theme of conspiracy which often involves women and children as affective subjects but is more clearly focused on supposed political alliances between Muslims and Leftist political parties or political and cultural elites. This theme of conspiracy that emerged in both the German and American datasets points towards a more fundamental conspiratorial turn in Germany and the United States among far-right communities. Muslim communities are only a single player within the larger context of global, far-right conspiracies which posit a linkage between Muslims, Leftists, Marxists, and Feminists as colluding to “destroy” Western civilization and the Christian hetero-patriarchal family structure.

When examined in conjunction, the thematic patterns present in the German and American Twitter content reveal two major findings. Firstly, that mainstream socially conservative beliefs emphasizing traditional gender roles and the primacy of the hetero-patriarchal family serve as the basis whereupon increasingly more extreme and Islamophobic ideological premises may be articulated, and secondly, that Islamophobic rhetoric in digital spaces is directly tied to a host of other conspiratorial beliefs ranging from suspicious critique to radical and unsubstantiated beliefs in global plots supposedly targeting Western civilization and the white or ethnic German family.

With this context laid out, I proceed with the subsequent three sections discussing major themes: COVID-19, women and children, and finally, conspiracy. I discuss the manifestation of these themes in the German and US datasets respectively beginning with the Tweet content, its text, image, meme, or new story. Following this, I identify user connections before shifting towards the practice of recontextualization—identifying, when possible, the origin source of news stories, images, memes, or other multi-medias attached to the representative Tweets. This practice of recontextualization or reconstruction of Tweet content is critical because it moves us

beyond the platform of Twitter to identify linkages to a broader far-right media ecosystem that is comprised of other platforms such as digital media outlets and blogs. While I look to Twitter as a space that facilitates the articulation of these far-right digitally networked publics (Bruns and Burgess 2011; Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández 2016), Twitter is, in one sense, merely the stage whereupon these Islamophobic digital discourse becomes presented and legible to a mainstream audience. Identifying second-party sites that originate Islamophobic digital content provides key context about the larger terrain of Islamophobic digitally networked communities. As such, I discuss in the next three subsections the thematic issues and their manifestations. To conclude, I summarize what each pathway reveals about the map of far-right Islamophobic digitally networked publics and what these routes reveal about far-right German and American conceptions of identity, race, and nation drawing attention to the uniquely national manifestations of what may be classified as an increasingly globalized form of far-right ideology defined by a shared value of Islamophobia.

*Quarantine or “Quran-time? ”: COVID-19 Crises and Mediating Islamophobic Digital Discourse*

In this section I discuss a key theme that emerged from coding the German and American datasets; COVID-19. Data collection of the #Islamization and #Islamisierung hashtags began in March of 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic for Europe and the United States. As such, the corpus of data, while focused on the topic of Islamophobic digital discourse in German and American digitally networked publics on Twitter, is indelibly framed by the on-going COVID-19 pandemic as a shared global crisis for Germans, Americans, and the entire international community. As such, discussion of COVID-19 manifested both explicitly and implicitly in the data and may be addressed in the larger context of crisis. The theme of COVID-19 in the datasets

may be grouped into two key types that are nationally specific. In the case of Germany this is the narrative that German Muslims or Muslim immigrants are being given special political treatment by an Islamophilic German government or that German Muslims and Muslim immigrants are somehow taking advantage of COVID-19 rules to “Islamize” neighborhoods and schools. In the case of the US data, COVID-19 was related to a suspicion that masking was part of an Islamic plot to enforce and encourage the practice of veiling, whereby US political groups, such as Leftists, were allied with Muslim groups to promote masking as an agent of Islamification of US society. In both of these cases, COVID-19 served as a strategic theme whereupon far-right groups were able to deploy racialized rhetoric targeting Muslim communities by focusing on a “color-blind” issue of public health.

I first discuss the case of COVID-19 in the German data. The most important recurring theme in the German dataset was an emphasis on the Muslim call to prayer, through the muezzin, during COVID-19 lockdowns as the first step towards the Islamification of German society. An example of this thematic topic comes from @BlackDo04913777, who has since been suspended but at one time had 3,515 followers. @BlackDo04913777, in a Tweet states, “*#Islamisierung im #Corona-Windschatten: Erster öffentlicher Minarett-Gesang in Marxloh [vomiting face] #Buntland [clown] <https://t.co/pKZWjqTyC1> via @jouwatch*” (BlackDo04913777 2020). This translates to, “Islamization in #Corona-Slipstream: First public minaret singing in Marxloh #Buntland.” The Tweet from @BlackDo04913777 then links out to a story from the far-right digital news publication *Journalistenwatch* or @jouwatch, which I discussed in greater detail in Chapter IV.

@BlackDo04913777 uses the same headline from the news article published on *Journalistenwatch*, “*Islamisierung im Corona-Windschatten: Erster öffentlicher Minarett-*

*Gesang in Marxloh*” rather than articulating his own original Tweet. This user, who may be classified as a micro-influencer, thus disseminates content from *Journalistenwatch* to his own network of followers, merely re-posting and re-circulating an Islamophobic news story. As such, with this example we see the way in which far-right German Islamophobic digitally networked publics are imbricated within a broader far-right German digital ecosystem, whereby a new generation of digital news sites like *Journalistenwatch* influences conversations on Twitter even when users might not necessarily be following or engaged with the publication itself (Heft et al. 2020b; 2020a).

Looking further to the article itself from *Journalistenwatch*, the piece focuses on how people in the Marxloh neighborhood of the city of Duisburg are supposedly being “Islamized,” calling for a show of solidarity with other cities by performing the Islamic call to prayer (SB 2020). The article suggests that Muslim officials are using the COVID-19 crisis as a means to encourage the call to prayer in other German cities outside of Duisburg (SB 2020). Duisburg, and the Marxhol neighborhood in particular, has been termed the “most dangerous neighborhood in Germany,” or in German parlance, a “no-go” area (Schumacher 2018). Marxhol, like many other deindustrialized Germany cities, is located in an economically depressed area populated with former industrial manufacturing buildings, however, the neighborhood has frequently been termed “dangerous” by politicians and media outlets in Germany likely due to its higher population of migrants in the area (Schumacher 2018). Elizabeth Schumacher notes that while “64 percent of its 20,000 inhabitants have what is termed a ‘migration background’” in the neighborhood, “many of its residents are second-generation immigrants who were born in Germany” (Schumacher 2018). The term “migration-background,” or *Migrationshintergrund*, is

a unique category in German immigration policy and political discourse and is used to refer to native-born Germans who have any immigration background.

This article, while predominately focused on COVID-19 and the muezzin in the multi-racial neighborhood of Duisburg demonstrates an implicit suggestion of conspiracy on the part of mosque officials to somehow take advantage of the COVID-19 situation in Germany to create a network of solidarity with other cities thereby Islamizing the greater nation. Within the article, an unnamed mosque official is quoted as saying “*Andere Moscheen in Deutschland möchten nach diesem „Vorbild“ nun ebenfalls den islamischen Gebetsruf einführen. „Dieses Projekt gibt es zur Zeit nur in Duisburg. Doch in anderen Städten könnte in Zusammenarbeit mit den Kirchen auch etwas gestartet werden“*, freut sich der Islamfunktionär über die weiteren *Islamisierungstendenzen.*” This translates to “Other mosques in Germany would like to introduce this model of Islamic call to prayer. The project is currently happening only in Duisburg. Other cities could work together with churches to get started.” The article then frames this innocuous statement as part of a sinister plot, stating that the “Islamic” official is “said [to be] pleased with the Islamization trends” (SB 2020).

In attempting to recontextualize this quote, it appears that this discussion of a solidarity initiative between mosques and churches was suggested by Hülya Ceylan, the chairwoman for the DITIB NRW-Landesverbands which is the regional association of the German organization the Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion, which translates to the Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institute for Religion. Engaging in a *de*-contextualization of this solidarity initiative, *Journalistenwatch* strips Ceylan’s comment of context and connection to a multi-faith initiative of partnering mosques and churches (IslamiQ 2020). As such, with this Tweet we see that not only are far-right German Twitter users focused on muezzins and the aural call to prayer

as a site or example of supposed Islamization of Germany society but that this long-standing far-right issue is reconstituted as particularly sinister during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The focus on COVID-19 and the call to prayer is a recurrent theme within the German dataset. The following Tweet further exemplifies this trend; “*Muezzinrufe in unserer bayerischen Nachbarstadt #Miltenberg! Liegt es an den ""Ausnahmeregelungen"" wegen des #Coronavirus? Will man heimlich den Ausnahme- zum Dauerzustand machen? NEIN ZUR #ISLAMISIERUNG!!! #Covid\_19 #CoronavirusPandemic*” (AfD Walldürn 2020). This Tweet, from a local AfD coalition group in Walldürner, @afd\_wallduern, translates to “Muezzin call in our Bavarian neighboring city #Miltenberg! Is this allowed because of ‘exceptions’ because of the #Coronavirus? Does one want to make this exceptional state permanent? NO TO #ISLAMIZATION! #Covid\_19 #CoronavirusPandemic.” This Tweet comes from an institutional network actor, this is to say the local AfD chapter in Walldürner and not a singular everyday, far-right user. This Tweet demonstrates a key trend in the German dataset, that far-right, conspiratorial, Islamophobic content does not originate necessarily organically within a far-right German Twitter public, but rather such content is produced by media organizations, political parties such as the AfD, or politicians and then amplified and re-circulated by a plethora of users as outlined in Chapter III.

Considering the content of the Tweet, @afd\_wallduern directly ties the practice of the aural call to prayer in Miltenberg to supposed exceptional circumstances during COVID-19. Like the previous Tweet, this Tweet directly ties the COVID-19 pandemic to the possible Islamization of society. The COVID-19 pandemic as a public health crisis has been defined by at times dramatic levels of governmental intervention into the public sphere and for far-right users these forms of governmental intervention are imagined as a pretense to re-order society. This focus or



critique on “exceptional” circumstances and the COVID-19 pandemic has been discussed elsewhere by scholars, such as Giorgio Agamben. Agamben has argued that the context of the pandemic has provided a social context whereby governments are able to justify and expand “exceptional measures,” noting that

the state of fear, which in recent years has diffused into individual consciousnesses and which translates into a real need for states of collective panic, for which the epidemic once again offers the ideal pretext. Therefore, in a perverse vicious circle, the limitation of freedom imposed by governments is accepted in the name of a desire for safety, which has been created by the same governments who now intervene to satisfy (Agamben 2020).

Agamben, here, emphasizes the cyclical nature of public crises and increasing encroachments on freedom. And while these far-right German Twitter users notice the same tendency towards a “state of exception” in Germany during the COVID-19 lockdowns, these users come to a different conclusion than Agamben. Instead of connecting the cyclical nature of crisis and governmental overreach to systemic crises such as capitalism and climate change in our modern society, far-right users highlight how exceptional circumstances and the limitation of freedoms or existing laws and policies are directly tied to a plot of Islamization. The individual panic or anxiety experienced by these users cannot be satisfied by the existing governmental regime but rather through a different intervention, perhaps by the return of ascendancy of an ethnonationalist government led by the AfD. This is underscored by the fact that the author of this video, the @afd\_wallduern, is part of the institutional force of the AfD.

In further considering the context of the Tweet, it is also important to note the multi-media attached to the text of the Tweet which features an image of a man articulating the call to

prayer on what appears to be a residential-commercial German street with a small group of Germans standing on the other side of the street filming. Overlaid on the video is text that states, “...are you a Muslim?” The video is sourced from the video-sharing social media company Tik Tok, which highlights the significance of cross-platform connections between Twitter and other social media sites. This emphasizes that the discussions and conversations of far-right German Twitter users can be read as manifestations of more extensive far-right networks within a broader far-right online ecosystem. As previously discussed in Chapters III and IV, many examples of far-right content from German Twitter users eminent from other platforms or websites whether this is from Tik Tok or far-right digital news websites. It is critical to highlight the origin source of this far-right digital discourse on Twitter as it reveals how for far-right German Twitter users Twitter appears to be a space of circulation and curation rather than production of original Islamophobic content.

Continuing then to another example of out-sourced content focused upon the same theme of muezzins, COVID-19, exceptional circumstances, and Duisburg is this Tweet from @anoynews which states “*#Islamisierung während #Coronakrise: Islamischer Gebetsruf schallt jetzt täglich durch #Duisburg <https://t.co/1gbsH4KPH8> #anonymousnews via @anoynews,*” which translates to “Islamization during corona-crisis: Islamic call to prayer rings daily through #Duisburg” (anonymousnews.ru 2020). As I briefly mentioned in Chapter IV, *anonymousnews.ru* is a far-right digital news platform similar in form and function to *Journalistenwatch* also examined by Heft et al. as a major circulator of far-right fringe news content (Heft et al. 2020b; 2020a). *anonymousnews.ru* describes themselves as “*Das meist gefürchtete Magazin Deutschlands. Hier finden Sie die Nachrichten und Informationen, die der politisch-mediale Komplex verschweigt*” which translates to “The most feared magazine in

Germany. Here you'll find news and information that the political-media complex hides" (anonymousnews.ru 2018).

Clearly from this biography, we see that *anonymousnews.ru* suggests that mainstream media institutions are in league with the German government or political classes to suppress and hide news and information, with *anonymousnews.ru* the supposedly intrepid outlet seeking to root out hidden secrets or corruption. *anonymousnews.ru* has been noted as a far-right digital news outlet known for publishing some of the most viral misinformation in German online spaces such as vaccine misinformation (Neumann et al. 2019, 36). Interestingly, while *anonymousnews.ru* is focused on German national news, it is formally based in Russia (Rödiger 2017, 30). Both *anonymousnews.ru* and *Journalistenwatch* on the surface appear as far-right nationalistic news organizations, however, both sites have transnational financial connections to other states, to Russia and the US respectively. Russia in particular has been noted as targeting Germany through disinformation campaigns to weaken the state and the broader EU multilateral framework (Baczynska 2021; Monsees 2020). As such, as we see with the American corpus of data, while in many respects the German far-right community on Twitter is nationalistic, it is defined by global far-right connections, even if unlike in the American case it is far-right institutions that have transnational connections and not necessarily individual users.

This particular tweet about the muezzin in Duisburg from *anonymousnews.ru* is extremely similar to Tweets discussed earlier from *Journalistenwatch* focusing on the supposed Islamization of the Marxhol neighborhood of Duisburg exemplified through the aural call to prayer. In fact, the stories from *Journalistenwatch* and *anonymousnews.ru* are identical, word for word (Erdinger 2020; SB 2020). What is interesting in this case is that the same content, literally a direct copy of the story discussed earlier in this section, is re-published and re-circulated

through *anonymousnews.ru*'s network on Twitter. One such effect of this type of amplification is that these stories from multiple outlets make it seem as though "Islamification" is widespread and a verifiable phenomenon. @anonynews has 2,263 followers (anonymousnews.ru 2018) and @jouwatch has 12,000 followers (Journalistenwatch 2012). As such, there is a large divide between @anonynews and @jouwatch in terms of follower count, but this reposting of stories across platforms highlights the significance of far-right German digital news sites in driving the conversation among far-right German Twitter users.

The re-appearance of this news story on the Duisburg muezzin also reveals the preoccupation of far-right German digitally networked communities with the specific topic of the call to prayer. This subfield that has emerged in the context of the COVID-19 theme is in fact related to longer historical conversations in Germany about the presence of Muslim communities in the nation, particularly what Katherine Pratt Ewing has noted as the ability of Muslim communities within Germany to have "the freedom...to practice Islam in publicly visible ways" (2000, 35). Ewing has noted that only recently in the 2000s have Muslim groups within Germany pushed against the "implicit Christian Protestant presence in public spaces" (2000, 35), advocating for their equal right under Germany's constitution to construct architecturally traditional mosques and perform the call to prayer in the same way churches ring bells (Ewing 2000, 35-36). The specific focus on the muezzin has been discussed in German contexts as supposedly an issue of integration and preservation of neighborhood character (Joppke 2013), however, this hyper-focus on the muezzin broadly and specifically in the context of this dataset may be more accurately read as a symbol revealing the localization of cultural conflict between ethnic Germans and Muslim immigrant communities within the state (Pott and Thieme 1999).

The question of muezzins in Germany, and the context surrounding Tweets within this dataset focused on COVID-19 and muezzins, relates ultimately to a more established imagined civilizational conflict between ethnic Germans and Muslim immigrants. The issue of muezzin is re-fashioned and re-mixed against a COVID-19 backdrop to give the issue new salience in the context of topics of social gathering and public health, but most clearly relates to Ori Schwarz has discussed as racialized contestations of aural space. Examining the contestation over muezzins in Israel, Schwarz notes that the opposition to the call to prayer is generally framed around three key points:

First, their sound is conceived of as a weapon in a territorial conflict, a ‘demonstration of ownership’. Second, muezzins allegedly disrupt the life of Jews and impair their quality of life. Third, their sound disqualifies Israel as a ‘Western and civilized country’, identifying it as part of the ‘uncivilized’ Arab Orient (2014, 2034).

The same can be said of far-right German digital discourse on the topic of muezzins whereby far-right Germans view muezzins as a threat to ethnic German possession of public spaces and signal the supposed *Überfremdung* of Germany. COVID-19, and the “states of exception” it has created in society allows for far-right German digital news outlets and far-right German users to re-frame the issue of muezzin with greater visibility and salience.

What is notable about these stories is that users do not critique public religiosity and gatherings as a potential health concern, which have been noted as key vectors for disease transmission during the pandemic (Conger, Healy, and Tompkins 2020). Rather, these far-right users and the original articles from *anonymousnews.ru* and *Journalistenwatch* take a more conspiratorial tact suggesting that “state of exception” or emergency health measures undertaken by Western governments are part and parcel of a plot to facilitate the Islamization of society

more broadly (Choukroune 2020). This emphasis on governmental take-over of freedoms and public life in Germany appears directly aligned with far-right COVID-19-deniers and anti-maskers in the United States who have publicly protested and asserted that the pandemic and governmental health restrictions, specifically masking, are part of a plot to restrict individual freedoms (E. Stewart 2020). In this sense, there appears to be an ideological overlap between the American and German far-right in considering the intersections between COVID-19 and conspiracy, that for German Twitter users, becomes illuminated when we consider the question of Islamophobia specifically.

The notion that governments somehow are in league with Muslim communities appeared in the German dataset through the following example of the New Cologne incident discussed briefly in Chapter IV. The Tweet states “*300 Muslime beteten gestern vor einer #Moschee in Berlin-#Neukölln und ignorierten die #Ausgangsbeschränkungen wegen #COVID2019. Anstatt die widerrechtliche Versammlung aufzulösen, war die Berliner Polizei mehr darauf bedacht, Passanten am Filmen zu hindern. #Islamisierung*” which translates to “300 Muslims prayed yesterday before a #Mosque in Berlin-#New Cologne and ignored the movement restrictions against COVID2019. Instead of breaking up the illegal gathering the Berlin police were more concerned with stopped passerby from filming. #Islamization.” This Tweet is from @henrykstoekl with 3,789 followers who describes himself as a “*Patriot für freie Meinungsäußerung und gegen links-grüne Mainstream-Medien*” which translates to “Patriot for free thought and against the Left-Green mainstream media” (Stöckl 2017), referring to the German Die Grünen party.

Attached to the Tweet is a video rather spatially far away from what appears to be a city square with some type of gathering. @henrykstoekl’s Tweet, while ostensibly focused on the

issue of the potential spread of COVID-19 via a religious gathering, still focuses on the German state, here the police, and some type of preferential treatment towards Muslims communities and a supposed pattern of repression of information from the broader German public. In Chapter IV, we saw how the Twitter account of the Berlin Police became a central node within Graph D in terms of the third highest in-degree measure because of constant user connection back to the Berlin Police’s Twitter handle regarding this news story.

The next examples from the COVID-19 theme discussed here are examples of digital discourse about the pandemic and Muslim communities that veer into the territory of conspiracy, however, later in this chapter I examine in greater detail the nuanced dynamics of conspiracy as its own category that transcends the COVID-19 pandemic to include a more disturbing global, plot or scheme that includes elements not related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While this next example is conspiratorial it is fundamentally and primarily about the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, this Tweet from @TacTiCOrc demonstrates this thematic intersection of COVID-19 denial and Islamophobia; “*Es gibt keine #Islamisierung und auch keine #Umvolkung. Bitte weitergehen und Mund halten. [laugh crying face] #COVID—19 #Coronakrise ist ne schöne Ablenkung,*” which translates to “There is no Islamization and also no ethnic conversion. Please go ahead and keep your mouth shut. COVID-19 #Corona crisis is great distraction” (President-Elect JanStatue of liberty 2020). In this Tweet *Umvolkung* is a Nazi-era term, similar to *Überfremdung* discussed in Chapter III. *Umvolkung* refers to a supposed process of assimilation of German peoples and the forgetting of their culture and language that has re-appeared in usage among far-right and mainstream right German political circles since the late 2010s (Faiola and Kirchner 2016). The context of the Tweet clearly suggests that COVID-19 as a global health

emergency is merely a “distraction” against on-going processes of Islamization and ethnic conversation of German society.

Other Tweets focused on COVID-19 in relation to Muslim communities, political groups, and the media in more general terms were also tinged with a similar conspiratorial flourish. For example, the Tweet “*Keiner redet mehr über das Klima, keiner redet mehr über Flüchtlinge, jetzt ist #Corona das große Thema. Nur die #Islamisierung ist ja nicht vom Tisch. Die Einwanderung von Islamisten ist nicht vom Tisch. Diese geht nämlich weiter, nur wird nicht mehr angesprochen*” which translates to “No one talks about the climate, no one talks about refugees, now #Corona is the big topic. Except Islamization is not off the table. Immigration from Islamists is not off the table. These things are still going on, except nobody talks about them anymore” (Richtungsweiser 2020a). This Tweet comes from a familiar user, @R1chtungsweiser, who falls into the Alleged Anti-Totalitarian taxonomy and illustrates a far-right preoccupation with the notion that COVID-19 is either a distraction from existing political issues or cover for a nefarious government plot.

This tweet from @LeserRalf demonstrates another more substantive critique of COVID-19 media coverage, intimating that COVID-19 is a diversion from a supposed Islamic invasion of Europe. @LeserRalf Tweets, “*Während hauptsächlich die Bevölkerung Westeuropas im #Coronawahn verblödet, mit islamistischen Tattataten und tagtäglichen Einzelfällen des Klintels unterhalten wird, läuft die illegale Einwanderungswelle von Moslems an der EU Außengrenzen auf Hochtouren weiter. #Islamisierung <https://t.co/R42f5BiZ6x>*” which translates to “While mainly the population of Western Europe is zombified by #Coronamania, with Islamic terror attacks and daily individual cases of (Klintel), the illegal immigration wave of Muslims to the EU’s borders continues at full-speed” (LeserRalf 2020). This Tweet demonstrates the



complex way in which members of far-right digitally networked Islamophobic digital publics engage with the topic of COVID-19. COVID-19 as a global and national public health crisis is a backdrop against which far-right users are able to mediate established grievances and critiques against Arab and Muslim populations, whether that is related to muezzins, EU border policies, or religion in public schooling.

These final examples I discuss in the COVID-19 thematic section from the German dataset demonstrates the culmination of far-right Islamophobic digital discourse in the context of the supposed “state of exception” and demonstrates a preview of the connections between the three themes of COVID-19, women and children, and conspiracy. This Tweet from @hainault\_of states *“Corona macht möglich, dass in deutschen Städten per Lautsprecher der Muezzin ruft Passend zum neuen Unterrichtsfach Arabisch unter #Covid19 Vorwand Trennung von Mädchen+Jungen in Schulen. Andere Schulen wollen folgen #Harburg #Islamisierung #Deutschland <https://t.co/VzHVwh7kpx> <https://t.co/n2CSKT3dpP>”* which translates to “Corona makes it possible, that in German cities over the loud-speaker the Muezzin calls. Suitable for a new Arabic subject under #Covid19. A pre-text for separating girls and boys in school. Other schools want to follow #Harburg #Islamization #Germany” (de Hainault 2020). @hainault\_of as a user is a recurring actor in terms of the taxonomy of German Twitter users. Her biography states, *“Ich bin eine von den Töchtern Europas Mein Name ist Mia, ich bin Ebba, bin Maria Wir erinnern uns an jede..bloss nicht grün. pro-sovereignty. [okay symbol] #dexit”* which translates to “I am a daughter of Europe. My name is Mia, I am Ebba, I am Maria. We remember each of us. We don’t bleed green. Pro-sovereignty. #dexit” (de Hainault 2019). Before engaging with and analyzing the content of the Tweet I draw particular attention to @hainault\_of’s biography as an original producer of this content.

@hainault\_of's biography refers to a far-right social media campaign, and a particular video "I am Mia, Maria, and Ebba" circulated by a far-right, ethnic nationalist German "feminist" group #120db (Staff 2018). I place feminist in quotes because while the group #120db classifies itself as such, the organization is aligned with far-right, xenophobic, and racist ideological positions that are not aligned with the values of mainstream feminist movements. #120db focuses on sexual harassment and violence against European women as an "imported problem," targeting male immigrants of color as inherent offenders (Gil 2018). The campaign video and phrase "I am Mia, Maria, and Ebba," refers to series of European female victims of domestic violence. Mia Valentin was killed by her ex-boyfriend, an asylum-seeker from Afghanistan (Bennhold 2018), Maria Ladenburger, a German college student, was raped and murdered by an Afghan asylum seeker (BBC News 2018a), and Ebba Akerland was a Swedish school-girl who killed in a terrorist attack when an asylum seeker from Uzbekistan drove a truck through downtown Stockholm (Sky News 2017). While each attack was horrific, these instances across the German nation and Europe are presented by #120db in their campaign video as fundamentally interconnected thereby situating Muslim male migrants as inherently violent and a threat to white European women.

To provide greater contextualization, I quote the campaign video at length here because it encapsulates an emerging trend of far-right ethnic German women re-appropriating the rhetoric of women's rights and protection from violence to advance racist and xenophobic aims. The video states:

We are not secure because you are not securing us – because you refuse to secure our borders. Because you refuse to control who is coming in. Because you refuse to deport criminals. Because you would rather censor any critique against you then take us

seriously. Because you would rather let us die, instead of admitting your errors. Because of your immigration policies, we are facing soon a majority of young men that come from archaic societies with no women's-rights. You knew that and you accepted it. You abandoned us. You sacrificed us. You are preaching feminism and women's-rights but you are the true enemy of women.

...

Mothers, women, sisters, daughters of Europe: This state will not protect you. Nobody knows who will be next. You need to stand up for yourselves. Because your name is Mia. Your Name is Maria. Your name is Ebba. They could be you. And you could be them (Staff 2018).

This campaign video verbalizes a supposed connection between Leftist or progressive political groups in Germany, and Europe more broadly, that may take pro-immigration positions, and white, European women as under violent threat due to these policies. In the “I am Mia, Maria, and Ebba” video, the #120db group posits a notion of male Muslim immigrants as coming from “archaic societies” that supposedly do not value “women’s rights,” again reprising a discursive position of civilizational conflict (Brubaker 2017). @hainault\_of, as a supporter of the #120db group, demonstrates the type of ideological mutation that distinguishes contemporary far-right German groups and individuals, in this case far-right movements become the protectors of women’s rights rather than Leftists groups or the state, a strategy used by other European far-right groups (Hafez 2014, 484).

Connecting @hainault\_of’s biography to the content of her Tweet, we see how far-right women in Germany emphasize gender, both the issue of violence against women and supposed gender equality in schools, to advance Islamophobic ethnically exclusionary arguments. By

couching her position as merely a supporter of women’s rights and a Twitter user concerned with the supposed separation of boys and girls in school, @hainault\_of situates the far-right as defending ostensibly liberal values, particularly of women and gender equality (Hafez 2014, 484). @hainault\_of’s Tweet suggesting that COVID-19 and public health policies in fact serve as the pretext for “Islamizing” German school children, when read in conjunction with her biography, thus points towards the next key theme discussed in the German data section; the instrumentalization of women and children as affective symbols within far-right Islamophobic discourse. As such, this Tweet serves as a representative example of how a belief in gendered Islamophobic conspiracies become re-purposed in the context of COVID-19.

Many German users, like their American counterparts, also engage with the topic of COVID-19 in relation to masking and veiling, whereby far-right users suggest that public health policies of mandating mask wearing in public spaces to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are in fact a guise to begin forcing the public to accept or don the veil. This is a one such theme that emerged from both the German and American datasets, suggesting a similar transnational far-right preoccupation with Islamophobic-COVID-19 conspiracy theories. This Tweet from @Conan\_IB lays out the connect thusly: “*Wahrscheinlich ist die ganze #Corona-Mundschutz-Kacke nur dazu da, dass wir uns schonmal an verhüllte Menschen gewöhnen... [man shrugging] [male symbol] #Islamisierung*” which translates to “Probably the reason for the #Corona-Mouth-guard bullshit is only to help us to get used to people who are veiled...#Islamization” from user @Conan\_IB (Conan 2020). The suggestion here is that wearing masks, which have been documented to prevent the respiratory spread of COVID-19 (Peeples 2020), is in fact part of a governmental conspiracy to make the public “accept” veiling. While in Germany in particular this debate over veiling is well-established since the 1970s when

issues of veiling and the presence of Turkish women in society became a symbol of a larger immigration debate (Chin 2007, 161), what is notable here is how this issue is re-appropriated and re-circulated on Twitter in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to attain contemporary relevance and legibility. In this case, discussion of COVID-19, masking, and veiling are proxies for a racialized discussion of Muslim communities.

This Tweet from @co\_faktor further exemplifies this discursive trend. @co\_faktor Tweets “*Und demnächst wird uns erzählt, dass es jetzt, wo wir uns alle an die Masken gewöhnt haben, auch keinen Grund mehr gibt, die Vollverschleierung abzulehnen. #Islamisierung #Covid\_19*” which translates to “And then, it will be explained to us that since we’ve all gotten used to masks, there aren’t any more reasons to reject full veiling. #Islamization. #Covid\_19” (Charlsens 2020). @co\_faktor here seems to suggest that public health masking mandates are the first towards the practice of full veiling, directly connecting the supposed process of Islamization to the COVID-19 pandemic. What is most concerning about these types of Tweets tying together COVID-19 and veiling is the assertion that the German government or political institutions are orchestrating these policies somehow to achieve the Islamification of society.

What the fundamental theme of COVID-19 tells us about Islamophobic digital discourse among German Twitter users is that there appeared to be a sincere perceived association between the German government and Muslim communities as coordinating some type of alliance or collaboration to either subvert public health guidelines, or more outlandishly, to coordinate the supposed Islamification of the state using the pandemic as a distraction or convenient “state of exception” to subvert existing laws. This suspicion of the state and Muslim immigrant communities is what defines far-right German Twitter users’ interest and focus upon the COVID-19 pandemic even as users also engage with this topic in gendered ways. In this next

section I discuss the theme of COVID-19 that emerged from the US dataset and some parallel topics that emerged, thus demonstrating a transnational overlap between German and American far-right Islamophobic ideology.

COVID-19 emerged in the US dataset as a distinctive conversational focus among far-right American Twitter users and demonstrates a reprisal of several arguments made by far-right German Twitter users focused on supposed collusion between the American government, or the Democratic Party in particular, and an undefined, global group of “Islamists” as attempting to realize the Islamization of society. This notion of conspiracy also runs through the American Tweets that engage with the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic suggesting similar forms of paranoid far-right rhetoric discursively linking German and American users

I begin with a Tweet that picks up on a similar theme of veiling and masking from the American dataset. The Tweet states, “This is what liberals are pushing for when they try to force us to wear face masks. #islamization #islam #islamisation #liberals #democrats #DemocratsAreMarxistsDestroyingAmerica #DemocratsAreDestroyingAmerica #Covid19 #WuhanVirus #ChinaVirus #ChineseVirus #Covid19Hoax #Corona <https://t.co/hIr8619pnU>” from @jeezyjeezy1 (jeezyjeezy1 2020b). @jeezyjeezy1 in their biography describes themselves as “PRO LIFE, PRO GOD, PRO GUN, MAGA & KAG. NO TO SOCIALISM! Get the UN out of the US and get the US out of the UN!” (jeezyjeezy1 2020a), clearly placing them in the category of MAGA Devotee with their support of MAGA and KAG along-side other socially conservative issues of abortion, Christianity, gun rights, and a suspicion of “socialism” as well as global multilateral organizations such as the United Nations. @jeezyjeezy1’s Tweet is a rich text to analyze as it fully and explicitly demonstrates the multiple linkages between the Democratic Party, Islamophobia, Sinophobia, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The Tweet posits that the public

health practice of wearing face masks is a tactic to supposedly Islamize American society and that this program of Islamization is desired by the allegedly “Marxist” Democratic Party.

@jeezyjeezy1’s Tweet, while rife with racism and falsehoods, draws a similar ideological pattern as the far-right German Tweets discussing masking; that the state is part of an evil plot with Marxists/Leftists and Islamists to take advantage of the “state of exception” to engage in a program of social take over. In explicating the posited far-right connection between Islam and progressive political ideologies, Mattias Ekman notes that for far-right communities “Islam is believed to be a totalitarian political ideology in the same line as fascism and communism” (2015, 1994). In this sense then, in the context of European and American far-right ideologies the actual content of Muslim or Marxist beliefs is superfluous, rather it is the perception that as a religion and political ideology adherents to Islam and Marxism believe in comparable forms of social totalitarianism, thus making them idealized allies. Conversely, the far-right conceptualizes itself as the defender of Christian, liberal Western democracy and in particular individual freedom and the white or ethnic German hetero-patriarchal family unit.

Furthermore, this association of a supposed Democratic-Marxist-Islamic plot with COVID-19 has coincided with the resurgence of Sinophobia and anti-Asian racism more broadly in the United States most clearly articulated by former President Trump’s racist labeling of the COVID-19 virus as the “Chinese Virus,” “China Virus,” or the “Kung Flu” (Hswen et al. 2021; B. Y. Lee 2020). The assertion that the COVID-19 pandemic is merely a “hoax” also connects to the German suggestion that the pandemic is a “distraction” from other issues and emphasizes the comparable strains of conspiratorial thinking that categorize both far-right German and American Twitter users.

Accompanying the text of the Tweet from @jeezyjeezy1 is a meme in the form of an image that visualizes these discursive points of conspiracy, Islamophobia, the COVID-19 pandemic, and veiling and masking.



Figure 13. The Goal of the Left? *Source:* Twitter, Aug 1, 2020. <https://twitter.com/jeezyjeezy1/statuses/1289671302391963649>.

The image Tweeted by @jeezyjeezy1 shows a direct correlation between German and American far-right associations with masks and veiling in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to visualizing transnational connections, the image is identifiable as a play on an established far-right meme born from Twitter known as “the goal of the Left.” While COVID-19 and masking define the central message of the meme tweeted by @jeezyjeezy1, the specific message of Islamophobia articulated by the image and phrase is in fact part of the far-right lexicon pre-COVID-19 and is merely re-purposed here.

The text “this is what liberals are pushing for” Tweeted by @jeezyjeezy1 is a play on the phrase, “this is the future liberals want” a phrase posted by @polNewsNetwork1 captioning an image of a drag queen and a woman in and niqab on a New York City subway (Crouch 2017).



As an ideological message the logic is rather discordant: the Left is advocating for both supposedly the conservative veiling of women and the progressive freedom of gender expression. While this critique of liberals or the more amorphous “Left” is itself fundamentally contradictory; the Left is both advocating for the oppression of women and freedom of gender expression, these clashing messages serve to highlight the far-right association of Islam and Leftist political ideologies as disrupting traditional gender roles which parallels the shifting far-right emphasis on their movement as protecting simultaneously Western modernity, women’s rights, and traditional hetero-patriarchal family values against the dissolution or re-organization of the family unit. Gender and family continually appear as the site upon which Islamophobic, anti-LGBTQIA+, and anti-Feminist discourse is mediated.

The similar phrasing and visual panels used by @jeezyjeezy1, of the goal liberals want to achieve, or the “goal of the left” refers to an “exploitable image mocking a conservative conspiracy theory which suggests that wearing facemasks during the coronavirus pandemic is part of a master plan by the political left to get women in burkas” (Adam and andcallmeshirley. 2020). The image, the same photograph Tweeted by @jeezyjeezy1, was first posted by user @pappyG45 who has since been suspended, however, in its initial incarnation the image was shared seriously among far-right users and even Republican politicians until it was re-appropriated by progressive or left-leaning users to mock the assertion that the Left is seeking to “Islamize” society (Adam and andcallmeshirley. 2020). *Figure 16* shows a play on “the goal of the left” meme in a more humorous direction, showing a woman initially wearing a face-mask but slowly turning into a cat over the course of four panels.



Figure 14. The Goal of the Left...A Radical, Totalitarian Feline Society. *Source: Know Your Meme, 2020.*  
<https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1868096-the-goal-of-the-left>

While this meme format initially appeared in the American corpus of data with @jeezyjeezy1's Tweet, as mentioned previously, this meme has been deployed by mainstream Republican politicians, thus demonstrating the mainstreaming of Islamophobic discourse in the US.

@jeezyjeezy1 may be a single MAGA Devotee user, however, the image he re-posted, went viral when Republican congressional candidate DeAnna Lorraine reposted the same image earlier in 2020 (Adam and andcallmeshirley. 2020). DeAnna Lorraine ran unsuccessfully as a Republican candidate in California's 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, the district currently represented by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (Almukhtar et al. 2020). While DeAnna Lorraine was not a candidate with a serious chance of unseating Speaker Pelosi in the Democratic dominated district, she gained incredible media attention for racist comments she posted on Twitter. Such comments included critiquing Black American rapper and singer Cardi B, or Belcalis Marlenis Almánzar, on Twitter and posting a horrifically racist comment about the presence of George Floyd's family at the Democratic National Convention as they spoke about

police violence targeting the Black community (Gifford 2020; L. Rosenberg 2021). Lorraine has also been a noted Q Anon conspiracy supporter, although she has lately distanced herself from the movement (N. Singh 2020).

In the context of this research, however, Lorraine's popularizing of the "the goal of the left" meme was meant in earnest, cementing her belief in the correlation between Islamophobia, masking, and global conspiracy. In another Tweet Lorraine further expanded upon these associations when she Tweeted about the FOX show *The Masked Singer*, a reality television show where famous judges have to guess which anonymized and masked celebrity sings a song in a competition format (Llewellyn 2021). Lorraine commented that *The Masked Singer*, which premiered in 2019, was part of a "demonic" plot led by the mainstream media to normalize mask-wearing and face coverings before the start of the pandemic to potentially Islamize society (Erwin 2020). Pushing back against her critics, Lorraine included an additional anti-Semitic statement, Tweeting, "Seriously, mock this all you want... You leftists have allowed yourself to be completely taken over and become absolute SHEEP! Try for once to think critically rather than just what the Soros-bought-and-paid-for-media shoves in your face. WAKE UP!" (Erwin 2020), referring to Hungarian-born American Jewish billionaire George Soros who is a supporter of progressive causes. Lorraine was eventually suspended from Twitter (Collins and Zadrozny 2020).

I discuss Lorraine's postings in detail to highlight the overlap between various themes in the context of the mainstreaming of far-right and extremist rhetoric in the American Republican Party that may be primarily mediated on Twitter, particularly the connection between Islamophobia, anti-Semitism with the mention of George Soros, COVID-19 denial, and conspiracy. While the focus of this chapter is not to identify the ways in which high-profile,

institutionalized users such as DeAnna Lorraine influence everyday users likes @jeezyjeezy1, the similar sharing of the same “goal of the left meme” by a Congressional Republican candidate and an everyday user illustrates how these images or memes circulate within a far-right digitally networked public and serve as affective symbols to further disseminate far-right, Islamophobic ideology against the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis, or hoax, as these groups may classify it (Crosset, Tanner, and Campana 2018, 955).

Other American Tweets focused on the topic of COVID-19 are more explicitly conspiratorial in nature and demonstrate the way in which far-right Twitter users are attached to the concept of Western civilization in crisis. For example, this Tweet from @Holger\_D69 states, “Top meme in struggle against all leftist #Evil powers: #AnticulturalMarxism #Islamization #BLM #Covid19 #LGBT #EU #UN #WHO Just place your favorite hero of our times #Bolsonaro, #Salvini, #Orban <https://t.co/KFw1E0jfAe>” (HolgerD 2020). Depicted below is the meme.



Figure 15. Top Meme Describing the Struggle for White Supremacy and Global Authoritarianism. *Source:* Twitter, July 3, 2020. [https://twitter.com/Holger\\_D69/status/1278943550848348160](https://twitter.com/Holger_D69/status/1278943550848348160).

This meme and Tweet shared by @Holger\_D69 here further demonstrates the imagined linkages in the far-right American imaginary between Muslims, “Cultural Marxists,” racial justice organizations such as Black Lives Matter, the LGBTQIA+ community, and global multilateral organizations such as the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN), classifying these institutions and communities as both Leftist and “evil powers” engaged in some type of conspiratorial alliance. Comparatively, @Holger\_D69 positions far-right authoritarian leaders including Brazilian President Jair Messias Bolsonaro, former Lega Nord Italian Deputy Minister Matteo Salvini, and Hungarian President Viktor Mihály Orbán, all with the image of Trump as “heroes” in fighting the supposedly wicked forces of Leftism. This meme, in addition to the content of the Tweet, exemplifies the centrality of civilizationalist discourse within the American far-right, of the rhetoric of a society under threat. However, this notion of society under threat and the “you” is highly exclusionary. The “you” these evil Leftists powers are coming for is a particular, gendered and raced user; white, Christian, heterosexual, and socially conservative.

This next Tweet I discuss considering COVID-19 is explicitly focused on the connection between masking and forced veiling discussed earlier in the German section. @Climatebabes Tweets “We'll see that women have to keep wearing masks while men can stop doing that. A woman is way more vulnerable as carrier of a potential child you know blah blah. Then we'll see that covid19 can waft onto hair infecting from above, and through exposed skin... #islamization #islam” (Babes 2020a). This Tweet, similar to the German Tweets discussing masking and veiling and the “goal of the left meme” suggest that masking is but a precursor towards a supposed Islamization of society that will directly affect women’s rights in a supposedly modern, Western nation-state.

The notion of Western civilization and by extension the United States as under threat is frequently framed in a transnational dimension—extending across the United States, Europe, and India. @BhushanLalKoul2, a user who may be categorized as a Far-Right Hindu Nationalist user type, Tweets “If you thought #Islamization of #Europe was just a myth made up by #right\_wing conspiracy theorists, you are dumb, deaf and blind. Here is #Rome by the way. Your beloved vacation destination. #maga #coronavirus #AfricaDay @secretnstrange9 @pdkamath @Lots\_Of\_Fun\_69 @Cold\_Peace\_ <https://t.co/SKU9B09dDa>” (BhushanLalKoul2 2020). @BhushanLalKoul2 has since been suspended and the image is no longer available, however, @BhushanLalKoul2’s text reveals a racialized conception of Muslim immigration, connecting the presence of Muslim immigrants to patterns of migration from Africa to Europe, suggesting that a higher population presence of Black Romans potentially indicates the Islamization of Italy. Tagging his post with it #maga, #coronavirus, and #AfricaDay associates African immigrants with Islamization against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this particular example, the racialization of Muslim communities is explicit. @BhushanLalKoul2, like other Far Right Hindu Nationalist accounts, acts as a connector between various far-right nationalist discourses in Europe, the United States, and India as is made visible by the accounts he tags in the body of the Tweet.

They include, firstly, @secretnstrange9, a cross-over between a MAGA Devotee and Neighborly Racist with over 15,000 followers who describes herself in her biography: “A working class hero is something to be, if you want to be a hero well just follow me - John Lennon. Fairy is my Queen. BREXIT Flag of United Kingdom- MAGA [US flag]” (Secret Strangers Wife 2019). Secondly, @pdkamath, is an account that trumpets its support of a Hindu nationalist paramilitary organization the RSS Swayamsevak (Kamath 2008), a suspended

account @Lots\_Of\_Fun\_69, and finally, @Cold\_Peace\_, which is the account of Jeff M. Smith, a research fellow specializing in South Asia at the right-wing conservative think tank the Heritage Foundation with roughly 54,000 followers (J. M. Smith 2011). These linkages or “@s” are in some ways more revealing than the content of Tweet itself, as it demonstrates in a more granular fashion how Far Right Hindu Nationalist accounts such as @BhushanLalKoul2 serve as critical connectors or bridges between various far-right actors on Twitter in circulating information. Furthermore, this example demonstrates how far-right Hindu nationalism, far-right British nationalism, and far-right American nationalism coalesce around a shared grammar and value of Islamophobia.

The next and final Tweet I discuss in relation to the appearance of the theme COVID-19 within the American dataset returns to my earlier discussion of Christian and pro-Biafran Nigerian Twitter users and further demonstrates how the global health crisis of COVID-19 becomes instrumentalized as a backdrop to on-going political and cultural societal tensions. This Tweet, from @hacfo, states “KIDNAPPING, #FORCEFUL #ISLAMIZATION AND FORCED #MARRIAGE OF #HAUSA #CHRISTIAN #GIRLS AND EVEN #MARRIED #WOMEN IS RAPIDLY INCREASING IN #NORTHERN #NIGERIA AMIDST THE #COVID-19 PANDEMIC #LOCKDOWN @wwmonitor @NigeriaCsw @cweensnigeria @JubileeCampaign @OpenDoors @ApostleGeorge” (HACFO Nigeria 2020). @hacfo, the author of the Tweet, is a Christian Hausa organization (HACFO Nigeria 2017).

This Tweet refers to the supposed kidnapping of Christian girls of the Hausa tribe in Northern Nigerian who are then forced into child marriage and religious conversion to Islam. While the Tweet appears rather alarmist, in fact journalists have documented that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lock-downs and economic hardships child marriage in

these areas in Nigeria has risen (Ontiveros 2021). While this is a documented and developing phenomenon, @hacfo directly connects individual instances of child marriage to a larger supposed program of Islamization in Nigerian society. Much like the case of far-right German Twitter users who re-appropriate factual news stories with Islamophobic framing, @hacfo re-frames factual news stories or events using Islamophobic rhetoric and language that then becomes re-circulated on the Twitter platform. This Tweet, focused specifically on COVID-19 and the forced conversion of young girls in Nigeria leads into the next section of this chapter focused on the theme of women and children in both the German and American datasets. Just as the topic of forced child marriage animated @hacfo's Tweet, women and children as affective symbols drove conversation among German and American far-right digitally networked Twitter publics.

### *Women, Children, and Gemeinschaft*

In this next section I first discuss how German far-right users engage with the topic of women and children, and the broader hetero-patriarchal family unit in the context of Islamophobic digital discourse. The instrumentalization and emphasis on women as victims of Muslim men, as previously discussed in this chapter, is well established in German and European anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim political discourse (Carroll 2017; Rettberg and Gajjala 2015). Within this dataset we witness a reoccurrence of discussions of women and children in the context of veiling and the possible threat of religious conversion and violence. What these representative Tweets will demonstrate is that German far-right Twitter users interpret and frame the threat of Islamization on both a civilization and gendered level, the site of the hetero-patriarchal family is where race, national belonging, and culture are mediated.



The first tweet I discuss that demonstrates some of these tensions comes from @NicolaCrow2 and states; “#Islamisierung: dafür wirbt die Stadtreklame mit einer Burkaträgerin in der Mitte für Vollverschleierung und Frauenunterdrückung. <https://t.co/BfDa50NWR0> via @Deutschland Kurier” which translates to “Islamization: the city commercial advertises with a burka-wearer in the city center for full veiling and women’s oppression” (Crow 2020). While the link is now broken, the handle that is quoted incorrectly, refers to @Deu\_Kurier, which is a far-right German news website financed by AfD sympathizer David Bendels (Schmelzer 2017). The German business paper *WirtschaftsWoche*, in tracking the funding of the *Deutschland-Kurier* called the paper “*Eine Mischung aus Breitbart und Bild*” which means a “mixture of *Breitbart* and *Bild*” (Schmelzer 2017), with *Breitbart* referring to an American far-right digital newspaper and *Bild* referring to a daily German tabloid. @NicolaCrow2’s linking to the publication again emphasizes the importance of far-right digital news platforms as generators of (mis)information and hate-speech.

Within the actual context of the Tweet, @NicolaCrow2 attempts to connect the practice of veiling with female oppression, representing an established, Western Islamophobic argument. Myra Macdonald summarizes this argument thusly, that in Western context “‘[t]he veil’ becomes an all-encompassing symbol of repression...[and] in its dominant association with Islam...reinforces the monocular representation of that religion” (2006, 8). In Germany specifically, discourses of veiling “implicitly [reveal] a growing fear about the place of Islam in Germany” and about immigration in the nation more broadly (Weber 2004, 33). In the context of far-right digitally networked publics, these discourses of veiling are highly explicit and go beyond critique or concern and are instead articulated with highly racialized and Islamophobic language. Just as ethnic German and white American women serve as affective symbols within

far-right discourses, German Muslim women, historically Turkish-German Muslim women, are also mediated as affective symbols to reinforce the notion of Germany as a nation defending against the supposedly regressive, oppressive cultural norms of the Eastern, Islamic world.

This next Tweet also engages with these issues of gender, civilizationalist conflict, and culture within this specific context of veiling. This Tweet from @Jani\_Depp states “#Douglas macht nun Werbung für #Frauenunterdrückung [thinking face] #Kopftuch #Hijab #Islamisierung #Islam <https://t.co/Kq2BtG220y> <https://t.co/DBQkhvle2U>” which translates to “Douglas makes an advertisement for women’s oppression. #Headscarf #Hijab #Islamization, #Islam (Big Mops Is Watching You [US flag] 2020). @Jani\_Depp’s biography is rather mundane, discussing football and beer, but interestingly their profile picture appears to be a picture of a Pug dog in front of what appears to be a Nazi flag with a banner featuring the phrase “GERSOC” which may refer to the German Society at the University of Southampton (Big Mops Is Watching You [US flag] 2011; Southampton University 2021). As such, this visual examination suggests that @Jani\_Depp is certainly affiliated with far-right German ethnic nationalism.

The image Tweeted by @Jani\_Depp is a commercial advertisement for the European clothing company Douglas featuring fashion looks for the Muslim holidays of Ramadan. The advertisement features four young women wearing stylish hijabs and headscarves for the perfect “Ramadan look.”

Home / Make-up / Beauty Stories / All About: Zuckerfest



Figure 16. Zuckerfest-Look. *Source:* DOUGLAS. May, 24, 2020. <https://www.douglas.de>.

The advertisement illustrates a trend within the fashion industry of modest style, pioneered by Muslim Hijabi influencers and fashion bloggers which has increasingly been picked up by international clothing brands looking to cater to the Muslim women's market (Abdi 2021). Amal Abdi, in reporting on the rise of Hijabi fashion notes that just as major brands such as Nike, Banana Republic, and Marks and Spencer's have included in their European offerings more modest clothing and hijabs, these forms of commercial inclusion have been protested by Islamophobic European customers (2021). The appearance of this Tweet within the German dataset and the continued emphasis on veiling as supposedly indicative of women's oppression demonstrates the continued salience of this topic within German digital publics. Abdi notes the contemporary celebration of modest and Hijabi style is imbricated within a larger cultural economy that increasingly fetishizes diverse representation as lucrative business practice; "[d]iversity...is a good business model and the hijab is the latest prop being utilised to signify representation" (Abdi 2021). For far-right German Twitter users, however, this representation of

racial and religious diversity within the sphere of women's fashion serves as a fundamental threat to the ethnic, German cultural imaginary.

Continuing onto another example that focuses on the thematic topic of women, we see that far-right German Twitter users not only re-frame mundane media images such as advertisements, arguing that they are pernicious evidence of female oppression and the possible Islamization of German women, but such users engage with explicit, Islamophobic news stories that emphasizes a broader form of civilization conflict between the West and East with European women as key victims. @PatriotPetition, in a Tweet states “#Imam von #Bergamo: „#ChristlicheFrauen sind unsere #Beute!“ <https://t.co/GHL3y2PdHu> #Islamisierung stoppen! Jetzt aktiv werden und #Petition unterzeichnen: <https://t.co/7rgW110aqt>” (PatriotPetition 2020), which translates to “#Imam from Bergamo. Christian women are our #loot. Stop Islamization! Take action now and sign our #petition.” While @PatriotPetition is now suspended, the account may be classified as a Transnational Trumpist and a news outlet, with the biography stating “#Patriot #Freedom #Family #ProLife #ProGun #ProGod #AltRight #Christianity #BigLeague #MAGA #KAG #Trump2020 #TheGreatAwakening #1A #2A [US flag] [German flag] [Austrian flag] [Swiss flag]” (PatriotPetition 2017), referencing a series of hashtags which connect to the American far-right movement, former President Trump, as well as more general ideological themes of family, anti-abortion positions, and the Christian faith with a series of flags for the USA, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

One URL included within the content of the Tweet links out to a far-right German website *Unsere Mitteleuropa* which translates to *Our Central Europe*. The article on the website details how an imam from the Bergamo region in Italy allegedly stated that “*Ungläubige Frauen, die im Dschihad (heiligen Krieg) gefangen genommen werden, gelten als Beute und*

*daher können die Mudschahedden (islamische Kämpfer) mit ihnen tun, was sie wollen*” which translates to “Infidel women, are captured in Jihad (holy war) and therefore the Mujahideen (Islamic fighters) can do whatever they want with them” (Vox News 2020). Whether or not this type of reporting is based in evidentiary fact, the effect is the same for users and readers engaging with this type of Islamophobic content; Christian, ethnic German women are framed as in threat of violation by Muslim men.

Within the comments section of *Unsere Mitteleuropa* the overlap between mainstream racialized social conservatism that emphasizes anti-immigrant and Islamophobic positions completely collapses with fascist, Neo-Nazi ideology. In a comment on the “news” story, user Rocker Tom posts his opinion about the story “*Ab ins Krematorium mit dieser Memme!!*” which translates to “Off to the crematorium with this coward!!” speaking about the imam (Tom 2020). This type of comment is particularly disturbing given that during the Holocaust, the German Third Reich murdered and burned over 6 million Jews in crematoriums in concentration camps including Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bergen-Belsen, and Buchenwald (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2020). Comments such as these show the ideological overlap between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in Germany in the microcosm of far-right digitally networked communities. Today far-right German digitally networked communities use similar forms of discursive racialization and tactics of Othering connecting historic rhetorical treatment of German Jews in the 1930s and to treatment of Muslim immigrants in the 2010s and 2020s.

The other URL included within the Tweet from @PatriotPetition links out its own far-right website called *Patriot Petition.org Wir Sind Das Volk!*, which translates to “We are the people!” The statement, while potentially generically asserting “we are the people,” is in fact highly politically charged with the particular usage of the term *Das Volk* rather than other terms

such as *Die Leute* or *Die Menschen*. *Volk*, which means people, is connected to the Nazi-era usage of the phrase *völkisch* or folkish which asserts the ethno-cultural concept of Germans as a racial, national community. Adelheid von Saldern, in discussing the concept of the *Volk* in the context of Nazi-era Germany notes that “the notion of *Volk* community and the related expressions of nostalgia for soil, *Stamm*, and, in part, blood and race became metaphors for antidemocratic feelings and an emotionalized longing for an idealized, socially harmonious past” (2004, 329). This notion of a national *Volk* is thus mediated by far-right German digital communities emphasizing contemporary forms of nostalgia for an imagined anti-democratic, racially homogenous, and socially harmonious past.

The website, *Patriot Petition.org*, clearly emphasizes these notions of racialized, reactionary nostalgia. The website states its focus on a series of values including “*Für die christlich-abendländische Kultur unseres Vaterlandes...Für Ehe und Familie...Für das Leben...Für die Freiheit...Für die Souveränität der Vaterländer und das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Völker*” which translates to “For the Christian-*abendländische* culture of our fatherland. For marriage and family. For life. For freedom. For the sovereignty the fatherland and the self-determination of the people” (PatriotPetition.org 2021). Relevant here, is the usage of the term German *Abendland*, which translates literally to “Evening land,” but refers to the historic notion of a German “Christian West” or “Occident” initially used in the context of early 20<sup>th</sup> century German-Catholic political movements but has lately been re-appropriated by far-right German and Austrian parties (Forlenza 2017; Forlenza and Turner 2019).

In addition to the explicit assertion that Europe, and Germany in particular, is an explicitly Christian cultural community, is that suggestion that feminists and members of the LGBTQIA+ community are also not part of Christian European civilization (PatriotPetition.org

2021). While the Twitter account of @PatriotPetition has since been suspended, on their website, the outlet is still actively extolling visitors to follow on Facebook, Gab, and Telegram. While @PatriotPetition emerged through the process of data scraping on Twitter, we see how far-right digital news outlets like *Patriot Petition.org* are embedded within a larger far-right ecosystem and are able to connect with users by disseminating content on other platforms with more flexible moderation policies.

In concluding this discussion of the theme of women within the German dataset before shifting to an assessment of children, we see that among far-right German digitally networked communities “gender issues are absolutely central for racist and authoritarian demands and right-wing mobilizations,” among not just far-right German political parties but also along individual users and news outlets (Berg 2019, 80). Lyn Berg, in explicating the way in which far-right German political groups both situate themselves as protectors of “women’s rights” and articulate sexist, gender reactionary positions notes that there

are two gender-specific threat images that are intended to jointly create a threat scenario for the safety of ‘our society’ or ‘our people’, which simultaneously creates two opposing gendered groups. First, a misogynist, oppressive and violent group is labelled as Muslim and immigrant and is thus characterized as foreign, non-affiliated and threatening. They form the negative image for a supposedly free, gender-equal, emancipated, liberal, ‘our German’ society, and at the same time are presented as a threat to it... Second, yet simultaneously, the externalization of misogyny, sexual violence and discrimination against “the others” allows the self-declared natives to legitimize the complete exclusion of this foreign group (2019, 86-87).

As such, Berg's analysis of the way in which far-right political parties in Germany, specifically the AfD, deploy these racialized, gendered troupes and images is also applicable to the way in which individual users engage with similar themes on Twitter. Such ideological and discursive parallels emphasize how we witness a symbiosis between the ideological positions of everyday users on the Twitter platform and institutional political actors.

I now shift to a discussion of children, another key emergent theme in the German dataset. In examining mentions of children and family in the context of far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities we are able to understand and analyze how far-right German users conceptualize the national cultural community, because as *PatriotPetition.org* outlines, the hetero-patriarchal family unit is directly conceived of as a mirror to the nation: "*Die Familie ist der Grundbestandteil des Volkes, das wiederum nichts anderes ist, als unsere 'größere Familie'*" which translates to "The family is the basic component of the people, which in turn is nothing else but our 'larger family'" (PatriotPetition.org 2021). Berg notes this ideological tactic within the specific context of Germany as "[the] ethnicist concept of 'the people' [being] conveyed through the family" (2019, 81). As such, we see the site of the family is a prism through which the German nation is both mediated and managed.

With far-right German users concerned broadly with the possible Islamization of society, in considering children this threat of Islamization manifests specifically as a threat of religious conversion of children by both Leftists and Islamists. These dynamics are exemplified by a Tweet from @real\_bachelor, who states "*Wenn Deine christliche, 7 jährige Tochter aus der Schule kommt und sagt: 'Papa, ihr betet falsch und ich möchte gerne ein Kopftuch tragen' - DANN läuft in der Schule und unserem Land etwas in die ganz, ganz falsche Richtung!! Keine Pointe. #Islamisierung*" which translates to "When your Christian, 7 year old daughter comes



home from school and says; Papa, you don't pray right and I would like to wear a headscarf" - THEN something is going very wrong in the school and our country! No point. #Islamization" (real\_bachelor 2020).

The @real\_bachelor instrumentalizes an established digital framing of "my child saying" that is frequently used by parenting influencers or "mommy bloggers," where adult parents articulate poignant phrases or comments and attribute them to their children. Clive Martin, in reporting on this cultural trend, notes that parental Twitter users have started to share "clearly fabricated child-related anecdotes," usually of a humorous variety, to increase their own attention and engagement on social media platforms (2014). However, in this particular case @real\_bachelor is not pretending to impersonate his 7-year-old child with a charming anecdote about the Tooth Fairy but rather he is using his daughter as a means through which to spread Islamophobic, anti-immigrant discourse. @real\_bachelor, through this Tweet and his likely impersonation of his daughter, draws attention to the threat of supposed Islamic conversion in Germany's public schooling system emphasizing especially the gendered aspect of this threat—not only does his daughter allegedly critique how he prays but she expresses interest in wearing a headscarf. For far-right German Twitter users these multiple themes, of discourses of veiling and the supposed threat the ethnic, German family faces in the context of an increasingly multi-racial and multi-religious society comes together through the @real\_bachelor's re-application of a memetic strategy deployed for Islamophobic, racist ends.

Continuing this focus on children and the public schooling system, far-right German Twitter users also approach these issues of children, conversion, and race utilizing the concept of the "Great Replacement." In the context of the US, the theory of the Great Replacement is a white nationalist conspiracy theory that posits that the white population of the nation is to be

“replaced” demographically with immigrants of color (Shakir 2019). During the 2017 Neo-Nazi, white supremacist “Unite the Right Rally” in Charlottesville, VA protestors chanted “Jews will not replace us” referencing the Great Replacement (Green 2017). While the Great Replacement theory is well established within American far-right circles, the conspiracy has its roots in French New Right ideology, with French writer Renaud Camus initially coining the term, spreading its popularity and salience within the context of the AfD network in Germany (Leconte 2019).

In the German context the Great Replacement as a concept is translated as *Bevölkerungsaustausch* which means population exchange. This notion of *Bevölkerungsaustausch* in the context of Muslim immigrants is directly referenced in this Tweet from @ThomasRettig10 who Tweets “*Bremen: Zu wenig Kindergartenplätze wegen der rasant steigenden Zahl von Migranten-Kindern (Weser-Kurier 26.06.20): #Bevölkerungsaustausch #Ersetzungsmigration #Migrationspakt #Resettlement #Replacement #Islamisierung #Masseneinwanderung #Massenmigration <https://t.co/qmgKC2117P>” which translates to “Bremen; too few kindergarten places because of the rising number of migrant-children. Population Exchange. Replacement migration. Migration pact. Re-settlement. Replacement. Islamization. Massive immigration. Mass migration” (Rettig 2020).*

In this Tweet, @ThomasRettig10 discusses how allegedly there are not enough kindergarten spots for ethnic German children because of the growing number of “migrant children,” which fundamentally suggests that immigrants have no place in Germany society and should not have access to the same social services as ethnic German children. The content of the Tweet includes a screen shot of news story from the newspaper *Weser-Kurier*, a regional newspaper focused on the Bremen area. The actual newspaper article discussing this lack of kindergarten spots in the Bremen area in fact does not center or even address migration, rather

in the article journalists discuss the issue as stemming from a structural lack of investment in early childhood education in the city (Faltermann 2020).

@ThomasRettig10, in framing this mainstream news story with a series of racialized, Islamophobic hashtags, “#Bevölkerungsaustausch #Ersetzungsmigration #Migrationspakt #Resettlement #Replacement #Islamisierung #Masseneinwanderung #Massenmigration,” demonstrates how far-right German discourse operates on Twitter. Users re-frame events or news stories with hashtags as modifiers to spread misleading but highly affective Islamophobic information. Suddenly the headline of the story, “*In Bremen fehlen mehr als 1000 Kita-Plätze,*” or “In Bremen there is a shortage of more than 1,000 daycare places” (Faltermann 2020), becomes transformed into evidence of the Great Replacement in Germany. @ThomasRettig10 as an individual user engages in a form of dynamic re-production and appropriation of information that becomes re-circulated across a far-right digitally networked German public.

These discussions of children and demography, while related to the larger societal structure of German society are also deeply imbricated with gendered notions of reproducing the family and nation. We see this dynamic at play here in a Tweet from @\_seiwachsam who states “*Ich frag mal die @CDU : Wie hoch wird Ihrer Zuwanderungspolitik folgend der Anteil Deutscher Staatsbürger ohne Migrationshintergrund unter 60 im Jahr 2050 sein?[thinking face] Sollten Sie vielleicht mal vom Demographen hochrechnen lassen! #Großfamilien #Islamisierung <https://t.co/jtuwHx7g0e>*” which translates to “I ask the CDU; how high will your immigration policy be when the proportion of German citizens without a migration background is under 60 in the year 2050? You should maybe ask the demographers to extrapolate it! #Bigfamily #Islamization” (Blauauge 2020). The link embedded within the Tweets goes out to an article from the mainstream German newspaper *Zeit Online*. The article discusses how immigration

may slow down Germany's aging population, particularly from other EU member states as well as from non-EU member states (ZEIT ONLINE and Reuters 2020).

While the article does deal with the topic of migration, focusing on attracting immigrants from a variety of countries, EU member states, India, and Latin America, to come work in Germany particularly in the context of an aging native German populace it does not discuss children. However, @\_seiwachsam's bracketing of the article with the hashtags #Bigfamily and #Islamization suggest a correlation between Muslim immigrants and reproduction, evidencing an alleged replacement or take-over of the native German populace through the supposed prolific fecundity of Muslim women. For the far-right, the social reproduction of a Christian, ethnic German society is tied to the physical reproduction of ethnic German children. Alexandra Minna Stern notes this particular emphasis within both American and European far-right contexts on procreation with white nationalist groups that increasingly emphasize the realm of domesticity as a means to achieve racial-political domination, Stern notes that "white nationalism can grow through procreative means, boosted by pronatalist programs" (2019). For American and European far-right groups, birthing more white children becomes a critical facet of their political mobilization with this broader topic of demography undergirded by gendered, racialized conceptions of nation, family, and domesticity.

The final Tweet I discuss in this section on children serves as a bridge to discuss the American corpus of data with its emphasis on a series of interlocking topics, conspiracy, children, and Islamophobia. @Konverter53 Tweets "*D. ist keine #Propaganda !! Es ist ein #Weckruf zum Schutz von #Kindern, da mir d. #Aufmerksamkeit zu solchen Themen zu gering ist. Im Rahmen der #Islamisierung werden mehr u. mehr, #ehemals sehr guten Kinder/Familienschutz-Gesetze, unterwandert z.B. #Polygamie u. #Kinderehe!*

<https://t.co/4qp8TAjKbp>” which translates to “D. this isn’t #propaganda. It is a wakeup call to protect children. Cause I don’t pay attention to such issues. In the context of Islamization more and more formerly very good children and family protection laws are subverted for example polygamy and child-marriage” (Konverter53 2020). The link for this Tweet is broken, but in the context of the Tweet itself we see that @Konverter53 asserts that protections against polygamy and child marriage are being subverted somehow by alleged Islamization, whereby within the context of Islam these practices are accepted—which is a strategy of the far-right to cast Islam as a regressive religion that disenfranchises women. The invocation of topics such as polygamy and child marriage are highly affective, connecting to the larger far-right argumentation that ethnic German women and children are somehow in danger from immigrant Muslim men.

What this section on the topic of women and children in the German dataset has sought to demonstrate is that just as far-right German users have engaged in Islamophobic discourse that focuses on the topic in a global and national sense, particularly against the backdrop of a the COVID-19 crisis, Islamization as a topic is mediated through stories and images of women and children that lend a particular affect to anti-immigrant, racist, Islamophobic discourse. Women and children are tied to the larger conception of the German national cultural community as both an idealized, nostalgic gender reactionary community dominated by the patriarchal heterosexual family as well as the notion of Germany as a modern, Western nation-state protecting liberal democratic values of “women’s rights.” Lyn Berg in discussing this apparent flexibility of the far-right German political agenda frames this as a form of “ethicized sexism” and emphasizes that the far-right platform is ideologically mutable to offer “a connecting space for these agendas, both in terms of its anti-feminism and familialism and in terms of the entanglement of sexism and racism, in particular anti-Muslim racism” in addition to its purported concern for

“women’s rights” (2019, 89). The most significant take-away in considering how far-right German digitally networked communities engage with the theme of women and children is how when it comes to gendered topics, the far-right in a German context has been able to position itself as both a defender of the patriarchal family and women’s rights. By weaponizing issues of violence against women committed by immigrant men and appealing to traditional, socially conservative views of gender roles and family structure held by mainstream conservatives, the German far-right connects various contradictory positions of anti-feminism, Islamophobia, and support for women’s rights.

In this next section, I outline how similar dynamics are at play within the context of the US dataset that focuses on issues of women and children. Discussions of women and children among American far-right users were a prominent topic, particularly the recurrent topic of veiling as well as a similar positioning of Muslims and Islam more broadly as somehow oppressing women, thereby positioning the West and far-right groups in particular as supposedly defending women’s rights.

In the first example I examine a hitherto underexplored intersection of Islamophobia and ecofascism, from repeat offender @Climatebabes. Ecofascism is an emergent strand of far-right ideology which connects traditional forms of white supremacy and anti-immigration sentiment, particularly concerns over demography, with an emphasis on environmentalist principles (Ong 2020, 6). In ecofascist contexts, concern for the environment is filtered through the prism of white supremacy with a desire to secure a productive landscape for future white generations. @Climatebabes Tweets, “Women gain the right to wear the hijab and view that as a victory.. #islamization <https://t.co/adeFOFTaCK>” (Babes 2020b; 2020a). @Climatebabes, like far-right German users, makes the similar argument here that veiling and the hijab are in fact oppressive

to women. As a white female user, @Climatebabes illustrates how neoliberal white feminist discourses of empowerment are deployed for white supremacist ends. Just as far-right German Islamophobic ideology is defined by its mutability and contradiction we see within the American dataset far-right Islamophobic users are categorized by a range of positions outside of traditional social conservatism. The incorporation of white “feminists” and environmentalists into far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities thus demonstrates the flexibility and dynamic nature of these groups.

The next Tweet I discuss demonstrates the mutability of far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities focusing specifically on Transatlantic far-right ideological connections between German and American Twitter users in the context of gender-based violence. Within the American corpus of Tweets there appeared Tweet dealing with Germany. @LGcommal Tweets “*NOT an #AprilFools: The German #women's magazine 'illu der Frau' (issue 04/2019) published #advice on how to treat knife|stab-wounds. Even more remarkable is the picture which makes women associate short #skirts with phalloid #danger. #BRD #Deutschland:#Germany #Islamization <https://t.co/AeBbi6uXGd>*” with a substantial Twitter following of 5,500 users (Information 2020). Alongside the Tweet @LGcommal includes an alleged screen-shot from the mainstream German women’s magazine *illu der Frau* shown in Figure 19 below.



Figure 17. Stab Wounds in Spring. *Source:* Twitter, April 1, 2020. (<https://twitter.com/LGcommal/status/1245307899095769088>)

The Tweet within the screen-shot states “good tips in women’s magazines” with *Multikulti* a phrase for multiculturalism and *Messerland* meaning “knife-land.” Reading the actual text of the article shown, it merely states that knife crimes have become more common in Germany and that self-defense may be something women should be aware of. The actual text of the article does not mention immigrants or refugees, however, as previously discussed here and in Chapter IV, far-right German users re-frame mainstream news sources through the deployment of anti-immigrant and Islamophobic hashtags.



In attempting to identify the veracity of the article within *illu der Frau*, we see that the far-right American digital news site *Breitbart* in fact ran a story discussing its publication—thus demonstrating the symbiosis between far-right German and American digital media ecosystem. In the article discussing knife attacks against women *Breitbart* states “While attacks and murders using knives have often become major headline stories — particularly those which involve migrants stabbing young German women to death, such as the cases of 15-year-old Mia in the town of Kandel in 2017 — actual reliable statistics on knife crime are sketchy at best in Germany” (Tomlinson 2019). Even as *Breitbart* reporter Chris Tomlinson recognizes that there is a lack of substantive data on knife attacks in Germany, he connects the *illu der Frau* article to the highly sensationalized case of Mia Kandel who was stabbed to death by her ex-boyfriend, an Afghan asylum seeker. Earlier in this chapter I discussed the far-right German Twitter user @hainault\_of, whose biography referenced the Mia case. We see that @LGcommal’s Tweeting of the *illu der Frau* article and *Breitbart*’s subsequent piece connecting issues of violence against women committed by immigrants in the US and Germany demonstrate a similar form of “ethnicized sexism” that defines a Transatlantic far-right (Berg 2019).

In further examining the source of the Tweet we see a series of additional transnational linkages. @LGcommal describes himself as located in Germany and highly educated; “Professional critic and mathematician. Doctorate in (a subarea of) mathematics” (Information 2018). @LGcommal Tweets in both English and German, but here uses English hashtags thus reaching an English-speaking audience on Twitter including both #Germany and #Deutschland in his Tweet and using #Islamization instead of #Islamisierung. This Tweet from @LGcommal and the resonance of the *illu der Frau* article beyond Twitter to an American news outlet *Breitbart* demonstrates the Transatlantic connections between German and American far-right

audiences. Caitlin Carroll in discussing the similar forms of racialization of immigrants and refugees in Europe and United States notes that in a European context the

myth of the immigrant rapist...reduces immigrants from a wide range of cultural, economic, and religious backgrounds to a singular entity: the violent, misogynist brown man...The myth is perpetuated through news media and political speech, especially through focused media attention on accounts of crimes committed by immigrant men and silence surrounding crimes committed by white men. In this way, the myth creates the specter of the immigrant rapist without needing to provide broader context of the problem of sexual violence, simply reducing sexual violence to a problem of ‘culture’ or ‘religion’ (2017).

As such, in identifying this *illu der Frau* example in the American corpus of Tweets we see that the similar deployment of the affective symbol of imperiled white American/ethnic German women as functioning to both justify restrictive and racially discriminatory immigration policies as well as to homogenize, racialize, and criminalize Muslim immigrants as threatening the domestic security of the nation state.

The next Tweet I discuss as a representative example of the theme of women in the American corpus of Tweets also reveals the transnationalized nature of Islamophobic digital discourse from another repeat offender and Far-Right Hindu Nationalist Twitter user @IndiaFactsOrg with over 50,000 followers (IndiaFacts 2013). @IndiaFactsOrg, as per its handle, appears to Tweet objective “facts” and in this case appears to Tweet a fact suggesting that Islamic canonical religious law, Sharia law, is an instrument to oppress women. @IndiaFactsOrg Tweets “It is indeed an unfortunate reality that Islamic Shariya law governed regions are largely successfully in resisting against the reformist calls of modern feminist

movements, writes Avinash Vasishth. #Islam #Islamization #IslamandWomen <https://t.co/VniP1vOr2p>” (IndiaFacts 2020a). @IndiaFactsOrg, using the work of one of its reporters, suggests that Sharia law is incompatible with modern feminism movements. This argumentation is specious, and, as previously discussed demonstrates the way in which Western nation states have also used concerns over “women’s rights” in the Global South to justify a series of (neo)colonial interventions (Abu-Lughod 2013). Furthermore, as feminist scholar Leila Ahmed has discussed in her work historicizing the development of Islam and gender, she notes that “...the religion’s understanding of women and gender emerges as far more ambiguous...Islam’s ethical vision...is stubbornly egalitarian, including with respect to the sexes” (L. Ahmed 1992). @IndiaFactsOrg, by situating Islam as incompatible with contemporary liberal Western democratic values such as women’s rights demonstrates this recurrent tactic of positioning Islam as hostile to women.

Shifting now to a discussion of children, we also see in the American corpus of Tweets that children are frequently invoked as symbols in need of care and saving with Muslim immigrants cast as threatening in the sense of physical or conversion harm. Discussions of children within the American corpus of Tweets also evidences a conspiratorial strain of discourse among far-right American users. These dynamics are well represented by @TheDeliaAspect with 2927 followers who Tweets “This is why parents will end up home schooling their kids/let them skip college to protect them from teachers/professors that’ll brainwash/mind program them to hate:America/Americans/it’s culture,incite racial divide/violence,promote #Socialism/#Islamization,erase/rewrite history <https://t.co/gy8bgIWP9x>” (Del!a [diamond] 2020). The @TheDeliaAspect’s Tweet is a quote Tweet above another Tweet from Newsmax correspondent @EmeraldRobinson which states, “This is the untold story of the last 30 years: the

person you hired to teach your kids about Christopher Columbus was actually a Leftist who wanted to destroy Columbus. And the rest of Western civilization too” (E. Robinson 2020).

What this micro-conversation reveals, other than the far-right linking of socialism to a supposed program of Islamization which I have discussed elsewhere in Chapter IV, is the assertion that secondary and higher education systems are also in collaboration with Leftist and Islamist groups to somehow destroy Western civilization, manipulate history, and foment civil strife by drawing attention to the documented historical realities of settler colonialism and the specific instances of genocide committed by colonizer Christopher Columbus (Tinker and Freeland 2008). Among far-right American Twitter users there is a clear sense of imagined victimization, of conservative, Christian, white communities as under threat.

Additionally, we see the American far-right homogenizing various groups under the category “Leftist” to mean progressive or left-wing political organizations, feminists, the queer community, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, Asian Americans, and Black Americans as colluding to somehow “hate” and destroy America and American culture. The connection of various groups and communities together, who share different identity positions and ideologies, suggests an unspoken assertion that America and American culture is conservative, white, Christian, and hetero-patriarchal. To be critical of these systems of power, whether from a religious, feminist, or political viewpoint is to be critical not only of the far-right American imaginary but systems of racial capitalism, hetero-patriarchy, and Christianity the far-right seeks to protect and preserve.

As I discussed in Chapter III, while American far-right critiques of political and cultural elites such as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi or George Soros are troubling, the discursive violence targeting certain communities more broadly, particularly the Muslim community in the United States, may lay the discursive groundwork for physical violence. Scholars and journalists

discussing the rise of the American far-right have emphasized the far-right as a digital phenomenon focused on cultural issues, that these Americans perceive themselves as fighting a “culture war” (Esposito 2019; Nagle 2017). Nicholas Michelsen and Pablo de Orellana in discussing the American far-right note that the “[f]ar-right assemblage is united in seeing politics as ‘down-stream from culture’ (a quote attributed to Andrew Breitbart), and as requiring struggle against the dominant forces that have captured the cultural common sense” (2020, 123), referring to Andrew Breitbart, the founder *Breitbart*, and the broader Gramscian turn of the far-right movement. While these notions of culture are critical—@TheDeliaAspect and @EmeraldRobinson’s Tweets attest to the far-right preoccupation with culture and education—it is imperative to emphasize the way in which this discursive war carried out on digital platforms has also historically been rooted in white supremacist, misogynist violence.

Matthew M. Sweeney and Arie Perliger in discussing contemporary trends of far-right violence note the increase in instances of “spontaneous” violence carried out by individuals adhering to “Racist, Anti-Federalist, and Christian Fundamentalist” ideologies (2018, 52), as we have seen, key elements of many of the American user-types I have described. Sweeney and Perliger note that in our current socio-political context instances of far-right individual spontaneous violence are not viewed by the public “as politically-motivated violence, even given their apparent targeting of a particular ethnic demographic and/or specific religious or political groups” (2018, 66). While the purpose of this dissertation is to not identify the processes of radicalization from online-adherent to far-right ideological discourse on Twitter to the enactment of physical violence, it is imperative to draw attention to the way in which far-right ideologies, particularly the emphasis on a cultural war, and the radical language used by Twitter users is inseparable from the larger historical societal context of white supremacist violence. Just as

politics may be viewed as down-stream from culture, I argue here that white supremacist ideology is downstream from social conservatism, even if it is not publicly recognized politically as such.

In further emphasizing this point, I turn to another Tweet, again from @NetizenParo, that exemplifies these trends of Islamophobia, white supremacy, and violence again mediated around the topic of children. @NetizenParo Tweets “#SaveOurDemocracies! #ProtectOurKids from #Islamization. #Stop #Jihad in #America. If you #love&#amp; #respect #America, our #flag, our #liberties u MUST #SpeakUp! [US flag] [US flag] #CallingAllPatriots #UniteToFight #StopGlobalJihad #CitizensAgainstJihad #ShariaKills #KickIlhanOut #Save #Minnesota <https://t.co/GRxtMMhkDB>” (NetizenParo 2020c). Here, @NetizenParo references a URL which links to Democratic Minnesota Governor Tim Walz awarding Qorsho Hassan, a fourth-grade teacher at Echo Park Elementary School of Leadership, Engineering and Technology, the Minnesota Teacher of the Year Award (Moskowitz Grumdahl 2021). Hassan, in addition to being an award-winning educator, is also a Somali American. @NetizenParo’s Tweet, with her reference to Hassan, as well as “Ilhan” which refers to Minnesota US Representative Ilhan Omar who is also a Somali American (Nelson 2020), suggests that the predominately white Midwestern state of Minnesota is undergoing “Islamization.”

@NetizenParo’s Tweet is focused on children, “#ProtectOurKids,” and this supposed conversion of children through the educational system but also targets Muslim women in particular as representing a religious and gendered threat. The increased visibility and representation of Muslim women who wear headscarves, such as Hassan and Omar, is emphasized in @NetizenParo’s Tweet as evidence of a coming “jihad” in American society with (white) children as victims. Furthermore, extending my previous discussion of the far-right

American national imaginary we also see that Muslims and Islam are situated as non or even anti-American, not part of the American or Midwestern community by @NetizenParo.

@NetizenParo thus articulates a racialized, exclusionary ethno-nationalist American imaginary that is also paradoxically multi-cultural and possibly multi-racial, with her emphasis on her identity as a Hindu, Indian American and far-right adherent.

Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes have discussed the incorporation of Americans of color into the MAGA movement and far-right social movements more broadly as a form of “multiculturalism of the far right” (2019). Discussing this phenomenon HoSang and Lowndes note a “tangled relationship between renewed forms of authoritarian nationalism and a masculinized version of multiculturalism, one that selectively incorporates some people of color into the nationalist framework” (2019, 103). Hosang and Lowndes in their work emphasize the particular gendered nature of this type of far-right multiculturalism, particularly among male Trump supporters of color, arguing that “[v]iolent masculinity is the identity and practice that brings together explicit racists with fascist people of color” (2019, 121). What the presence and influence of accounts such as @NetizenParo within the American corpus of Tweets suggests, is that women of color, particularly Hindu nationalists, are not only increasingly incorporated within a far-right multicultural imaginary, but that these women are leading and driving the political conversation of white racialized nationalism.

This section on the theme of women and children within the American corpus of Tweets reveals similar themes as within the German Tweets, particularly the emphasis on Muslim men as sexualized and physical threats to white American women, the preoccupation with veiling, and the salience of children and the educational system as affective symbols that mediate a fear of Islamization of society. Additionally, in the unique context of the American corpus of Tweets

I also emphasize here the importance in continuing to identify how Hindu nationalist women contribute to, influence, and lead digitally networked Islamophobic American. The influence of these network actors is critical as we also see other users emphasize an explicitly racially pure, Christian, hetero-patriarchal vision of the American national community.

Far-right American users increasingly assert white supremacist national ideologies while also featuring the involvement and influence of far-right women of color within these digital spaces. Such gendered, racialized contradictions within far-right digital spaces are a feature rather than an aberration of Islamophobic digital discourse that allows these far-right movements to mutate and incorporate an increasingly diverse groups of users. This diverse collection of users becomes implicated within the community as fighting for a highly racialized, gender reactionary concept of the “West” against what is viewed as a global cadre of conspiring, corrupt interests. In this next section I discuss in detail the dynamics of these global conspiracies and outline how Islamophobic discourse ties together a series of increasingly disturbing and bizarre conspiracy theories (re)articulated by the German and American far-right.

#### *Digital Born Conspiracies and Islamophobic Discourse*

In this section I discuss the final theme that emerged from coding the German and American corpuses of Tweets. In previous sections in this chapter, as well as in Chapters III and Chapter IV, I have briefly addressed the salience of conspiracy theories, particularly the frequent intersection of Q Anon adherents and Islamophobia and the connections between COVID-19 denial and Islamophobia. However, in this section I examine the theme of conspiracy in greater detail. This section serves as the summation of the previous two sections, and I draw particular attention to the globalized nature of conspiracy that manifested in each dataset. I first address the centrality of conspiracy within the German corpus of Tweets.



I begin with this example from @buntlandulkus, who Tweets “*Nein, bin inzwischen davon überzeugt, dass genau dass der Plan ist. Unruhe, Chaos, Morde, #BlackLivesMatter #COVID\_\_19 #FridaysForFuture #GiletsJaunes #islamisierung #IS Spaltung der Gesellschaft, jung vs. alt, schwarz vs. weiß, reich vs. arm, rechts vs. links.... etc. <https://t.co/QsmItvZAXM>*” which translates to “No, I am now convinced, that this is exactly the plan. Unrest, chaos, death #BlackLivesMatter, #COVID\_19, #FridaysForFuture #GiletsJaunes #Islamization is division of society young vs. old, black vs. white, rich vs. poor, right vs. left...etc.” (alea\_iacta\_est [German flag] 2020). The user, @buntlandulkus, is a Transnational Trumpist as indicated in the biography which states “*Freiheit macht Angst, deshalb passen sich so viele an. (M. Minder) #MGGA*” which translates to “Freedom is scary, that’s why so many adapt. (M. Minder) #MGGA” or “Make Germany Great Again” (alea\_iacta\_est [German flag] 2020). The usage of the term “plan” in the Tweet and the emphasis on a global plot is rhetoric from the Q Anon movement (Amarasingam and Argentino 2020, 42), specifically the phrase “trust the plan.”

This type of language demonstrates the global reach of American digital conspiracies. @buntlandulkus, in the Tweet, articulates a series of conspiratorial connections between the American racial justice movement #BlackLivesMatter to the COVID-19 health pandemic and also references “Gilets Jaunes” which refers to a series of French protests, the “Yellow Vest” movement, where French citizens donned yellow vests to protest the federal government raising prices on diesel and petrol which morphed into a broader anti-government demonstration (Chrisafis 2018). Additionally, @buntlandulkus mentions Fridays for Futures which is a global climate strike movement pioneered by youth climate activist Greta Thunberg in 2018 (Fridays for Future 2021). Stringing together these various events and movements, including Islamization,

together under the rubric of unrest, chaos, and death initially may appear illogical or disparate, however, they are intimately connected through far-right logics.

What connects these events, movements, and processes is the assertion by @buntlandulkus that they cause a division of society along lines of age, race, class, and political position and conversely that outside of these events, movements, and processes society is a paragon of harmony, order, and security. Far-right German Twitter users like @buntlandulkus see the presence of Muslims in German society as evidence of destabilization and connected to other progressive social movements or global events. Muslims and progressive activists are physical manifestations of a changing society. This form of “division” or conflict between various identity groups, white vs. Black or old vs. young for example, are not viewed as productive political disagreement about capitalism or existing structures of racial domination but rather an insidious form of conflict that destabilizes the forced “harmony” or dominance of certain groups in society, here of ethnic Germans.

For both far-right American and German users there is a fundamental sense of victimization that is undergirded by a belief in a global conspiracy that various groups are conspiring to steal or reduce the existing privileges of ethnic Germans and white Americans in society. Holger Marcks and Janina Pawelz in discussing this narrative trend among far-right groups in Germany note that these communities “employ myths of victimhood that serve as an emotional foundation for radical action” going on to argue that the radical action such victim narratives inspire are “fantasies of violence” that increasingly become actualized (2020, 2, 14). Notions of global conspiracy are thus a crucial form of rhetoric that defines Islamophobic digitally networked German communities. These conspiratorial narratives of victimization then create an ideological structure whereby when the “national collective [is depicted] as the victim,

[and] individuals have the chance to be heroes” (Marcks and Pawelz 2020, 14). To be a hero and “save” the nation from the grasping hands of a global cabal can mean a multitude of things for different individuals, it is beyond the scope of this project to identify the process whereby discourse translates to action, but it is important to note that this type of Islamophobic, conspiratorial language promulgated by these communities may lead to a range of actions from increased far-right political mobilizations in the form of the AfD, to engagement in increasingly radical online far-right platforms and websites, to potential instances of offline violence.

Focusing on the relationship between political activity, political parties, and global conspiracies articulated by far-right German users, we also see more nationally focused iterations of conspiracies that engage with national German parties, as I briefly discussed earlier in the section on COVID-19. Far-right German users intimate a connection or alliance between the German federal government, national political parties, and Muslim communities in some type of sinister arrangement. For example, @Vercing61979660 Tweets “#MuezzinRuf in Bielefeld trotz Gerichtsverbot: #Islamisierung hat für @spdde und @Die\_Gruenen höchste Priorität <https://t.co/jfaKCPuvpn> via @jouwatch” which translates to “The Muezzin rings in Bielefeld despite a court ban. Islamization is the highest priority for @spdee and @Die\_Gruenen” (Vercingetorix 2020), linking an article from *JournalistenWatch* and referring to two national political parties the SPD and the Die Grünen.

@Vercing61979660’s Tweet is in fact a regurgitated headline from a *JournalistenWatch* article (DM 2020). The piece discusses how the mayor of Bielefeld, who is a member of the centrist business friendly SPD party, is supportive of the call to prayer in Bielefeld referencing the solidarity initiative I discussed earlier in this chapter (DM 2020). However, in the context of this article, *Journalistenwatch* strongly emphasizes that left and center-left parties are supposedly

in support of the call to prayer because of their commitment to *Weltoffenheit* or cosmopolitanism (DM 2020). It is through this critique of multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism by far-right communities that in the German context, Muslim communities, Leftists parties, and German Jews become implicated as linked in a form of nefarious collusion. For far-right users and far-right political parties such as the AfD who espouse ethnonationalist ideological positions, any group who is does not conform to ethnic German, Christian, socially conservative positions or identity categories then becomes suspect and a potential enemy of the state. As a far-right news organization, *Journalistenwatch* is also a key propagator of these conspiratorial associations between Muslim communities in Germany and Leftist parties.

Furthermore, within the context of the article the outlet asserts most explicitly that Muslims in Germany are not aligned with supposedly German cultural values. *Journalistenwatch* states in the article that “*Während Kirchenglocken ein rein akustisches Signal ohne inhaltliche Botschaft sind, werden beim muslimischen Gebetsruf religiöse Inhalte und Botschaften verkündet, denen sich niemand entziehen kann*” which translates to “While church bells are a purely acoustic signal without meaningful message, the Muslim call to prayer contains religious message and meaning no one can escape” (DM 2020). Here, *Journalistenwatch* asserts that Christianity in German is not religious—it is rather part of the secular culture of the nation—and Islam is instead a foreign religious presence threatening the public with messages “no one can escape.” This fear of creeping cosmopolitanism in the form of Islamization is imagined as being carried out by enemies *within* the German state—the SPD and Die Grünen—and *outside*—Muslim immigrants.

In the German context, this critique or emphasis on cosmopolitanism as a political threat to the state and society is reminiscent of Nazi-era political discourse which positioned Jews as

explicitly threatening cosmopolitans seeking the “‘destruction’ of national, ethnic and religious communities” (Schoeps and Rensmann 2011, 35). More recently, Neo-Nazi parties such as the NDP have revived such anti-Semitic anti-cosmopolitan discourses (Rensmann 2011, 138). Thus, we see that historically fascist discourse is actively being re-purposed among far-right digitally networked Islamophobic German communities to target not only Jews, but Muslims, Leftist parties and a multitude of other groups whereby cosmopolitanism speaks to a notion of a more fragmented, diffuse threat to the national, ethnic, and religious imagined German community.

This next Tweet further exemplifies the way in which far-right German users increasingly implicate Leftist political parties, particularly Die Grünen, as key agents in the supposed Islamization process. The Tweet states “*Wen überrascht das noch? #Hofreiter ist wie viele #Gruene offensichtlich ein ideologisch gestörter Deutschlandhasser, der die #Islamisierung schnellstmöglich umsetzen möchte...[eye rolling face] #antonhofreiter #DieGruenen #Unterwerfung #Houellebecq #ReplacementMigration <https://t.co/208deN5Slz>*” which translates to “Who is still that surprised? Hofreiter like many Greens is likely an ideological disturbed, German-hater who wants Islamization as fast as possible. #antonheifter #TheGreens #Submission #Houellebecq #ReplacementMigration” from user @mginberlin (Right 2020). In the Tweet @mginberlin refers to Anton Hofreiter who is a politician and member of the German Die Grünen party (Deutscher Bundestag 2021). @mginberlin also mentions French author Michel Houellebecq, who has written an Islamophobic novel *Submission* (2015) that imagines an Islamized France after power is wrested from a Socialist government. Houellebecq has made comments in the past stating his opposition to Islam and has classified himself as an “Islamophobe” (Houellebecq 2015).

Interestingly, not only does @mginberlin allege that Die Grünen, and Hofreiter in particular, are somehow in a coalition to Islamize Germany, but the user suggests that Die Grünen and Hofreiter are *Deutschlandhasser* or fundamentally hate Germany. The assertion that Leftist politicians and parties in Germany are not merely part of the opposition, but that they are seeking to orchestrate the destruction of the German homeland reveals two key points about far-right German communities; firstly, that such Leftist parties are viewed as “Other” in the context of German society and secondly, that an authentic German political community does not share any ideological values or positions of the German Left. In this sense, while ostensibly this imagined, conspiratorial alliance between Leftists, Muslims, and others demonstrates the tortured logic of the far-right, these supposed linkages also reveal how far-right German Twitter users are defined by anxiety over any challenge to an ethnically homogenous, Christian, hetero-patriarchal society

This next example of a conspiratorial Tweet throws these anxieties into starker relief. @mgeurope1984 Tweets “*Es ist offensichtlich, dass das #deutsche Volk in eine #linke und #islamische Diktatur gezwungen werden soll...Schutz durch #Polizei und #Militär wären dann in der Tat überflüssig [eye rolling face] #Unterwerfung #Islamisierung #Merkel #ReplacementMigration <https://t.co/NtAibVcXvz>*” which translates to “It is obvious that the German people will be forced into a Leftist and Islamic dictatorship. Protection by the police and the military would be superfluous. #Submission #Islamization #Merkel #ReplacementMigration” (mgeurope1984 2020). Clearly, @mgeurope1984 articulates a possible fear of some sort of governmental take-over whereby Islamists and Leftists groups align themselves for total authoritarian control. Certainly, this type of assertion is not based in reality, but in the context of

far-right Islamophobic German Twitter users there is a possible imagined connection between Leftists and Muslims as collaborating enemies of the German state.

Further examining @mgeurope1984's biography, we see this purported far-right association between progressive political ideologies and Muslim communities. @mgeurope1984 describes herself thusly: "*Freigeist...pro Meinungsfreiheit, Demokratie und Rechtsstaat...contra Denkverbote, Genderisierung, Globalisierung, Islamisierung...Let's get connected!*" which translates to "Free spirit for freedom of thought, democracy, and rule of law, against restriction of thought, gender-ization, globalization, and Islamization...Let's get connected!" (Right 2017). @mgeurope1984 imagines "gender-ization," globalization, and Islamization as concurrent, equally threatening processes. The antithesis of these processes is then reactionary gender roles, resurgent nationalism, and Christian dominance.

Parsing out these contours of far-right conspiratorial associations is useful in so far as it illuminates precisely what far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities feel is under supposed threat—an imagined, ethnically homogenous, hetero-patriarchal Christian national community. Most interestingly, however, as I document in the next example detailing conspiracy is the way in which while these far-right digitally networked Islamophobic communities, while intensely nationalistic, also are defined by a transnational focus.

For example, @FrankWienand1 Tweets "*#Trump #Meinungsfreiheit #Demokratie #Sozialismus #Kommunismus #Islamisierung Niemals vergessen, wenn Präsident Trump fällt, fällt die gesamte westliche Welt in die Hände von Linksextremisten, Kommunisten und Islamisten !!!*" which translates to "*#Trump #FreedomofThought #Democracy # Socialism #Communism #Islamization Never forget when President Trump falls, the entire world falls into the hands of Leftist-extremists, Communists, and Islamists*" (FrankWienand1 2020). While this Tweet is

resplendent with meaning, what is most relevant here is the way in which @FrankWienand1 circulates these various threats—Islamization, socialism, Communism, etc.—around one figure, former President Trump as the bulwark of protection. While far-right German Twitter users are certainly nationalistic, as I discussed with the emergence of the Transnational Trumpist user, many individuals within the German dataset find Trump an inspiring figure and model their language after his MAGA rhetoric. Far-right German users also posit a global plot of Leftists, Communists, and Islamists as threatening the German national community, but it is an American President here that is viewed as the pathway to German salvation.

Far-right users engaged in traffic of transnational conspiracy theories at times explicitly confronting the claim of conspiracy arguing that their racist, Islamophobic claims are in fact grounded in reality. @teeverkoster Tweets “*Jemand der jetzt eine mögliche, nein wahrscheinliche #Islamisierung Europäischer Länder für eine #verschwörungstheorie hält ist ein Geschichts- und Realitätsleugner. Jemand der denkt: ‘Ach das kann/ wird schon nicht passieren.’ ist ein wie naives Kind.* <https://t.co/XDFXexXVic>” which translates to “Anyone who now considers it possible, no probable Islamization of European lands to be a #conspiracytheory is a denier of history and reality. No one thinks ‘oh, this can’t/won’t happen’ is really a naïve type” (Der zynische Teetrinker 2020). The link within the Tweet features a screen shot of another Tweet, reproduced here below.





Figure 18. Iran Pre-1979. *Source:* Twitter, June 27, 2020.

[https://twitter.com/JJ\\_1809/status/1276910273975259139](https://twitter.com/JJ_1809/status/1276910273975259139).

@teeverkoster, and the original poster @JJ\_1809, take vintage images and radically decontextualizes them. What is significant and affective in the context of Twitter is not the historical context of these images of the complex history of the 1979 Iranian Revolution that was initially started as a pro-democracy movement before being overtaken by religious Shia traditionalists (Moazami 2013), but that the trappings of the West and modernity are distilled into gendered fashion objects. Women without headscarves, wearing swimsuits and form fitting 70s clothing are what indicate a departure from a supposedly Islamic society. As previously discussed, women, whether ethnic German women, white American women, or here Iranian women, serve as affective symbols with which to mediate conceptions of national identity. By

drawing attention to the similar forms of fashion between Iranian women in the 1970s and contemporary German women, @JJ\_1809 and @teeverkoster attempt to suggest that Islamization is not a conspiracy but a possible future reality in Europe, simplifying and condensing the 1979 Iranian Revolution as an Islamic take-over of a modern society.

What this discussion of conspiracy within the German section of Tweets reveals is the way in which far-right German users, while couched in nationalistic frames, posit a global struggle between the Christian West and a series of forces such as Muslims and Leftists as seeking to destroy or destabilize the national, hetero-patriarchal Christian community. For far-right German users, the enemy of society may be Muslim immigrant communities, however, users also imagine state actors and even the state itself as allied with these supposedly foreign interests. This notion of besiegement, that Islamization of German society could occur, has potentially troubling consequences for the functioning of civil political discourse. In this next subsection I shift to a discussion of American engagement with the topic of conspiracy emphasizing similar thematic connections, particularly of internal enemies and global conflict transitioning with an example of a German Tweet which directly articulates a series of American conspiracy theories, German hyper-nationalism, and Islamophobia which reveals the globalization of far-right racist Islamophobic digital discourse and in particular Transatlantic German-American linkages.

@JaNuWatn Tweets *“Irgendwie gehört das alles zusammen. #Migrationspakt #Islamisierung #Antifa #BlackLivesMatterGermany #Merkel usw. Deutsch/Deutschsein/Weiße, dafür gibt es nur noch Verachtung, Hass und natürlich Geldforderungen. Jetzt sollen wir beim bezahlen noch niederknien. Und schweigen. <https://t.co/VEbO3ZBILK>”* which translates to “Somehow it all makes sense. #Migration pact #Islamization #Antifa

#BlackLivesMatterGermany #Merkel usw. German/being German/white, there is only hatred and request for money. Now we're supposed to kneel down while paying and be silent”

(JaNuWatn 2020). @JaNuWatn's Tweet includes a picture which is reproduced below in Figure 19.



Figure 19. Somehow it All Makes Sense. *Source:* Twitter, June 11, 2020.  
<https://twitter.com/JaNuWatn/status/1270962465258573825>.

The image from @JaNuWatn is a rich text that represents multiple threads of conspiracy coming together linking German and American far-right users—with Islamophobia visually undergirding half of the message or the pictures on the right. @JaNuWatn links together highly complex topics including Turkish immigration, veiling, and an assertion that Islam is a seeking to “take-

over” the globe with the rise of European multilateralism, Antifa, and racial justice movements as combining to threaten Germany.

Indeed, these hashtags, #Migrationspakt #Islamisierung #Antifa #BlackLivesMatterGermany #Merkel, illustrate how far-right communities form an understanding of the world and demonstrates what animates their feelings of victimhood. For far-right German users, immigration and Islam are fundamentally linked because of the country’s long history of Turkish immigration. Antifa and Black Lives Matter Germany, which is not a formal organization but may refer to Black German solidarity protests in the summer of 2020 (Safronova 2020), suggest a far-right German fear of “foreign” American Leftist social organizations focused on issues of race and racial justice—supposedly imported problems in an imagined ethnically homogenous German society. Finally, hashtagging #Merkel emphasizes the persistent far-right German suspicion of the German state as collaborating with outside interests.

As an example that serves as a transition between the American and German datasets, this Tweet and the meme embedded within emphasizes the glocal way in which conspiracy is mediated by far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities—it is necessary to both couch Islamophobic, conspiratorial claims within a global context to heighten the affective threat, and conversely, it is critical to situate these amorphous conspiracies within a local national context to become legible to other nationalistic users. What is key here in transitioning to the American dataset is the way in which American far-right conspiracies—particularly the Antifa conspiracy and the allegation that the #BlackLivesMatter protests were covers for Leftist forms of destruction and looting—have become legible and salient to a German audience in the context of Muslim and Turkish immigration. As such, we see the transnationalization of far-right conspiracy theories and the transmutation or globalization of race as well as forms of nationalist

racism within these comparable digitally networked communities. In this next section I further discuss the theme of American conspiracy theories.

Earlier, I outlined the prevalence of the Q Anon conspiracy theory supported by many users that posits Democrats, Leftists, elites, and other figures are part of a global cabal that engages in sexual abuse and blood-drinking of children in Chapter III. As such, in this section I focus primarily on conspiracy theories that diverge from the dominant Q Anon narrative and reveal other strains of racist, Islamophobic, conspiratorial thinking. For far-right American users what has emerged from the data is a sustained focus on former President Barack and First Lady Michelle Obama as involved in some type of global conspiracy, explicitly to Islamize the country. Additionally, we see frequent anti-Semitic claims that George Soros is part of a global cabal, and more broadly, claims that Islamization and destabilization is occurring elsewhere in the globe but coming the US.

For these far-right American users, like their German counterparts, the threat to the imagined Christian, conservative, white community is both external and internal, with Democratic figures and groups imagined as conspiring to threaten the nation internally, and external “foreign” groups such as Muslims or Jews collaborating from the outside. As I previously discussed in the German conspiracy section, this type of emphasis on internal and external enemies feeds into the far-right ideological situation of victimhood narratives which undergird fantasies and actualizations of violence (Marcks and Pawelz 2020). In the United States specifically, we have seen adherents of the Q Anon conspiracy theory imagining themselves as heroes to abused and forgotten children commit acts of violence from assault, to bomb threats, to kidnapping, to murder (Beckett 2020). As such, when considering the theme of Islamophobic American conspiracy theories as the conclusion of the chapter, perhaps nowhere

else is the specter of material violence so visceral. Here, digital discourse may become the incubator for future violence.

The first example I address within this section also connects the United States and Germany, although here from an American user. @Alam\_Chaudry Tweets “Another propaganda film at best. There is no positive spin to a story born out of conspiracy to unleash #Islamization project in the Middle East and subsequent failure led to #Refugee crisis that only undermined the long-term survival of Europe. #Merkel is an Obama enabler. <https://t.co/AFsq5s0GA2>” which then links to an article in the journal *Foreign Policy* about the production of a film about the refugee movement in Europe featuring German Chancellor Angela Merkel as a “super-hero” in the film (Chaudry 2020; Hockenos 2020).

In this Tweet, @Alam\_Chaudry critiques the German made-for-television film as “propaganda” claiming that the arrival of refugees in Europe as a result of the Syrian Civil War as well as state destabilization in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which were caused by American invasions and foreign policy interventions post 9/11 (Nester 2012), somehow threatens survival of Europe. @Alam\_Chaudry again emphasizes the way in which Americans, like German users, imagine conspiracies as defined by global dimensions with a connection between Merkel and Obama. The emphasis on Obama demonstrates the enduring potency of the racist, Islamophobic conspiracy theory that Obama was both a Muslim and immigrant that dogged the former President during his campaigns and was encouraged by former President Trump as he called for the release of the Obama’s “real” birth certificate (Moody and Holmes 2015). The mention of Obama in this Tweet from @Alam\_Chaudry emphasizes the fundamental association within the American far-right between xenophobia, anti-Black racism, and Islamophobia that have become more virulent and increasingly transnationalized as demonstrated in this chapter.



For American users, Islamophobic discourse is not only defined by nationalistic sentiment and a xenophobic, racist emphasis on the United States as a white Christian country but also by a sense of civilizational threat. Democratic politicians of color, yesterday Obama and today Representative Ilhan Omar, are imagined as internal threats that seek to enact not only a new, multi-racial American national community but to secure a literal “New World Order” where Islam is theorized as a totalitarian system of government (El-Shall 2018).

@Alam\_Chaudry further expands upon this conspiracy Tweeting “@TomFitton @GenFlynn #Obama's #Islamization project to remake #MiddleEast in his father's image was the most fundamental challenge he mounted against modernization of #Islam and [US flag]. An #Islamist #MiddleEast led by #Iran was the same creepy misadventure #Nixon took to #China! Both are hell for [US flag]!” (Chaudry 2020), here Tweeting at conservative media personality and author Tom Fitton who is President of the right-wing Judicial Watch group and former National Security Advisor and Q Anon celebrity Michael Flynn (Choi 2020; M. Rosenberg 2021).

@Alam\_Chaudry suggests Obama is involved in a plot to somehow “remake” the Middle East.

Other users posit similar conspiracies regarding former president Barack Obama.

@Kovichinda Tweets “The price of taking in these Muslim refugees - we all get ‘fukked’, including President Trump. LOL. Just listen to them! By the way, Obama deliberately took in as many Muslims from Africa as he could. #Islamization <https://t.co/ea4Hm9Ot97>” (Kovichinda 2020). @Kovichinda, like @Alam\_Chaudry, gestures towards the racist, Islamophobic birther conspiracy theory that former President Obama is secretly a Muslim aiming to remake American society, and we see that Islamophobia and anti-Black racism are fundamentally imbricated for these users as they racialize Muslim immigrants. @Kovichinda’s Tweet is not only representative of the conspiratorial strain of American far-right digital discourse but also

illustrates the influence of far-right American women of color within this digital landscape.

@Kovichinda describes herself as a “Minority woman. Christian. Love America & her people. #MAGA #America1st. Support @POTUS from day 1#TrumpCountry. No Dating. No private message please!” with over 9,000 followers (Kovichinda 2013). Users such as @Kovichinda, classified as MAGA Devotees, articulate their support of President Trump as a supposed bulwark against Islamization and demonstrate the emergence of a far-right multi-racial coalition manifesting on Twitter.

This supposed project of Islamization of the United States as led by Barack Obama also implicates former First Lady Michelle Obama, with users such as @jumagoe positing a truly outlandish conspiratorial connection between Michelle Obama, Saudi Arabia, and the “New World Order:” “Is @MichelleObama an asset of the Saudis too? Are you all going to continue with the #Islamization of America? Are you going to decimate the United States Armed Forces as you did before? Are you going to embrace the NWO & perhaps having her to be the World President?” (Gomez 2020). Here, @jumagoe references the New World Order which has its roots in the far-right American anti-Communist John Birch Society which posited that the United Nations, controlled by a shadowy group of “Insiders,” would one day seize power from militaries and sovereign national governments to establish a “new world order” (C. J. Stewart 2002). With this example, we see the near culmination of various thematic strands within the American dataset, historic conspiracies, misogynoir, Islamophobia, and a fear of multilateral institutions.

The last Tweet discussed in this conspiracy section in the American dataset demonstrates the contemporary connectivity between these themes and emphasizes how in identifying and tracking Islamophobic discourse we see that Islamophobic hate-speech is fundamentally defined



by a constellation of other far-right ideologies including xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism. Furthermore, we see a key user-type who circulates Islamophobic discourse, a user who supports gender reactionary ideology, Christianity, Trump, and conspiracies with an affiliation with for authoritarianism as a political solution. @ohknowudidntt Tweets “Who is behind mass migration? Who is behind the #MassiveRiots in the USA? Who is behind #Islamization? Who is behind the #destabilization of the whole world? Who is behind the #climatecrap? Here is your answer: Mr. George Soros <https://t.co/FaQBzSxfCR>” (ohknowudidntt1 2020).

@ohknowudidntt1’s Tweet suggests a connection between immigration, “riots,” likely referencing the 2020 summer racial justice protests sparked by the police murder of George Floyd that were branded by conservative media as “riots” (Mansoor 2020), Islamization, and the general COVID-19 destabilization with a supposed conspiracy of climate change. These seemingly disparate events and processes are imagined as orchestrated by George Soros. For far-right American users Islamophobia, racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism come together through the form of global conspiracy that imagines Muslims, immigrants, Jews, and Black Americans as allegedly conspiring to destabilize the American state—with the most fundamental danger to this imagined Christian, hetero-patriarchal state being a series of united multiracial groups and communities.

@ohknowudidntt1 describes themselves as “Chris[cross]ian[US flag]#Q #TRUMP2020 [US flag] #IFBP #KAG #MAGA [US flag] #PRO1a2aLife #SaveTheChildren #MagaRollerCoaster #MagaPatriotUnite [star] [star] [star] #GenFlynn #VoteRed #DigitalSoldier” (ohknowudidntt1 2015). We see here that the type of user who produces and curates Islamophobic digital discourse is, as @ohknowudidntt1 states, religious, Trump supporting, and supportive of anti-abortion positions and gender reactionary roles. These users

are concerned primarily with preserving or realizing an idealized, nostalgic white nation state. For these users, these seeds of social conservatism grow into a support of a violent, conspiratorial, white supremacist worldview that must be realized through conflict that is a form of discursive, cultural warfare—with everyday Twitter users becoming digital soldiers.

This phrase “digital soldier” specifically refers to supporters of the Q Anon movement, but here I extend the utility of this phrase and suggest that all users within the American dataset may be viewed as digital soldiers—drawing back to the notion of civilizationalist conflict of the medieval Crusades to define how far-right American users imagine a contemporary conflict between an alleged non-white regressive, Muslim East and a liberal, democratic or socially conservative traditional Christian, white West (Brubaker 2017). I conclude with this topic of digital soldiers as foregrounding the significance and relevance of this dissertation in considering the transnationalization of Islamophobic digital discourse in the next section and subsequent chapter.

#### *Conclusions: Digital Soldiers and Cultural Warfare*

This chapter has presented a series of major themes embedded within the German and American datasets that included a focus on COVID-19, gendered symbols, and global and national conspiracies. These various themes can be understood as various pathways with which to conceptualize the relation between various users presented in Chapter III as well as a way in which to read the SNA visualizations produced in Chapter IV. This chapter has examined a series of recurring themes that emphasize both the globalized nature of Islamophobic discourse as well its roots in other historic forms of far-right ideologies and narratives. Additionally, this chapter has discussed the way in which Islamophobia discourse is deeply imbricated with other forms of hate-speech targeting groups including Black and Jewish communities.

Considering a summary of these themes in tandem, we see that COVID-19 as a background theme informed the way in which German and American far-right, Islamophobic digitally networked communities mediated the concept of a state of exception whereby internal and external “enemies” colluded to realize the Islamization and authoritarian take-over of society with Christian, socially conservative white or ethnic Germans the victims of this imagined conspiracy. Most disturbingly, in the United States we see an overlap between fringe far-right digital conspiracies and the Republican Party whereby Islamophobic COVID-19 conspiracies are re-circulated and amplified on the platform Twitter.

Additionally, for both German and American Islamophobic digitally networked communities, women and children serve as critical affective symbols that motivate online discussion. German women and children are seen as in need of protection from religious conversion and from the supposed sexualized violence perpetuated by male Muslim migrants of color. This thread is taken up by far-right American users who become fixated on transnational cases of violence against women whereby far-right political groups are situated as the true defenders of both liberal democratic values of “women’s rights” and conversely patriarchal protectors.

Ultimately, this notion of conspiracy is incredibly potent among both German and American far-right users. German and American users imagine a conspiracy between national political parties, such as the Die Grünen and the Democratic Party, as plotting with a series of shadowy forces such as Marxists and “Islamists” to Islamize various nations and Western society more broadly. Within this thematic focus we see Muslim communities becoming connected to a series of other political groups and communities, Leftists, Jews, immigrants, and the Black community, as all sharing a stake in destabilizing white, Christian, hetero-patriarchal society.

This emphasis on global conspiracy undergirds how German and American Islamophobic digitally networked communities, while mired within far-right nationalist political identifications, are engaged within a transnationalized Islamophobic network community increasingly defined by mutable conspiracies that are re-purposed to speak to the particular anxieties of the user.

These beliefs in conspiracy, of a society and family unit under threat suggests future confrontations between these “digital soldiers” in an increasingly virulent culture war. Additionally, we see that Islamophobic digital discourse is mutable and flexible—while the fundamental kernel may be a belief in a white or ethnically homogenous Christian nation-state—far-right Islamophobic Twitter users are adept at instrumentalizing new arguments, positions, and symbols to alternatively appeal to socially conservative users as well as white or ethnic German and American “feminists” to build a coalition.

## CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION: NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET?

In this last and final chapter, I offer some concluding thoughts on the research questions that drove this dissertation project: how do far-right German and American digitally networked Islamophobic communities frame, discuss, and imagine Arab and Muslim immigration and what can these digitally networked communities tell us about mediations of national cultural identity in Germany and the United States in an age of crisis? In this work I have attempted to explore the parallel crises of racialized nationalism in Germany and the United States by focusing on Arab and Muslim communities as key categories through which the far-right has policed and constructed the boundaries of the national cultural imaginary.

To explore the limits of the German and American national cultural community I have scraped data following two hashtags, #Islamization and #Islamisierung, over a six-month period to amass an archive of Islamophobic hate-speech utilized by everyday German and American Twitter users. By employing a feminist grounded theory methodology involving coding, memoing, and allowing themes to emerge from the data (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz and Belgrave 2019; Wuest 1995), I have engaged in a taxonomical classification of user biographies, produced a series of Name Network Visualizations tracking information transmission and network structures, and identified major communicative themes through a close textual reading of Tweet content. Adapting a trace-based approach (Crosset, Tanner, and Campana 2018), I have taken these hashtags, #Islamization and #Islamisierung, as initial digital objects to be examined in multi-scalar ways (Murthy 2017). As such, I have sought to view this dissertation project as an exercise in mapping. Chapter III serves as the map legend, or key to identify various users who are visualized in Chapter IV on the terrain of the map through social network visualizations.

Chapter V then serves as the routes or pathways one can travel along the map of far-right German and American digitally networked publics to reach a series of ideological destinations.

This project has illuminated the contours and content of far-right Islamophobic digital communities on Twitter drawing particular attention to everyday Twitter users rather than politicians, influencers, or established political parties. By tracking hashtags, I have entered in a specific “techno-social” space of far-right German and American Islamophobic discourse (Shahin and Dai 2019). By scraping the #Islamization and #Islamisierung hashtags rather than beginning with an identification of users, I have revealed a complex and diverse collection of users that comprise Islamophobic digitally networked communities who may not have been immediately visible as implicated within these far-right networks.

In classifying, analyzing, and describing these banal users and the mundane forms of hate-speech collected under the #Islamization and #Islamisierung hashtags, I have identified the way in which German and American far-right communities frame Muslim communities as foreign Others who are seeking to destabilize an imagined white or ethnic German, Christian, socially conservative yet liberal democratic society through the supposed importation of regressive cultural norms. Far-right digitally networked Islamophobic communities view Arab and Muslim groups as harbingers of crisis on local, national, and global levels, as figures which threaten the existing hegemonic position of white and ethnic German groups. Conversely, these Islamophobic digitally networked communities reveal that German and American national cultural identity is imagined and defined by fantasies of racial and ethnic homogeneity, Christianity, and reactionary gender roles even as societies grow increasingly diverse. Furthermore, I find that for far-right German and American users, notions of German and American national cultural identity are mediated and (re)constructed by Transatlantic and

transnational digital networks—nostalgic, racialized notions of the German and American national cultural community involve a cast of users from continental Europe to Nigeria, to India.

I have tracked how far-right digitally networked communities imagine Muslim communities as part of a nefarious alliance with other racial or ethnic minority groups, progressive political organizations, and multilateral institutions. Far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities are fundamentally ideologically inconsistent—they view Muslim communities as both inherently threatening liberal democratic values as well as aligned with progressive political organizations and parties such as #BlackLivesMatter or Die Grünen. Conversely, as I have discussed in Chapters IV and V, far-right German and American networked communities then imagine themselves as both defenders of Western liberal democracy, particularly regarding issues of violence against women, and preservers of the gender traditionalist hetero-patriarchal family unit.

As I have explored through the examination of the networked selves of these users in Chapter III (Papacharissi 2010), German and American users define themselves and the boundaries of the national cultural community by a series of descriptions; Christianity, gender traditionalism, social conservatism, racial or ethnic exclusion, and a support for MAGA-style politics, and increasingly, conspiracy theories. For these users, Muslim communities are not merely the religious and racial antithesis of the racially exclusionary German and American community, but rather Muslims and a host of other groups including progressives, Jews, and Black Americans or Germans are conceived of as literal enemies of the state—or as @mginberlin has stated in the case of Germany, “*Deutschlandhasser*” or German-haters (Right 2020). For far-right German and American Islamophobic digitally networked communities, not only are Muslims imagined as outside the boundaries of the national cultural and racial

community, but they are also imagined as taking part in conspiratorial plots to destroy and take-over German and American society.

Most significantly, I have traced how the users who imagine this type of civilizational, racial, cultural take-over of society increasingly constitute a transnational, multi-racial collective. While I have emphasized the Transatlantic connections between American and German far-right Twitter users, particularly the transmission of MAGA politics and conspiracy theories between the two national publics, I have also documented the emergence of Global North-South connections among far-right Islamophobic users. Far-right Hindu nationalist Indian and Indian American users are increasingly the most influential network actors within American Islamophobic digital publics, driving conversation and producing content that is consumed by far-right white American users. The influence of female Indian and Indian American users in particular, when compared to the appearance of far-right German “feminists,” suggests not only that far-right Islamophobic ideology is increasingly transnationalized but that these seemingly gender traditionalist and racially exclusionary communities are mutable—making space for and incorporating women who also find narratives of racialized, Islamophobic nationalism resonant. As such, I have sought to emphasize that far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities, while fundamentally exclusionary and ideologically radical, are also flexible, inconsistent, and possibly inclusive in the sense that we may be witnessing the growth of a *transnational* far-right multi-racial coalition defined by a shared value of Islamophobia in addition to growing *national* far-right multi-racial coalitions (D. M. HoSang and Lowndes 2019).

While this dissertation has focused on two initial national “ad hoc” publics of Germany and the United States on Twitter (Bruns and Burgess 2011), documenting the mediation and manifestation of racialized nationalism, this study has emphasized the significance of the



transnationalization of Islamophobic digital discourse that links together far-right German and American users to not only other far-right European digitally networked publics, but to far-right Hindu nationalists in India and pro-Biafran and Christian Nigerian groups as well. Islamophobic digitally networked communities, while intensely nationalistic, and even mired within East-West civilizationist rhetoric and conspiracy (Brubaker 2017), are themselves global networks.

The parallel crises of racialized nationalism in Germany and the United States as mediated and made visible via the #Islamization and #Islamisierung hashtags is both a global and platformed crisis linking Global North and South. In her innovative research tracking of the far-right Hindu nationalist diaspora in the US and Great Britain, Eviane Cheng Leidig argues that “global Islamophobic tropes can operate and adapt to local contexts, and ultimately, bolster support for populist radical right ideology in the West” (2019, 79). This dissertation has emphasized that these global Islamophobic tropes not only bolster support for far-right movements in the Western nations of Germany and the United States, but that this form of racialized digital discourse bolsters support for anti-Muslim political movements in the East or Global South as well—in India and Nigeria. In this way, by examining an archive of the hashtags #Islamization and #Islamisierung from multiple vantage points—examining everyday users engaged with these hashtags, visualizing the network structures of these Islamophobic communities, and analyzing the thematic content attached to these phrases—I have sought to triangulate my analysis on Germany and the United States as comparative states in crisis. However, I conclude here that these case studies instead serve as a window into the way in which resurgent racialized nationalism is in fact defined by processes of transnationalization and a platformed media ecosystem that encourages the radical decontextualization of information and user-reframing of content across state boundaries (Couldry and Kallinikos 2017).

I have emphasized that the production of Islamophobic digital discourse on Twitter is a fragmented and complex process. In the context of American users, it is a process dominated by Indian and Indian American far-right Hindu nationalists who serve as major network influencers. In the case of German networks, while Islamophobic digital discourse is produced by more traditional if fringe media outlets such as *Journalistenwatch* individual users still are the major origin sources in terms of framing news articles and information with a series of racialized hashtags obscuring and decontextualizing information. Much of the Islamophobic content that manifests within German Twitter networks in particular is not produced by Twitter users but originates from a series of secondary websites whereby news stories or blog posts are re-circulated on Twitter to reach a broader public. In this way, while everyday Twitter users in both German and American far-right digitally networked communities do not boast high in-degree measures in terms of influence within networks, these users share a distributed power, re-sharing and disseminating Islamophobic content across the platform. In particular, in Chapter III I noted the way in which single instances of content, often produced by Far-Right Hindu Nationalist user-types were exchanged and shared by far-right white users with larger follower counts. Furthermore, as I have outlined in Chapter IV, deploying the #Islamization and #Islamisierung hashtags to new stories or Tweets from governmental or institutional sources, users instantaneously created conspiratorial, Islamophobic content without necessarily producing any texts themselves. The *Weser-Kurier* article on vanishing kindergarten places in Bremen or the Qorsho Hassan teacher award demonstrates this process of radical decontextualization on Twitter that invites the (re)production of Islamophobic hate-speech.

Considering the content of the conversations from the scraped data, what I have attempted to emphasize in this project is that contemporary far-right Islamophobic digitally

networked communities, while undergoing processes of transnationalization and engaging with the platformed affordances of Twitter to produce Islamophobic content with democratized ease, also traffic in historical, racist troupes that are repurposed for our current moment of global crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. In Chapter V I have outlined three comparative themes that defined the German and American datasets: COVID-19, women and children, and conspiracy.

Far-right German and American Twitter users when discussing and framing Arab and Muslim communities engage with a series of established topics such as veiling, the presence of muezzins, supposed issues of violence against women., etc. The phenomenon of COVID-19 has given new relevance to these topics particularly as religious gatherings became a public health issue and debates over masking, especially in the United States, were highly politically charged and imagined by far-right users as a cover for forced veiling of the population. Ultimately, as I outlined in Chapter V what thematically defines these far-right digitally networked communities is a shared belief in both national and global conspiracy of which Muslim communities are key actors, whether that is the Q Anon conspiracy theory or a more complex belief in the conspiracy that the German and American states are colluding with Muslims to take advantage of the “state of exception” COVID-19 has inaugurated to Islamize society (Agamben 2020; Planck 2020).

In Chapter V I have outlined how Islamophobia links together a series of increasingly bizarre yet historical far-right conspiracy theories that not only implicate Muslims as allegedly threatening white, Christian, Western society, but also imagines Muslims as partnering with various national progressive political parties or racial and ethnic groups to destabilize society. While Muslims, #BlackLivesMatter, “Antifa,” George Soros, and the World Health Organization (WHO) ostensibly have differing goals, in the far-right national imaginary these groups, individuals, and organizations are positing as conspiring to destroy Western society—in so far as

this means destabilizing the existing systems of power of nationalism, hetero-patriarchy, and white supremacy that far-right groups seek to uphold. For far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities Muslims are the external enemies of the state who are supposedly collaborating with internal enemies— Die Grünen, the CDU, the SPD, or the Democratic Party.

While this dissertation is mired within digital culture—digital data, digital networks, and digital discourse—I have sought to chart far-right German and American Islamophobic digitally networked communities with an eye towards tangible usable futures, examining how national identity and the boundaries of the national cultural imaginary are increasingly mediated, constructed, and policed on social media platforms such as Twitter that serve as (fragmented) virtual public spheres (Bennett and Pfetsch 2018). In mapping and analyzing the landscape of these far-right Islamophobic communities I have documented the emergence of a usable future that is defined by the emergence of transnationalized Islamophobic networks that feature multi-racial coalitions and forms of ideological inconsistency that strengthen rather than dilute these coalitions. Far-right Islamophobic networks, as much as I classify them as “American” or “German,” are fundamentally global and mediate fantasies of racialized nationalism and civilizationalist conflict in connection with international partners in India and Nigeria.

These digital soldiers may be seeking to “Make America Great Again” or “Make Germany Great Again,” but they are linked by a shared belief in a seismic, civilizationalist global struggle against Muslim communities as the material manifestations of various processes of EU integration, globalization, demographic change, and the growth of progressive politics. Rogers Brubaker in considering the manifestation of civilizationalist conflict notes that this type of discourse “refers to a different kind of imagined community, located at a different level of cultural and political space, than national discourse...civilizationism does not supersede

nationalism; it combines with nationalism” (2017, 1211). As such, the usable future I have posited for Germany and the United States is defined by the articulation of a different kind of imagined cultural community, one that combines nationalist political impulses with an increasingly real far-right transnational multi-racial Islamophobic coalition that posits Western Europe, the United States, India, and some pro-Biafran, Christian Nigerian communities as allied in opposition to Muslim communities as either immigrants or native citizens.

I initially framed this dissertation project using the concept of crisis to explore racialized nationalism, examining how far-right digital networks framed, imagined, and discussed Arab and Muslim communities to illuminate how they viewed themselves and the boundaries of nation. What I have argued here in the conclusion is that the crisis of racialized nationalism may in fact increasingly be conceptualized as a crisis that is civilizationalist in nature. As such, I draw attention to two final forms of crisis that may be most significant when considering the material implications of my study of far-right digitally networked Islamophobic digital communities: first, that both German and American far-right communities increasingly imagine both their respective nations and the white or ethnic German hetero-patriarchal family as crisis, in peril and threatened by Muslim communities. These fantasies of victimization that I have documented here may increasingly lay the groundwork for either radical political action or acts of spontaneous violence to address this imagined victimization (Hubler and Bosman 2020; Sweeney and Perliger 2018), whereby Muslim communities are at a particular threat.

And second, this dissertation project has documented a crisis of (mis)information and hate-speech endemic to the platform Twitter that is not currently addressed by the company’s “Hateful Conduct Policy” (Twitter 2021). Furthermore, much of the content analyzed in this work is not native to the platform, it is sourced from reputable or dubious second-party websites

and is re-circulated by Twitter users. As such, by its very platform structure Twitter creates the conditions for this type of radical decontextualization of digital content that undergirds the growth and spread of Islamophobic hate-speech across global networks. As such, I argue that the phenomena of racialized nationalism in Germany and the United States are not merely crises of national political proportions but crises of technocultural, civilizationalist proportions that are being actively litigated as a digital culture war by far-right Islamophobic digital soldiers.

In considering and mapping the terrain of Islamophobic digitally networked communities, this project has been defined and inspired by a question of whether in the current, global digital age we may be witnessing a breakdown or fusing of the trinity of nation/race/culture (Agamben 1995, 117). Gesturing to this question, I titled this project drawing on the poem “The Ballad of East and West” written by British colonialist, imperialist author Rudyard Kipling (Kipling 1889), asking, “never the twain shall meet?” In the poem, Kipling writes:

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

(1889)

Kipling, a British imperialist who also authored the profoundly racist poem “The White Man’s Burden” (1899), ruminates in the “Ballad of East and West” whether the supposedly discrete (and unequal) societies of West and East will ever meet in the form of an equal connection. In this dissertation project, and in this concluding chapter, I suggest that the East and West do meet—but not necessarily in the form of the integration of an increasingly multiracial and

multicultural society in Germany and the United States. As I have documented with the transnationalization of far-right Islamophobic discourse and communities, East and West meet in the form of Transatlantic and Global-North-South linkages that define far-right digital communities. Border, breed, and birth continue to persist as significant even as German, American, Indian, and Nigerian communities meet on the platform Twitter. Nation/race/culture *are* being destabilized—with far-right Islamophobic digitally networked communities doing the unhinging themselves as they meet on Twitter to engage in a shared form of Islamophobic cultural warfare together as digital soldiers.

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