

## DONALD TRUMP AND ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND (AFD): THE CRISIS OF POLITICS

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### Abstract

*The main thesis of this text is that politics has lost its claim to make generally valid decisions for the whole of society. It interprets both Donald Trump and the 'Alternative für Deutschland' (AfD) as solutions to that problem. By understanding the votes of their supporters not so much as votes for a person or a party, but as votes against the political system itself, it tries to avoid the usual demonization of populist politics and persons and, instead, focuses on social functions and structures.*

**Keywords:** Crisis of politics, functional differentiation, democracy, rationality, populism

### Introduction

It would appear that all spheres of society are currently experiencing major structural changes. These changes can be observed especially in the political sphere where we find indications that politics has relinquished its claim to make generally valid decisions for the whole of society.

The reasons for this crisis are, as always, diverse. In general, it appears that respect for politicians and trust in politics have reached an all-time low: "People no longer trust that politicians will represent their interests and ideals".<sup>1</sup> The rebellion of the citizens<sup>2</sup> has become a rebellion against politics itself. Consequently, this frustration initially took shape outside of the political system, in the explosion of protests all around the world, in social movements like the, Arab Spring or the, 'Turkish Summer'. Although many

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<sup>1</sup> I. Krastev, *Democracy Disrupted: The Politics of Global Protest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> J. Gerhards, "Der Aufstand des Publikums, Eine systemtheoretische Interpretation des Kulturwandels in Deutschland" (The Rebellion of the Citizens, A Systemtheoretical Interpretation of Cultural Change of the German Society (1960-1989)), *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 30, No. 3 (2001): 163-184.

of those protests were “angry in [their] own way”. This new wave of revolutionary politics shared at least one moment: a deep mistrust towards the state and its institutions, and a frustration with political representation, boiling down “to an insurgency that is anti-political at its base”.<sup>3</sup> “Democracy has been disrupted”, states Krastev. “But to what end?”<sup>4</sup>

In the case of Egypt, the Arab Spring had “degenerated into renewed dictatorship ... and into anarchy in Libya, Yemen, and also Syria”.<sup>5</sup> The most significant long-term impact of the protests, resumes Krastev, “may be the wave of reactionary politics they helped to spawn”.<sup>6</sup> In Germany and the United States, on the other hand, the consequences surprisingly assumed a political form, albeit with some delay.

In the case of Germany, it was the rise of a new party, the ‘Alternative für Deutschland’ (which will henceforth be referred to by its German acronym ‘AfD’), that presented itself as an alternative to the established political actors. And in the case of the US, it can be seen in the protest vote of many Americans, who instead of a professional (‘traditional’) politician have entrusted a politically inexperienced outsider with the task of managing the affairs of their government. (When BBC reporters asked Trump supporters during the election campaign in 2016 what they liked about their candidate, the one aspect most of them agreed on was: ‘He’s not a politician’.<sup>7</sup>

As long as the voters could continue to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with politics through Trump’s election and as long as the Republicans could thereby hope to implement their own agenda, the risks associated with this choice were readily accepted by both his voters and his party. For his voters, Trump represented their chance of entering the zone of visibility, whereas the Republicans saw him as their chance to engage in policy-making. Unlike many other Americans, who expressed their disaffection with politics by choosing not to vote, at least the voters seized this oppor-

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<sup>3</sup> I. Krastev, *Democracy Disrupted, The Politics of Global Protest*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> F. Fukuyama, Why Is Democracy Performing So Poorly?, *Journal of Democracy* 26, No. 1 (2015): 11. Available at [https://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/ff\\_jod\\_jan20\\_15.pdf](https://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/ff_jod_jan20_15.pdf), retrieved 3.1.2018.

<sup>6</sup> I. Krastev, *Democracy Disrupted, The Politics of Global Protest*.

<sup>7</sup> T. K. Brown, “Why they love Trump: ‘He’s not a politician’”, 2016. Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/election-us-2016-36493676/why-they-love-trump-he-s-not-a-politician>, retrieved 3.2.2018.

tunity (and after many failures, his party was finally able to implement the long-cherished tax reform plan). However, their choice was not so much a vote *for* Trump but a vote against the political system and its representatives.

A similar development took place in Germany, where the AfD managed to establish itself by representing extreme – xenophobic and patriotic – views which were excluded from the public political discourse. What had first taken place outside politics – as manifested in the PEGIDA (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes, “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West”) protests in Germany and the Alt Right movement in the US - suddenly re-entered the system, thereby unfolding the paradox of anti-political politics.

We can refer here without exaggeration to the voting out or deselection of the political system per se, which Trump and his team chose to label optionally as either the “establishment” or a “swamp” that needs to be drained. At the same time, the candidate alleged that politics had fallen victim to impotence and incapacitation as a result of state institutions, such as the intelligence agencies, police, secret police, administrative agencies, and branches of government bureaucracy (the ‘deep state’), delegitimizing democratically elected leaders and wresting control of the state from politics. This allegation clearly corresponded not only to the well-known antipathy by political public towards bureaucracy and administration, but also to a widespread perception among voters that politics was only concerned with itself and that its institutions would continue to function without taking their needs into account, in short: without representing them.

### **The self-limitation of politics**

Politics is not everything and is also incapable of all-encompassing control; since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, at the very latest, it has regulated only politically controllable circumstances. Politics, however, must represent the *claim* to control the whole of society – although and precisely because it only represents a subsection. In contrast to all his predecessors, Donald Trump regards this self-limitation of politics to the political sphere as no longer having any value. Consequently, the primacy of functional differentiation is irrelevant for Trump, namely, the idea of conceding control to the relevant spheres of society. He does not recognize this right for the law, the econo-

my, the mass media, or even science; he seeks to politically control all of these spheres.

It is certainly the case that valuing political self-limitation is a 'Western' phenomenon. It does not apply, for instance, to China, or, for that matter, to Russia. Yet, even those countries that deviate from the Western democratic model must solve the problem of representation.<sup>8</sup> In China, citizens are subordinated to a class-based utopia. What is important is to take into account the whole of the population, even where this 'whole' is viewed as a racially-based unity formed through violence, which is then given access to education and health care, as was the case in Nazi Germany. Russia and Turkey also provide their population with a legal system, in which, law is reproduced as law, even when, to seize upon a wonderfully dry formulation by Luhmann, a "considerable uncertainty with respect to expectations" can be observed in these countries.<sup>9</sup> Citizens of these countries – and possibly also the USA in the near future – who do not suffer the misfortune of being completely excluded from access to the law must be prepared for surprises when dealing with the judicial system. One should at least be aware of its ongoing assimilation of factors other than purely legal ones.

In democratic states, the justice system is meant to protect society from the state deciding or predetermining everything. It is clear that politics interferes, but is, at the same time, limited: it understands itself to be a social subsection. The "total conditioning" or complete politicization of the state, pursued by Erdogan, Putin, Orban et al., runs contrary to the self-limitation of the political sphere. In this sense, Trump's aspiration to politically control all other social spheres is in fact 'un-American' or rather 'undemocratic'. Paradoxically, it is precisely the functional differentiation that has made Trump and his inclusion in politics possible in the first place (just as American immigration policy made possible his family's accumulation of wealth) and has allowed him to formulate his claims, even against the vociferous opposition of the 'traditional public'.

Democratic or 'modern' politics does not determine economic strategies, scientific truths, or reporting in the mass media. This clearly shows that

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<sup>8</sup> A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen, Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Wahlverweigerung und kompromisslosem Protest*, Petra Bahr and Nico Lange (eds.) (Sankt Augustin/Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., 2016), 20.

<sup>9</sup> N. Luhmann, *Theory of Society, Volume II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 25 f.

politics functions exactly as it should. Political decisions have a powerful impact on all these spheres, but it would be better to say that they act as an irritation: politics, acting from outside, cannot control the processes within these domains. In other words, collectively binding political decisions on such issues as taxes, redistribution of wealth, support, and prohibitions cannot control the behavior of society with respect to these decisions. It is impossible to know in advance if tax incentives for certain investments will result in the desired effect, i.e. if the promotion of particular sectors, such as coal, will have a positive impact on the competitiveness of businesses. Some decisions can even result in the opposite of what was originally envisaged. This is obviously because not everything in society depends on political factors. It is precisely and only political factors that politics can control. It is true that politics claims to be able to manage society as a whole, but this is merely political fiction; the factual possibilities open to politics are limited by its function. This function does not entail controlling society, but rather the reaching of collectively binding decisions, which in most cases are valid throughout the country. The law serves the function of producing normative expectations of security, the function of the educational system lies in the production of competencies and skills, science produces methodically controlled knowledge, the economy concerns itself with matters of scarcity, and the mass media provides society with a self-description, as in Armin Nassehi's variant, 'the mass media, simulate a whole world'.<sup>10</sup> All of these separate entities solve different problems and do so obstinately in their own way. They can only take into account the 'obstinacy' of other entities, spheres, or systems in the form of irritations. In this respect, we would like to address the issue of various 'system interests'. (In another, much longer text, the author of this Article have attempted to outline the systemic lines of conflict that are apparent in the Trump presidency). The conclusion reached is that the supposed chaos in the White House is anything but chaotic. Everything is 'in order' in the sense that the situation fits a fundamental pattern; either the autonomy of the social subsections is simply ignored by the current American government, not consciously considered or explicitly questioned.<sup>11</sup>

Trump's statements on the legal disputes relating to his travel ban, for instance, show that he is repulsed by the self-subjugation to legal regulations

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<sup>10</sup> A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> M. Heidingsfelder, "Conflicts of Interest, A Systems Analysis of the Trump Presidency", 2017. Draft only.

usually practiced in Western politics. The fact that regulation is not the same as jurisprudence not only does not interest him, but he also regards it as somewhat suspect. This also holds for his positions on other social sub-sections, such as his desire to run the USA like a business as well as his general disdain for scientific expertise. Following his taking the oath of office, Trump directly banned every scientist working for a federal agency, whether with the EPA, health authorities, NASA, or even the government weather service from engaging in communication via social media (some in the media publically refer – in the usual exaggerated fashion – of a ‘Blitzkrieg’ against science).<sup>12</sup> But to insist that he is right with respect to legal issues is far more important for Trump. This is understandable. Only when the travel ban’s ‘exclusive’ values take on a legal form binding on everybody could behavior deviating from these rules be liable to prosecution and subject to criminal sanctions. His election to the office of president has apparently already initiated a cultural transformation, which has made both sexual offensiveness and discrimination against foreigners more socially acceptable. This transformation, however, can only be institutionalized at the highest level after having been molded to fit the constraints of legal regulations. The current debate in the USA concerning sexual harassment does not serve as a counter-argument, but rather supports this thesis. The hysteria displayed over the controversy clearly indicates the great need for rectification. The difference is one between two areas of society and their different ‘audiences’: the entertainment industry, relying on consumers, and democratic politics, relying on voters. As the recent Alabama election has shown, Republican voters are willing to ignore accusations of pedophilia as long as their candidate wins: “This Roy Moore saga is unassailable proof that the prime motivating factor in today's Republican Party is hatred towards liberals, far more than standing for anything that they believe in”.<sup>13</sup> It is another indication of the growing rigidity and political polarisation in the USA, a trend that Matthew Gentzkow has been able to prove empirically in his book “Polarization” published in 2016.

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<sup>12</sup> D. Nutricelli, “Trump has launched a blitzkrieg in the wars on science and Earth’s climate”, 2017. Available at *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2017/mar/28/trump-has-launched-a-blitzkrieg-in-the-wars-on-science-and-earths-climate>, retrieved 22.11.2017.

<sup>13</sup> J. Weindling, “If You're a Nazi or Pedophile, There's Plenty of Room for You in the Republican Party”, 2017, available at <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2017/11/if-youre-a-nazi-or-pedophile-theres-plenty-of-room.html>, retrieved 12.11.17.

### **Disloyal oppositions**

It might make sense here to reverse the usual perspective. Seen functionally, Trump and the AfD are not taken as problems, but as solutions to the crisis of authority in politics. If we consider Trump or the AfD as problems, we assume that society has made a mistake and had behaved incorrectly, if not 'dysfunctionally'. Yet, society is not an actor, nor does it possess free will – should such a thing even exist beyond narratives. What we find in society are solutions to problems, in other words, functions – political, legal, etc. It is not politics that has a problem, but rather us, in particular those on the left, who have a problem with politics and especially with Donald Trump and the AfD. But as ever, the sphere of politics solves the problem of collectively binding decisions.

Both Trump and the, 'Alternative für Deutschland' AfD have embraced the right themes and have included the motif of protest in their agendas. Their approach, which can be characterized as populism, is to tell the people what they want to hear, sometimes, but not necessarily, against one's better judgment. As Peter Fuchs has pointed out, the so-called non-populists are ironically considered populists by the populists. The intellectually righteous rightists are populists, the intellectually acceptable rightists are conservative, so only 'a little populist'. This, of course, is an assessment that is somewhat populist in itself.<sup>14</sup>

An important aspect of the populist strategy, therefore, is to forego any measured, 'rational' explanations in favor of stories or narratives. Otherwise, Trump and the AfD would have had to say to their voters that many of the problems they criticized, such as those observed in connection with globalization, are simply irresolvable. Yet, this is of no concern to the populist, rather, what is important is to represent a milieu or a group. In contrast to both Trump and her eliminated rival Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton was not successful in producing a similarly convincing or viable narrative. (We will return to the importance of a convincing narrative later.)

What unites Trump voters is not so much a specific ideology but their rejection of politics in and of itself. This observation also applies with respect to the AfD, as pensioners as well as young voters, the unemployed and high

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<sup>14</sup> P. Fuchs, "Populismus – ein bisschen beobachtet", 2017, available at [http://www.institut\\_ast.de/2017/02/10/populismus-ein-bisschen-beobachtet/](http://www.institut_ast.de/2017/02/10/populismus-ein-bisschen-beobachtet/), retrieved 15.11.17.

earners, the educated and the less-educated alike voted for them. This serves to support the argument that in both cases – Trump and the AfD – we are observing a phenomenon taking place throughout the whole of society and uniting all conceivable social strata.<sup>15</sup>

The basic principle of democracy can be observed in the practice of bestowing legitimacy to a state office by electing a candidate through a majority vote to serve in the post for a limited time period. In order to choose someone other than the incumbent of a political office, it is necessary to establish an opposition, whose candidate could eventually assume the post. This is why over the course of time; this opposing side came to be regarded as a legitimate part of the political system. Disloyal interests are thereby transformed into a 'loyal opposition', as was the case in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Nassehi here draws attention to the fact that democratic politics is always already divided, and it is precisely this division that allows for inclusion.<sup>16</sup> The perception of Trump and AfD voters, however, is that the government and the opposition arrange everything between themselves without taking into account voter interests. This view – that politics continues to play its game uncoupled and independent of voter interests, while the opposition, as part of the establishment, plays along with the government, entailing that true opposition and, therefore, real inclusion no longer exists – led to voters endorsing the hyped-up, aggressive style of Trump, who successfully embodied this disloyal opposition.

In modern states, the ideal of general inclusion serves as the guarantor of a loyal minority, in other words, those not included among voters for the majority party in the country's political representative body (parliament). It guarantees that this minority adheres to the common rules of life in - a democratic - society. Such rules include tolerating and not harassing those with dissenting views, and that police will not mishandle arrested persons. Trump's voters felt that this inclusion was no longer being ensured. As a result of electing their candidate to the office of president, a leader who only takes into account the interests of his own clientele and who, as previously mentioned, no longer even pretends to be concerned with the na-

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<sup>15</sup> I. Krastev, *Democracy Disrupted, The Politics of Global Protest*. See also E. Ekins, "The Five Types of Trump Voters, Who They Are and What They Believe", 2017, available at <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/publications/2016-elections/the-five-types-trump-voters>, retrieved 21.11.2017.

<sup>16</sup> A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, 18.

tion's citizens as a whole, a remarkable situation has transpired: the exclusion that Trump voters so vehemently opposed has now been institutionalized and the disregard for the rules of society has, to a great extent, been legitimized. And this has led to another peculiarity: the majority in the USA has become the minority. One could simply point to the eccentricities of the American electoral system, in which Hillary Clinton garnered more votes than her opponent, yet still failed to win the office of president.<sup>17</sup>

### **The importance of political narratives**

Armin Nassehi has suggested that the determination of political functions be correspondingly expanded so that they not only begin with the production of collectively binding decisions, but include the production of this collective in the first place through relevant targeting or addressing activities.<sup>18</sup> In this respect as well, the Trump government would repudiate the determination of political functions, as its decisions are not addressed collectively to the citizens of the USA, but rather only to the Trump electorate, consisting of 'real Americans'. Trump is not exactly (or no longer) interested in the capacity for collective consent or collective acceptance, which, in turn, minimizes the binding force of his decisions, as has been apparent in the resistance by individual states towards his decisions, in particular to his decision to rescind protections for undocumented people brought to the United States illegally as children,<sup>19</sup> and the opposition of many judges to his travel ban (not to mention opposition from government officials, such as James Comey and Sally Yates).

Nassehi's expanded concept is also helpful in understanding the narrative of 'making America great again', the "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson) of real Americans that Trump offers up. Although this community is imaginary, it is by no means pure fantasy – it must be continuously renewed with the help of relevant narratives. One element of this narrative is the 'establishment', which, as previously mentioned, serves to legitimize Trump's previous failures; another element is the narrative of animosity

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<sup>17</sup> J. Sharman, "Hillary Clinton wins 2,864,974 more votes than Donald Trump, final US election count shows", 2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/hillary-clinton-3-million-popular-vote-donald-trump-us-election-a7487901.html>, retrieved 15.11.2017.

<sup>18</sup> A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, 37.

<sup>19</sup> J. Walters, "'It's outrageous': 15 states challenge Trump's Daca decision in court", 2017, available at [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/06/daca-states-lawsuit-trump-dreamers-immigration](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/06/daca-states-lawsuit-trump-dreamers-immigration), retrieved 14.11.2017.

displayed by other countries towards the USA. This is precisely the reason for Trump's success, despite his lack of political knowledge, as politics has always been about the ability to produce narratives that demonstrate a binding effect and guarantee loyalty. Factual plausibility plays a role, but it is not a decisive one. We are concerned here not with a factual or scientific assessment of a taken decision, but rather with its political nature. Nassehi refers to the "semantic claims" of politics,<sup>20</sup> which hold precedence over de facto technical competence.

Trump's narrative, although it is relevant to and operates in the USA, does not hold these states together as a 'collective'. In contrast to all previous elections, Trump's victory did not bring harmony among the states of the federation. The production of such a sense of unity has always been expected of American presidents. They are supposed to overcome internal pluralities and cultural differences. Instead, Trump and his followers imagine a true America imprisoned within a false one, to vary Adorno's famous phrase from *Minima Moralia*.<sup>21</sup>

In this sense one could indeed question the maturity of the current American government, as it does not seem able to strike a balance between factual and social quality, which also helps to explain the high level of support for the government among Republicans as well as the historically low approval ratings by Americans as a whole. Trump's narrative has not been able to assume the role of a social bond that includes and unites all Americans. He raises the 'division of narrative', which we find implemented by various parties, to the level of government, thereby transforming the milieu, experiences, and interests of his voters into a 'government narrative'. He can therefore clearly afford to appear – at least in the eyes of his supporters – incompetent in factual matters, such as globalization or climate protection.

This point is particularly interesting in connection with an important element of his narrative – the criticism of the political elite. Indeed, this elite would be in a much better position to manage the detailed and technical level of politics than an outsider like Trump or even democratic politicians, who attain public office through the will of the people. Not only do scholars

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<sup>20</sup> A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, 43.

<sup>21</sup> T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005), 39.

have forwarded such an argument,<sup>22</sup> it can also be recognized in how the Chinese describe their own political system.<sup>23</sup> According to this position, the general population, due to its lack of necessary knowledge, is utterly incapable of choosing the best candidates for political office. The election of Trump could certainly serve as empirical evidence for this thesis - as well as the image of mentally ill people voting that has been used by critics of democracy at least since Plato, “demonstrate the farcical nature of democratic governance, a system in which the ‘sane’ and the ‘insane’ enjoy equal powers”.<sup>24</sup> It may be worthwhile to keep an eye on the question of whether such a model of comparatively stable circulation of meritocratic elite is superior to the instability of constantly changing governments, especially in light of the ascent of China.

The nomination of Hillary Clinton as candidate for president has made Trump’s criticism of the political elite seem plausible. At the same time, this criticism allowed Trump to justify his own candidature, as his sphere of action has been outside of political institutions; although he belongs to elite, he did not belong to the political elite. In his contract with American voters, Trump has indicated that he aims to reverse the decoupling of the state from the people (or, respectively, from the democratic decision-making process). Cast in a legal form and thereby contractual, this was nothing less than a promise to reestablish the cycle of power between politics and the people. Since issuing this promise, Trump has proved remarkably successful in constantly concealing his factual affiliation to the political system, at least from his own voters, through the stylization of his outsider role – be it through crude behavior or disclaiming responsibility for laws that he himself has enacted.

#### **The German solution: AfD**

The protest against politics in Germany initially took place outside of its institutions, mostly within the framework of the so-called PEGIDA movement. The anti-political protest by self-styled “enraged citizens”, who first appeared on the streets and expressed their disaffection by chanting popular slogans (“We are the people”, in an attempt to recall the protests against the former East German regime), eventually managed to infiltrate

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<sup>22</sup> D. A. Bell, *Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, 44.

<sup>24</sup> I. Krastev, *Democracy Disrupted, The Politics of Global Protest*.

the inner sanctums of politics, with no small thanks to the ‘moral support’ provided by Trump.

As in the case of Trump, one reason for the AfD’s success - the fact that they managed to secure representation in a number of German state parliaments in March 2016 and, in September 2017, succeeded in winning seats in the Bundestag (the German parliament) - lies in the production of a persuasive narrative. The first generation of the AfD, embodied by its leadership under Bernd Lucke, still underestimated the significance of semantics capable of binding voters. Lucke constantly invoked technical issues and political tasks, “We are neither left nor right. We have no need for ideological guideposts; we only require our common sense”.<sup>25</sup> As a professional economist, he was able to convincingly embody this expertise, as were many of the party’s founding members, consisting of professors, retired civil servants, businessmen, and high-ranking white-collar workers. Eventually, they all had to yield to the ideologues, which successfully made use of the irrational anxiety held by some segments of the German population towards immigrants and of the perception that the country was ‘being flooded with foreigners’.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the narrative employed by the AfD is by and large independent from concrete political content<sup>26</sup> (Nassehi draws attention to unusual coalitions, especially on the right wing of the political spectrum). The main task of this narrative is to convey the delegitimization of politics as a prevailing mood. The AfD also rejects the political system *as such* and protests about the decoupling of the political center from the periphery in order to find its purpose and existential justification in the reestablishment of this link between the people (the true sovereign) and politics.<sup>27</sup>

The issue that formed the basis of this narrative was not, initially, that of foreigners or refugees, but rather that of the opaque and cumbersome Eu-

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<sup>25</sup> M. Amann, *Angst für Deutschland, Die Wahrheit über die AfD: wo sie herkommt, wer sie führt, wohin sie steuert* (Munich: Droemer, 2017). E-Book.

<sup>26</sup> A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, 46; also see L. Bednarz and C. Giesa, *Gefährliche Bürger, Die neue Rechte greift nach der Mitte* (Munich: Hanser, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> H. Vorländer, M. Herold and S. Schäller, *Wer geht zu PEGIDA und warum?, Eine empirische Untersuchung*, (Dresden: Zentrum für Verfassungs- und Demokratieforschung, 2015); See also A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, 99.

ropean administrative apparatus, the so-called ‘deep Europe’, and, in particular the questionable euro rescue policies of the German government, which bestowed a certain degree of plausibility to the narrative. It was not a coincidence that early members of the party, such as Beatrix von Storch and Hans-Olaf Henkel, were also involved in the “Bündnis Bürgerwille” (Alliance of Citizens' Will), an anti-European movement. One of the first proposed names for the new party was “Alternative for Europe”, suggested by Lucke, as the inclusion of “Germany” in the name was considered too nationalistic. In the end, party members reached a compromise with the name “Alternative for Germany and Europe”.

Early members of the AfD could hardly agree to anything else, whether on climate change or the role of Islam in Germany, and there were significant disagreements on whether the AfD should serve as the parliamentary arm of a radical opposition street movement or establish itself as a potential coalition partner for traditional parties. This issue remained open and lies at the root of many internal party controversies. According to Amann, this issue is still undecided, as many AfD politicians and voters do not see eye-to-eye on a number of issues, and are, as it were, more of a union born of necessity. Focal issues of the party change constantly, which is why the historian Paul Nolte refers to it as a “chameleon party”, whereas Amann talks of an “ideological patchwork program”.<sup>28</sup>

In its early days, the AfD understood itself as a decidedly “liberal force” – as also indicated in the preamble of its party program at the time, completely in line with its main protagonists, Lucke and von Storch. Its critique was aimed at the economic failures of the then conservative-liberal governing coalition in Germany, and in particular at the legally and economically questionable policies of rescuing the euro currency. Much to the dismay of Lucke, the party altered its self-description, at the very latest with its vote against the trans-Atlantic free trade agreement (TTIP). In many respects, the justification for this vote reminds one of Trump’s argumentation: the agreement was not fair and it would be to the detriment of Germany. The AfD’s plea for a slim state that limits itself only to domestic security, justice, taxation, and foreign policy also sounds remarkably familiar. Likewise, one recognizes the demand to erect a bulwark against refugees, although, in the German case, not by building a wall, but certainly through the closing

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*; M. Amann, *Angst für Deutschland*.

of borders while, despite this demand, calling for the reduction of European trade barriers.<sup>29</sup>

This new 'refugee narrative', which replaced the anti-Europe narrative, allowed the party to portray complex circumstances in simple categories and to offer its program in narrative form, just as the Brexit supporters had managed to do. Its main idea is that - to paraphrase a memo Stephen Bannon once sent to Donald Trump - the 'liberal nonsense' that prevailed in the Cold War is making Germany weak and vulnerable in the face of a world saturated with terrorists and immigrants.<sup>30</sup> Foreigners, refugees, etc. became addressable as agents bearing responsibility and, not least of all, "because as foreigners they exhibit a form of visibility that has otherwise been lost in society".<sup>31</sup> Those responsible are thereby made visible and the complexity of the world is likewise reduced to the level of illegitimate interests, also including those of certain non-visible groups (such as 'greedy' managers, 'criminal' beneficiaries of social welfare services, the 'lying press', etc.). Vorländer has shown that the PEGIDA protests are likewise a result of the East German transformation process.<sup>32</sup> As is well known, the GDR was a country that not only locked in its own 'personnel', but also generally locked out the influx of people from other countries and limited pluralistic cultural influences. Trump's preference is indeed to first of all lock out 'undesirables' – yet, in light of his authoritarian tendencies, he is not averse to thoughts of locking people in. After all, a wall functions in two directions, as he indicated with a tweet: "When a country is no longer able to say who can, and who cannot, (sic) come in & out, especially for reasons of safety &. (sic) security - big Trouble!".<sup>33</sup>

### Political incorrectness

A contributing factor to the success of the AfD was in adhering to Trump's rule book by deliberately breaking taboos and intentionally transgressing

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> I. Krastev, "How Donald Trump redefined 'the West'", 2017, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/11/opinion/trump-poland-speech-west.html>, retrieved: 4.2.2018.

<sup>31</sup> A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, 87.

<sup>32</sup> H. Vorländer, M. Herold and S. Schäller, *Wer geht zu PEGIDA und warum?*, 45ff.

<sup>33</sup> D. Trump, "When a country is no longer able to say who can, and who cannot, come in & out, especially for reasons of safety & security - big trouble!", 2017, available at <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/827864176043376640?lang=de>, retrieved 12.11.17.

the prevailing boundaries of ‘political correctness’. Of course, this also included constantly berating the media (‘fake news’ for Trump, the ‘lying press’ for the AfD). Thor Kunkel, a best-selling author and head of the Swiss ad agency that came up with ideas for the party’s election campaign in Berlin, captured this message in a nutshell: “One should be allowed to say that”.<sup>34</sup> All AfD supporters could agree upon the context of this phrase – championing the freedom to say whatever one likes and the rejection of political correctness, here perceived as hypocritical (as, in fact, it too often is - it is not without irony that even the designation ‘Alt-right’ constitutes a politically correct variant).<sup>35</sup> This hypocrisy is also part of the narrative that the party makes use of to secure adherents. Amann points out a feature that is shared by all populist movements worldwide: “For many in the AfD milieu, the duty or requirement to be tolerant feels like repression and they regard respect for minorities as a marginalization of the majority”.<sup>36</sup> Now it is courageous to break taboos and even to be improper, just like Trump.

Upon closer examination it becomes clear that the reasons for political correctness are structurally tied to the necessity of the equality of inclusivity, namely the ideal or narrative of the modern, functionally differentiated society, whereby every individual of the human race can *in principle* participate in political, legal, economic, artistic, and scientific etc. communication. The reason is the decoupling of functions from social strata or classes and their society-wide deployment. This new social order can only function when equality is guaranteed. Trump himself is a good example of this; he participates in politics although he is not a politician. Bush Jr. referred to Obama as an example of this equality of inclusivity and also reserved this notion for the USA as a whole, a country with unlimited opportunities, that ‘even’ enabled a black man to become president, thereby expressly serving as a representative for this ideal.<sup>37</sup> Trump stands for this social reality, as he could only enter politics thanks to the validity of this ideal of inclusion, while at the same time, as a business man, he serves as a prime example of

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<sup>34</sup> M. Amann, *Angst für Deutschland*.

<sup>35</sup> L. West, “White nationalists? Alt-right? If you see a Nazi, say Nazi”, 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/22/white-nationalists-alt-right-nazi-language-trump>, retrieved 15.11.2017.

<sup>36</sup> M. Amann, *Angst für Deutschland*.

<sup>37</sup> G.W. Bush, “Remarks on 2008 Presidential Election of Barack Obama”, 2008, available at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbushonobamapresidentvictory.htm>, retrieved 14.11.2017.

the rampant inequality of opportunities, careers, incomes, and ways of living found in the USA, demonstrating that the equality of inclusion is anything but actual equality.

In many cases, it appears that the human psyche – and not just that of Americans – reacts to the excess imposition of empathy processed in the mass media by setting up boundaries. The demand for political correctness has only strengthened this internal defense mechanism. This is one of the main reasons why many of his voters welcome Trump's media bashing. He may be prone to this behavior above all in reaction to the continued criticism aimed at him, but at the same time, this allows Trump to single out the mass media as an agent of these - somewhat excessive - moral demands. From the point of view of Trump and his supporters, the mass media collaborate with politicians, predominantly from the Democratic Party, who impose these high demands upon them. In Trump's tweets and comments, the officially preferred version and the opinions of the 'man in the street' coincide. A similar process takes place in social media, where xenophobic stories become capable of being told and where they enjoy wide popularity. Such stories are in fact considerably more applicable to narrative than actual complex technical problems, such as the providing or constructing of adequate housing for immigrants.

This is not the place to discuss the advantages of inequality. Our primary concern here is to point out the opportunities open for Trump and the AfD to successfully operate within this structure. And this is not only in respect to the public ideal of political correctness, but also concerns the demand to fortify the zone of exclusion. There is no engaging in the hypocrisy of refugee friendly politics for Trump, who instead would like to keep the 'losers' outside of the winners' zone, the zone of inclusion. Trump readily acknowledges the ongoing agenda that has already been partially enacted at the legislative level, but is otherwise not openly admitted; he wants to transform the USA into a fortress in order to prevent the zone of exclusion from diluting the zone of inclusion. We are here dealing with a paradox that hardly even comes into view, except perhaps in the form of images found in the mass media showing us inconceivable destitution; it is the modern 'good' society, the inclusive society that is responsible for this misery.

By questioning political correctness, Trump, as well as the AfD, demonstrates modern society in its operational mode: contingency or, in other

words, that it is possible to operate in a manner that does not correspond to expectations. Norms (in particular legal ones) exist only because of what can be anticipated, and, on that basis, mankind has devised procedures to resolve conflicts and violations of these norms. The American context, especially the democratic tradition of the USA, plays a special role here. The behavior of Donald Trump might appear as amateurish, but not exceptionally unusual or even offensive. Thanks to Trump, the selective practice of the ‘modern West’, which denies its own selectivity, has become visible. That which most of us regard as necessary and irreplaceable values such as – democracy, tolerance, human rights, and equality – is denoted by Trump and the AfD as contingent; other values are also possible.

It is this contingency of our society that we must call upon to explain not only the place of distinction we hold for these values, but also for the promoted use of concepts of identity. These identities are precisely what Trump and the AfD provide their supporters – and, in turn, these offers of identity are presented as being non-contingent. ‘America First’ is not simply one concept of identity among many, but rather – for Trump’s voters – the only true offer, the best among all competing offers. Even the symbol of ‘America First’ is the result of a selection, which exposes the arbitrariness of possibilities that could be chosen; ‘America Second’ would be a more accurate recognition of reality, yet the norm of being first is exactly directed against this reality, just as every norm that we, in conformity with Niklas Luhmann, describe as “formulas for contra-factual expectations”.<sup>38</sup> Yet, at the same time, this selection regulates the decision, as there is no alternative to this alternative. It serves as an ‘inviolable level’.

The zealous efforts of the mass media to repudiate the contingency exposed by Trump and the AfD leaves observers somewhat panic-ridden, terrified, and helpless.<sup>39</sup> It is not only the recognition that the violation of social expectations is not punishable. It is not only that the fourth state and the system of checks and balances, a norm in itself, are literally powerless in the face of those in authority or, respectively, those who enact laws. It is also the insight in the powerlessness of argumentation, or, to put it another

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<sup>38</sup> N. Luhmann, “Are There Still Indispensable Norms in Our Society?”, in *Soziale Systeme* 14, No.1 (2008): 20.

<sup>39</sup> E. Bazelon, How Do We Contend With Trump’s Defiance of Norms? *The New York Times Magazine*, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/11/magazine/how-do-we-contend-with-trumps-defiance-of-norms.html>.

er way, in the limits of enlightenment. Those primarily concerned with survival – and many Trump and AfD voters appear to express this concern, whether it be personal survival in the face of unemployment, survival of the great American nation as a result of globalization, or the ‘little German’ fearing a flood foreigners, the loss of their cultural identity, and even a resultant civil war (many AfD politicians have indeed raised this specter) – simply do not have the energy necessary to pursue the ideal of a rational debate committed to the truth. Instead, they rely on the *feeling* of security. This may be a false sense of security, but it doesn’t feel like it. And it also provides for a much better narrative.

Reason has been dealt bad cards in the modern age, especially when it comes to establishing clarity. Its counterpart, irrationality in the form of emotion, what Leibniz termed *cognitio confusa* (‘confused cognition’), has considerably greater binding force. Something appears to be at stake.

### **What to do?**

This text is not meant to provide a plan of action along the lines of Karl Marx, who claimed that it was not enough to interpret the world, and that we need to change it instead. But what indeed needs to change is our interpretation of the world.

In his book *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, Armin Nassehi offers suggestions as to how it is possible to reclaim the political sphere. One of these suggestions is to consult with experts: “The reclamation of politics in the dimension of content possibly requires a renewed form of expertise, which must learn how to deal with cybernetic concepts such as control without having access to control options”.<sup>40</sup> One should keep in mind, however, that the advice of these experts may indeed be expensive, yet still provide little of use, and this is not only because it deals with the limits of controllability and sings the praise of observation. As soon as expert knowledge is employed in politics (or, for that matter, in other functional areas), it relinquishes important aspects of its scientific character. This is because expert knowledge in politics is obliged to lead to results, while in science, this knowledge *is* the result. In politics, this must be transformed into collectively binding decisions. Time pressure also plays a role here, just as the necessity to simplify complex interrelationships – analog to the ne-

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<sup>40</sup> A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, 108.

cessity of ‘narrativeness’. While the author of this Article is able to point out the precarious status of this present text, such a strategy is not at all possible for political experts, who are unable to justify their decisions with reference to the uncertainty of all knowledge which, for scholars and scientists, safeguards our results from criticism, but would have just the opposite effect for political experts. One could speak of two completely different levels of requirements – a scientist who shares responsibility for a politically relevant decision must satisfy greater demands than one engaging in ‘free’ research.<sup>41</sup>

In as much as Nassehi provides a lucid analysis of the situation, whose interpretation this author by and large supports, while at the same time vehemently disagreeing with the narrative of a ‘return’ or the re-establishment of a previous state of affairs.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the title ‘The Reclamation of the Political’ could also be polemically read as ‘Make Politics Great Again’. But how does he want to recover the political sphere? Is it a matter of overcoming the granularization of society by means of a new, unifying narrative? Certain aspects of Nassehi’s deliberations seem to point in this direction. He is thereby faced with the unenviably difficult task of finding a solution as to how to provide narratives for complex states of affairs, and is confronted with considerable problems when attempting to address certain groups prone to general protest in order to provide these groups with communicative offerings free from positions of resentment and fear-laden demands.<sup>43</sup> Even his cleverly chosen concept of ‘distributed intelligence’ does not appear to have provided any particular assistance here. And as much as it is true that “we cannot be sure on a priori grounds that theories of adequate complexity will turn out to be unsaleable”,<sup>44</sup> it is also true that in order to transform such complexity into a narrative, considerable reductions have to take place. Similarly, Luhmann’s grand narrative, his *Theory of Society*, is not nearly as inaccessible as his decidedly non-narrative *Social Systems*, yet it is still far from being a historical novel. In

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<sup>41</sup> N. Luhmann, *Politische Soziologie*, André Kieserling (ed.) (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2010); See also Luhmann’s remarks in *Politische Soziologie* where he states that “the use of science in politics takes place an incongruent perspective, for purposes that are not scientific and not because of the truth content of their statements ...” (2010: 347 f., translated by Markus Heidingsfelder).

<sup>42</sup> A. Nassehi, *Die Wiedergewinnung des Politischen*, 101.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>44</sup> N. Luhmann, “The Self-Description of Society: Crisis Fashion and Sociological Theory”, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 25, Nos.1-2 (1984): 68.

addition, a narrative dealing with functions and observers lacks the drama necessary for a captivating and moving story.

Apart from this rather technical difficulty remains another matter, which is far more important. The point of departure for the concept of postmodernity is the thesis of the end of grand narratives. Should, of all things, a new grand political narrative be what it takes to overcome the end of grand narratives and to reach the whole of society? (In fact, post-modernist theory is itself nothing other than a grand narrative, as Luhmann ironically remarked, even though it is better described as a *métarécrit* - a metanarrative.) The plurality of narratives, of discursive possibilities, cannot be rescinded with the emergence an additional, universally applicable possibility. On the contrary, efforts towards harmonization only lead to greater diversity, as Zygmunt Baumann remarks: "... the foremost paradox of the frantic search for communal grounds of consensus is that it results in more dissipation and fragmentation, more heterogeneity. The drive to synthesis is the major cause of endless bifurcations. Each attempt at convergence and synthesis leads to new splits and divisions... . The search for community turns into a major obstacle to its formation".<sup>45</sup> Luhmann therefore claims that the unity of society can only be asserted as paradox, not as principle any longer.<sup>46</sup>

What one could do in the field of science or theory would be to offer a different interpretation by developing a theory of the 'irrationality of communicative action', which no longer relies on rationality as a premise in the pursuit of consensus.<sup>47</sup> Yet, despite these phenomena, which have become all too conspicuous due to Trump and Brexit, sociology has up until now conceded too much power to the scope of argument and the search for consensus. Opponents of both Trump and the AfD demand rationality – and by doing that, appeal to what is 'non-negotiable'. However, someone merely invoking rationality – saying this or that is rational – will not result in the process of communication conforming to the conditions of rationality. This expectation is completely naive and does not do justice to the

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<sup>45</sup> Z. Baumann, "Philosophical affinities of postmodern sociology", *The Sociological Review* 38, No.3 (1990): 436.

<sup>46</sup> N. Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 345.

<sup>47</sup> J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger, with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge MA: MIT, 1989).

needs and anxieties of Trump and AfD voters, just like arachnophobia cannot be overcome by mere arguments. The characteristic of these diffuse negative ideas and images used by Trump and AfD and their voters is precisely that they cannot be refuted by rational arguments, neither by logic nor by experience.<sup>48</sup> Their vagueness defies any verifiability. What we require appears to be a combination of sociology and psychotherapy or social psychotherapy. Decisive work has been done in this direction by Elliott Jaques in the 1950s,<sup>49</sup> and, subsequent work has been presented by, among others.<sup>50</sup>

It may therefore also make sense to take into account discoveries from neurobiology in order to develop new outcome models. One could here consider the case of some individuals who have undergone psychotherapy and decades later, as a result of certain stressful situations, exhibit their previous behavioral patterns and emotional reactions, although these were considered to be “worked out” as a result of therapy and to have completely receded into the background. Similarly, among Trump and AfD voters, certain social behavioral patterns of intolerance and racism, long believed to have been overcome, have, along with the associated belief in a strong leader, erupted once again. Consequently, sociology and political theory must include the recognition that parts of our limbic system influence our emotions and temperament at various levels of our psyche. At the very least, this is necessary in order to provide a realistic appraisal of the possibilities for social modification, as vulnerability and resilience are neurobiologically anchored, even when they are closely linked to environmental influences. This approach has already yielded initial insights. Kaplan et al. have shown how defense mechanisms come into play when we are confronted with unpleasant truths – so-called counter-evidence or, one might say, ‘alternative facts’ - that threaten our convictions. Reactions can be similar to those evoked by physical, life-threatening attacks.<sup>51</sup> The pious

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<sup>48</sup> N. Luhmann, *Politische Soziologie*, 387.

<sup>49</sup> E. Jaques, “On the Dynamics of Social Structure, A Contribution to the Psychoanalytical Study of Social Phenomena Derive from the Views of Melanie Klein”, *Human Relations* 6 (1953), 3-24.

<sup>50</sup> A. Bain, “Social Defences against Organizational Learning”, *Human Relations* 51, No.3 (1998), available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.121.1222&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, retrieved 13.2.2017.

<sup>51</sup> J.T. Kaplan, S.I. Gimbel, and S. Harris, “Neural correlates of maintaining one’s political beliefs in the face of counterevidence”, *Scientific Reports* 6 (2016), available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/srep39589>, retrieved 3.2.2018.

hope that narrow-minded people are open to argument is revealed to be just that – pious.

In any case, this author rejects the claim that a de-differentiation of systems has occurred, a currently popular thesis touted in the mass media. The concept of ‘politainment’, too, is not a sign of a fusion of the two spheres, but marks a difference that can be observed either from the perspective of politics or from that of entertainment - as political entertainment or entertaining politics.<sup>52</sup> The essential structures of modern society continue to exist. This can also be empirically verified with respect to Trump. It is political decisions that made such a reaching out into the environment possible – and to nominate Trump as the GOP’s candidate was one such decision. We should not forget that Trump first had to win the necessary number of votes - which he clearly achieved with 1237 votes - in order to officially become the GOP’s candidate for president.

Furthermore, we should keep in mind that the public's dislike of bureaucracy and administration and of the state as a whole is neither a coincidence nor an error that could be remedied by a narrative or ‘promotional enlightenment’. By no means do we deny that a massive increase in this aversion can be observed; that is precisely what the term crisis signifies. But such a stereotypical negative image also fulfills a positive function in society.<sup>53</sup> It helps by facilitating and disburdening, as people can address their protest and disappointment – which, again, can also be considered from a psychological perspective also and especially because this address is not reachable by post. As such, this negative image is part of the basic orientation of the political public.

Instead of giving in to the use of the alarming term ‘crisis’ and calling for action - as Luhmann pointed out, ‘alarm’ ultimately means “à l’arme”, take up arms<sup>54</sup> - it may therefore be more useful to trust in the self-healing powers of the system. Certain developments can already be observed that appear to indicate a recovery or reclamation of the political - for instance the fact that more and more women are making their way into politics since Trump took office. The organization Emily's List, which assists women

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<sup>52</sup> A. Dörner, *Politainment, Politik in der medialen Erlebnisgesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> N. Luhmann, *Politische Soziologie*, 386.

<sup>54</sup> N. Luhmann, “The Self-Description of Society”, 59.

in applying for political office, claims to have received a total of 25,000 enquiries since the November 2016 election, having received a mere 920 in 2016.<sup>55</sup> The organization *Emerge America*, which recruits and coaches women for political positions, has recorded an 85 percent increase in applications compared to 2016.<sup>56</sup>

Bart Somers, the Mayor of Mechelen, Belgium, and winner of the 2016 World Mayor Prize, successfully introduced a model to fight radicalization, unraveling the paradox posed by the granularization of society simply by accepting it (and also en passant pointing at the new importance cities may play in a globalized world). Instead of imposing an identity upon his citizens from the outside and distinguishing between Muslims and non-Muslims, natives and immigrants, and potential victims of discrimination and potential offenders or criminals, this model takes into account that every individual consists of multiple identities. In a similar vein, Ian Krastev has been warning politicians against using anti-populist rhetoric: “The more one assumes that these people are fascists, the more they will become fascists. These people have no identity, they have no common political ideology... . If we keep telling them who they are, then we create an identity that they will accept”.<sup>57</sup> However important the narrative of multiple identities may be, in particular for Somers himself, it was not the narrative, but rather the efficacy of measures taken by Somers that exerted a binding force in Mechelen, resulting in a massive reduction in the radicalization of young people and greatly enhancing the trust in citizen’s place in politics.

That is not to say, to refer to Paul Valéry's famous 1919 essay, that the collective forms integrated by functional differentiation (*nous autres, civilisations*) are not mortal; social relationships are as precarious as natural ones, a democracy has the same fragility as a life. We know today that even minimal shifts in circumstances can have massive consequences. Do we need

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<sup>55</sup> Emily’s List, “25,000 Reasons To Be Excited For 2018”, 2017, available at <https://www.emilyslist.org/news/entry/emilys-list-announces-that-20000-women-are-ready-to-run-for-office>, retrieved 2.2.2018.

<sup>56</sup> M. Gatzke, T. Schröder and F. Mohr, “Trump wirkt”, in *Die Zeit*, 2018, available at <http://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2018-01/donald-trump-wirtschaft-usa>, retrieved 20.1.2018.

<sup>57</sup> L. Gorris, “Wie ein osteuropäischer Politikexperte die Unzufriedenheit der Ostdeutschen erklärt”, *Der Spiegel*, 2018, available at <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/ostdeutschland-politologe-ivan-krastev-ueber-unzufriedene-ostdeutsche-a-1188946.html>, retrieved 3.2.2017; Krastev quoted from Gorris, translated by Markus Heidingsfelder.

to worry about democracy? Is it an endangered species? As befits a modern society, even if the debate is dominated by certain pessimism, the answers to this question vary. Kurlantzick speaks of a “democracy meltdown”,<sup>58</sup> Diamond has observed what he calls a “democracy recession” for most of the last decade<sup>59</sup>, and Fukuyama also sees deficiencies in the performance of democracies in recent years<sup>60</sup>; others, like Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, disagree, even calling the democratic recession a myth<sup>61</sup> – something that did not nonetheless prevent Levitzky and Daniel Ziblatt from publishing a book this year whose title bluntly stresses the mortality of democracies.<sup>62</sup>

Although we should not make the mistake of equating democracy with politics, the same applies to the latter – it too is mortal. Integration may not be possible, but destruction is.<sup>63</sup> And since politics can only rely on itself when reproducing itself, it always co-produces the problem of its reproduction. The “free-floating processes” of politics, to refer to a phrase coined by Georg Simmel, are constantly looking for and rely on people who want to participate.<sup>64</sup> The global protesters do not want to participate – their only answer is the outright rejection of politics. Trump and AfD voters, on the other hand, clearly want to participate, unfolding the paradox of anti-political politics – just like those who, by opposing them, claim to be on the ‘right side’.

Even if the structural changes referred to in this text clearly demand the dynamization of our understanding of modern politics, there is no indication thus far that this self-substitutive order known as ‘politics’ is about to

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<sup>58</sup> J. Kurlantzick, The Great Democracy Meltdown, *The New Republic*, 2011, available at <https://longform.org/posts/the-great-democracy-meltdown>, retrieved 12.2.2018.

<sup>59</sup> L. Diamond, “Facing Up to the Democratic Recession”, *Journal of Democracy* 26, No.1 (2015): 141-155, available at <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/article/facing-democratic-recession>, retrieved 2.2.2018.

<sup>60</sup> F. Fukuyama, Why Is Democracy Performing So Poorly?, *Journal of Democracy* 26, No.1 (2015): 11-20, available at [https://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/ff\\_jod\\_jan2015.pdf](https://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/ff_jod_jan2015.pdf), retrieved 3.1.2018.

<sup>61</sup> S. Levitsky and L. Way, The Myth of Democratic Recession, *Journal of Democracy* 26, No.1 (2015): 45-58, available at <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Levitsky-26-1.pdf>, retrieved 3.2.2018.

<sup>62</sup> S. Levitsky and D. Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> N. Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 93.

<sup>64</sup> G. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, Third enlarged edition, D. Frisby (ed.) (London: Routledge, 2004).

halt its reproduction. In this sense, both Trump and the AfD are a considerable way ahead of social theory.