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# **Building a New Nation: Anti-Muslim Racism in Post-Unification Germany**

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## ***Abstract***

Research has provided insight into ideas, agents and patterns of inequality associated with Islamophobia. Yet, we know less about why anti-Muslim racism is so virulent and persistent today. Focusing on post-unification Germany, we explore the broader function Islamophobia fulfils for society. We draw on a discourse analysis of statements by four public figures, the publicists Monika Maron and Alice Schwarzer, and the politicians Vera Lengsfeld and Beatrix von Storch; two of them are from Germany's former East, and the other two from the former West. We found little evidence of regionally specific regional 'flavours' of anti-Muslim racism, but noted that the speakers' diverging positionality in re-unified Germany shapes their Islamophobic agitation. Our analysis shows how 'old' and 'new' Germans distinctly participate in re-creating western identities as unmarked norm. Anti-Muslim racism, we argue, plays an important role in everyday discursive acts of nation-building, and assists in justifying multi-layered patterns of stratification. Outward projections onto an 'Other', the 'enemy within', fulfil a key function: the integration of a highly polarized society, at least on the symbolic level. The collective in need of integration, our analysis suggests, may therefore not necessarily be the one that is the main target of such efforts.

**Key words: Race, Racism, Islamophobia, Nationalism, German Re-Unification, Germany**

## **1. Introduction**

Anti-Muslim racism thrives across Europe. Popular tropes are animated by historic Orientalist repertoires and often include quasi-pedagogical rescue attempts of the Muslim woman through legal restrictions of her public appearance, depictions of Muslim man as hyper-sexed patriarchal savage, and narratives that ascribe a specific proclivity to violence, conflict, homophobia, or anti-Semitism to Islamic 'culture'. Research into Islamophobia has identified key tropes and ideas associated with this racist repertoire (Attia 2009; Meer 2014, Klug 2014, Shooman 2014), accounted for political parties, social movements and public figures who advance Islamophobic political agendas (Schneiders 2010, Hafez 2014, Shooman 2016), and offered insights into anti-Muslim racism's manifestation in public opinion, its institutional reproduction and eruption in violent hate crimes (Decker et al. 2018, Lewicki 2017, 2018). While we have hence gained an understanding of the empirical facets of the

phenomenon, we know less about how and why anti-Muslim racism is so virulent and persistent today. Focusing on one particular case study, the German context, we thus explore the function Islamophobia fulfils for society as a whole.

Research into the gendered features of Islamophobia has highlighted two key functions so far. The idea that the ‘other’ culture is a sexist hell for women is positioned as in danger of being ‘imported’ through ‘unregulated’ immigration, on which grounds extensions of the security architecture and stricter immigration rules are mobilized – domestically and internationally, technologically and legally (Abu Lughod 2013; Amir-Moazami 2014; Boulila and Carri 2017, Kapoor 2018). Furthermore, distinctions between Muslim man as beast of prey and Muslim woman as sexual property uphold a gendered and racialized division of labour; Farris (2017) has shown that the growing sector of professional care and domestic work is disproportionately outsourced to women from the global south. Thus, the trend of securitization, as well as current patterns of dividing labour, rely on and are productive of Islamophobia, which in turn is constitutive of these political projects.

Our analysis draws attention to a third function that Islamophobia fulfils in European publics. Anti-Muslim racism, with its specific focus on gender, we suggest, resumes a significant socio-ideological compensatory role in processes of nation-building. Scholarship on the German context has related anti-Muslim racism to colonial practices (Attia 2009; Amir-Moazami 2014, Shooman 2014), the significance of the late emergence of the German nation state (Attia 2009) and the overcoming of the Nationalist-Socialist project (ibid., Pratt-Ewing 2008); pointing to the long-duree of Orientalist projections of gendered deviance and inferiority onto Islam and Muslims, these works note that articulations of anti-Muslim racist repertoires always involved simultaneous self-projections onto German society which enabled positioning the latter as progressive and enlightened unmarked norm.

While we build upon this important genealogical ground-work, we also suggest that these analyses have insufficiently engaged with Germany's most recent nation-building project, which evolved as a result of the country's division and re-unification in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The joining of two German states at the end of the cold war bore a range of asymmetries (see Lewicki 2018). The transition from the communist dictatorship to a capitalist democratic system evolved at great speed, and largely on the terms of West Germany. As a result, the majority of leadership positions across the public and private sector, in politics, the media, or Universities continue to be held by West Germans (Bluhm and Jacobs 2016), who also own significant proportions of property and larger enterprises in the East. German re-unification furthermore was followed by significant migratory movements of younger people relocating from the East to the West.<sup>1</sup> Beyond these asymmetries, two societies have been brought together which had operated on distinct societal organising principles for decades – ranging from the public role of religion, ideas of gender equality, to the provision of state welfare. Last but not least, both societies had been discursively pitted against one another – while West Germany was constructed as the capitalist successor of the Nazi state in the East, East Germany was positioned as 'lagging behind' in terms of civilization, modernity and democratic culture in the West (Kubiak 2018). In light of such disparities, and decades of projecting inferiority upon another, German nationalism provided a key unifying tool.

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<sup>1</sup> Bangel, Christian et al. „Die Millionen, die gingen“. *Zeit Online*, 02.05.2019. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2019-05/ost-west-wanderung-abwanderung-ostdeutschland-umzug>.

In the following, we explore the role attributed to projections upon the ‘Other’ in this context. Specifically, we examine how Islamophobia features in East and West German narratives of German history and unification.<sup>2</sup>

We draw on a discourse analysis of statements by four public figures who often participate in public debates on Islam in Germany, the publicists Monika Maron and Alice Schwarzer, as well as the politicians Vera Lengsfeld and Beatrix von Storch; two of them are from Germany’s former East, while the other two are from the former West. While we found little evidence of specific ideological or regional ‘flavours’ of their anti-Muslim argumentation, we noted that the speakers’ diverging positionality in re-unified Germany distinctly shaped their Islamophobic agitation.

Our analysis shows that projections into Germany’s past and future provide a key site of nation-building, whereby ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Germans distinctly contribute to the making of western identity as unmarked norm: East German intellectuals Maron and Lengsfeld, raise the credentials of their anti-Muslim agitation by highlighting their own oppositional stance to the GDR. On this basis, they inscribe themselves into and assert their position within a West-German identity, which can still be described as fragile for people from the GDR. Schwarzer and von Storch’s narratives, in contrast, engage in re-framing West Germany’s last dictatorship, the Nazi era, by recommending a ‘moving on from the past’. Unpacking two pillars of West German national identity, self-critical engagement with the Nazi legacy, and a focus on gender equality, they project racism and sexism outward onto the Other, which allows them to purify the unified German collective. Social contention, including about the asymmetries of the unification process, is thereby relegated to the domain of ‘identity’, which creates the illusion of simplistic solutions for complex patterns of social stratification.

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<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s, the main focus of such projections were asylum seekers and ethnic minorities. In the last two decades, attention has increasingly shifted to individuals who perceive themselves or self-describe as Muslims (see Lewicki 2018).

Anti-Muslim racism, we therefore suggest, plays an important role in everyday discursive acts of nation-building – and assists in upholding a diverse spectrum of patterns of dominance. The projection onto an ‘Other’, an enemy within, thereby fulfils a key function: the integration of a highly polarized society, at least on the symbolic level. The collective in need of integration, the following sections suggest, may thus not necessarily be the one most frequently positioned as main target of such efforts.

Although the main focus of this paper is on Germany, the insights into the role anti-Muslim racism plays within its’ nation-building project can also be traced in other national and supranational contexts. In the following, we will briefly elaborate the key conceptual considerations and methodological choices underpinning our analysis, and then turn to discussing the East and the West German case studies.

## **2. The Making of a Self**

The mechanism at the centre of our analysis can be described as the social-ideological function of racism. On the symbolic level, projections onto an Other provide an integrative tool, a way of arriving at new certainties about ‘who we are’ and ‘how we do things’ – as it can be asserted who we definitely are not, and how we certainly do not do things. The Other, as Kalmar observes, comes to embody ‘what we fear we ourselves may be’ (2012, 16). The outsourcing of negative characteristics and behaviours hence reveals less about its target, and more about the desire to re-imagine and re-invent the self. Such projections, Žižek notes, function as an ‘Ego-Ideal’, the point from which a collective can see itself in a likeable, idealized form, worthy of affection (1992, 192). Outward projections are thus not only instructive about ideas and characteristics attributed to the other, but even more so give insight into the micro-dynamics of the making of a self.

This mechanism has been explored historically, for instance, by Kalmar (2012) who examined early manifestations of Orientalism from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, and showed how the gendered vilification of Allah and Muslim man as despots enabled projecting existential anxieties about an uncaring deity and its worldly representation onto the Orient, “as if they were the downside of Islam alone (and maybe of Judaism) but not of Christianity” (ibid., 2). Scheer showed how during the cold war, West Germany sharpened the contours of its Christian, enlightened and democratic self-image against what was narrated as the Soviet Union’s godless ‘evil empire’ (2014).

In contemporary Germany, the debate about ‘Leitkultur’, a guiding culture for immigrant communities, offers a good illustration of this mechanism. During the election campaign in 2017, the ‘what defines us?’ question circulated prominently. Then-Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maziere offered a response in an opinion piece in *BILD am Sonntag*, the major German tabloid, by suggesting: “We are not Burqa!”. The headline was followed by a neat catalogue of practices that he identified as characteristics of German collective identity, including statements such as “we show our face”, “we stretch out our hand to greet somebody”, and “we do not link ideas of honour to violence”.<sup>3</sup> The catalogue attributes dishonesty, reservation and aggression to practices that are sweepingly associated with Islamic contexts, and positions them outside the desirable collective. At the same time, the unmarked self, the thereby constructed German collective, appears as honest, transparent and peaceful. Thus, the opinion piece reflects the desire to unify German society around certain commonalities, which, especially in a post-unification landscape and the resulting disparities, becomes accessible by means of a contrast to ‘what we don’t do’. In the following, we investigate this mechanism more closely, focusing in particular on its micro-dynamics across post-unification Germany’s East and West.

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<sup>3</sup> de Maziere, Thomas ,Leitkultur in Deutschland – Was ist das eigentlich?’, *Bild am Sonntag*, 30.04.2017.



### **3. Methodological Considerations**

We draw on a discourse analysis, assuming that meaning making is reflective and productive of social reality. In relation to racism, the analysis of discourse is important, not only because discursive formations shape attitudes and opinions towards racialized populations, but also because racism tends to be institutionally reproduced and translated into various forms of discrimination. Teun van Dijk (2002) highlights that racist ideology does not emerge from interaction in diverse contexts per se, but is acquired and learned through communication, thus through text and talk. And vice versa, racist repertoires are “typically expressed, formulated, defended, and legitimated in discourse and may thus be reproduced and shared within the dominant group” (ibid., 146). A discourse-analytical approach contributes to revealing the criteria according to which divisions between in- and outgroup are discursively constructed, and into how communities are imagined and crafted, as well as into how these fabrications become part of collective knowledge.

Accordingly, we analysed press statements and blogs, social media, and journalistic and literary contributions by four prominent public figures, the publicists Monika Maron and Alice Schwarzer and the politicians Vera Lengsfeld (Christian Democratic Party, CDU) and Beatrix von Storch (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD). Maron and Lengsfeld were prominent voices in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), while Schwarzer’s and von Storch’s engagement has been shaped by and contributed to public debates in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). In our understanding, the four speakers do not feature as singular elite actors who advance a specific political agenda, but their statements are reflective and productive of a wider set of contemporary ways of framing issues in relation to Islam in Germany. The four figures were selected as they have a track record of public anti-Muslim

racist interventions, which regularly gain traction within far-right online networks, such as ‘Politically Incorrect’ (Shooman 2016). The speakers’ concerns furthermore explicitly echo with a significant proportion of the German population (Decker et al. 2018), and, as we show in our analysis below, also resonate with recent policy initiatives, e.g. legislation in areas such as sexual abuse, immigration and integration.

The statements we analyse below, while not representative of German society as a whole, can nevertheless be considered as of influential and norm-setting status. While we selected four figures who self-describe as women, the analysis shows that their agitation is by no means limited to the feminist spectrum, as has often been highlighted in the literature, but reflects a diverse set of positionalities, from far-right, to centrist-right, radical feminist, to ‘old left’. Although the four find themselves on different if not opposite ends of the political spectrum, their arguments in debates on Islam turn out to have much in common (see also Farris 2017; Hadj-Abdou 2017).

#### **4. Life in the GDR and the making of ever foresighted revolutionaries**

We begin our analysis with the discussion of statements by two public figures who have been socialized in former East Germany. The novelist Monika Maron, born in 1941, was an acknowledged public intellectual in the GDR. She moved to the FRG in 1988, one year before the Berlin wall came down, upon officially applying for a visa. Her work has since critically engaged with life in the GDR. In 2010, she positioned herself prominently in debates about Islam, which contributed to raising her public profile in unified Germany. She sharply repudiated then-Federal President Christian Wulff’s statement that Islam, along with

Christianity and Judaism, now also belonged to Germany.<sup>4</sup> At the height of the *PEGIDA* (*Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West*) demonstrations in late 2014, she travelled to Dresden and expressed understanding for the demonstrators' 'worries', and defended them against accusations of racism.

Vera Lengsfeld, born in 1952, was a well-known civil rights activist who opposed the GDR regime. She now also harbours sympathies with *PEGIDA*. One of her regular contributions to the popular right-wing conservative blog 'Achse des Guten' (Axis of Good), welcomed the protest movement's growth with the appeal "Sie sind das Volk!" ("They are the people!"). Lengsfeld was barred from practicing her profession in the GDR, subsequently expelled from the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) in 1983 and deported to the west in 1988. From 1990 to 2005, she was an elected member of the Bundestag. When the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at wanted to build the first mosque in Berlin's former East in 2006, Lengsfeld campaigned with a citizens' initiative against the planned mosque in Pankow.

In their anti-Muslim agitation, Maron and Lengsfeld both use their experiences in the GDR as a foil, against whose background they interpret the Federal Republic's contention over the meaning of an open, diverse society. Projections into the past, thus their experience with the GDR, thereby play an important role in advancing their ethnocentric vision of a German nation.

Monika Maron, for example, runs a private political salon in Berlin together with sociologist and writer Necla Kelek. Individuals like Kelek, often referred to as 'native informants', are important allies for Maron and Lengsfeld; to them they are 'voices critical of Islam', which are 'not listened to enough in politics'. Their role, Monika Maron elaborated in an interview, reminded her of "our East-West history," because in the GDR, "dissidents" were also

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<sup>4</sup> Monika Maron (2010) 'Der Islam gehört nicht zu Deutschland', *Der Tagesspiegel* 5.10.2010. <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/glaube/zur-rede-des-bundespraesidenten-der-islam-gehoert-nicht-zu-deutschland/1949762.html>.

ignored: “We were troublemakers. And today, the government would rather speak with traditional associations than with secularized Muslims”.<sup>5</sup> Her concern blocks out the fact that, for example, Necla Kelek participated in the first German Islam Conference, and that her 2005 book ‘Die fremde Braut’ (The Foreign Bride) was reviewed by none other than the then-Federal Minister of the Interior Otto Schily in one of the most widely read German magazines (‘Der Spiegel’).

However, Maron does not only apply the label of dissident to Muslim critics of Islam. After the publication of Thilo Sarrazin’s bestseller ‘Deutschland schafft sich ab’ (Germany does away with itself), which presented an apocalyptic social vision of Germany's demise due to disproportionately high Muslim fertility rates, Maron and Kelek gave several interviews to the conservative newspaper ‘Die Welt’. Both rushed to defend Berlin’s former Finance Senator, who also had presented his ideas in their salon. They decisively refuted accusations of racism, taking them as proof of a supposed ‘witch hunt’ for critics of Islam in Germany. “All of this reminds me of the absurd discussions in the GDR,” Maron noted.<sup>6</sup> She complained about the growing suppression of the freedom of speech, as a result of which it was no longer possible “to speak without censorship.”<sup>7</sup> Parts of the media, which to her were “defenders of the veil and headscarf” preferred to “conceal or sugarcoat obvious grievances.”<sup>8</sup> The critique of racist arguments, to Maron, represented the West-German left-liberal elites’ betrayal of western values. In her contribution to ‘Der Spiegel’, she wrote: “Had the militant critics of Islam grown up in an Islamic culture, like Necla Kelek, or had they spent most of their life in the GDR, as I did, perhaps they would value western values

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<sup>5</sup> Anna Schneider, Monika Maron (2010) ‚Suche nach dem richtigen Leben‘, *Pegnitz Zeitung* 12.11.2010. <http://n-land.de/kultur/monika-maron-suche-nach-dem-richtigen-leben>.

<sup>6</sup> Seibel, Andrea (2011) ‚Die hohe Kunst des Falschverstehens, Interview with Necla Kelek and Monika Maron‘, *Die Welt* 28.7.2011. [https://www.welt.de/print/die\\_welt/politik/article13511809/Die-hohe-Kunst-des-Falschverstehens.html](https://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/politik/article13511809/Die-hohe-Kunst-des-Falschverstehens.html).

<sup>7</sup> Seibel, Andrea (2010) Die nachhaltigen Offenbarungen der Sarrazin-Debatte. Interview with Necla Kelek and Monika Maron, *Die Welt* 27.9.2010. <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article9883774/Die-nachhaltigen-Offenbarungen-der-Sarrazin-Debatte.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

more highly, for all their imperfections.”<sup>9</sup> Advocates of an open, plural society and of parity of participation to her are “German and European propagandists of tolerance versus intolerance and the equal worth of all cultures,” who join Muslim representatives in defaming and slandering critics of Islam.<sup>10</sup> Politicians in particular are seen as pandering to Muslims whose demographic growth could soon become decisive for elections.<sup>11</sup>

Lengsfeld too equals Muslim immigration to an apocalyptic scenario, placing responsibility for this development with the West German “elites on the left, who in the past vehemently opposed German reunification, yet were unable to prevent it, and now have turned to undermining Germany.”<sup>12</sup> The supposed conspiracy of elites and minorities against ‘the people’ is a key right-wing populist trope. In its Islamophobic variant, societal elites become ‘the gravediggers of occidental culture’. Both Maron’s and Lengsfeld’s statements at times are suggestive of analogies between the current political system and the GDR’s single-party rule. In 2015, for instance, Lengsfeld gave a public talk at the regional Centre for Political Education in Saxony (Sächsische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung), that was titled “Why (Not) Go to Pegida,” and in which she stated that “disinformation circulates at all levels.”<sup>13</sup> “As in the days of the SED,” the East German Communist Party, Lengsfeld concluded, “freedom of opinion only applies to opinions that conform with the mainstream. (...) As in the GDR, anyone who has a job to lose better keep their mouth shut.”<sup>14</sup>

Wearing the garb of the one-time civil-rights activist, Lengsfeld attempted to stage her rejection of an open, pluralistic society as resistance against continuous political

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<sup>9</sup> Monika Maron (2010) ‚Die Besserfundis‘, *Der Spiegel* 4/2010, 106-107, here p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> Monika Maron (2011) ‚Das Licht des Wissens. Was von Lessing und Moses Mendelssohn über den Umgang mit dem Islam zu lernen ist‘, *ibid.* p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> Monika Maron (2012) ‚Warum der Islam nicht zu Deutschland gehört‘, *Die Welt* 23.4.2012. <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article106216946/Warum-der-Islam-nicht-zu-Deutschland-gehoert.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Vera Lengsfeld (2017) ‚Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit? Nicht in Deutschland!‘ Vera Lengsfeld’s Blog 3.10.2017. <http://vera-lengsfeld.de/2017/10/03/einigkeit-und-recht-und-freiheit-nicht-in-deutschland/>.

<sup>13</sup> Vera Lengsfeld (2015) ‚Warum (nicht) zu Pegida gehen?‘, Blog Achse des Guten 27.1.2015. [http://www.achgut.com/artikel/warum\\_nicht\\_zu\\_pegida\\_gehen](http://www.achgut.com/artikel/warum_nicht_zu_pegida_gehen).

<sup>14</sup> Lengsfeld (2017) see above.

oppression. Thus, she refers to her critique of and resistance to the GDR regime to raise the credentials of her anti-Muslim agitation. Foregrounding their involvement in the social movement that brought down the GDR furthermore enables distance from West German perceptions of East Germans as “collaborators” in the GDR regime. Their dissident life, self-ascribed in the case of Maron, thereby makes both agitators seem predestined to raise a warning finger in debates about immigration, Islam, and Muslims. Accordingly, Maron feels that Germany is “threatened at its political and cultural foundations” by its current immigration policy, which to her “compels a people to commit collective suicide.”<sup>15</sup> In summary, Maron and Lengsfeld utilize their positionality within German history, their first-hand experience of the transgressions, but also the collapse and the disintegration of the once powerful Soviet Empire, to warn the Westerners who, in Krastev’s terms ‘remained unscathed by those traumatic events’ (2017,11). In staging themselves as ever foresighted revolutionaries, both speakers assert a Germanness in which they and their GDR past plays an equal if not pre-eminent role. In the next section, we explore how Islamophobic mobilization offers a tool to assert their own contested belonging to the German collective, and to shift the self-image of the republic in the direction of a more hierarchical and nationalist political community.

## **5. Islamophobia as entry ticket into the German nation**

The nationalist political project advanced by Maron and Lengsfeld, last but not least, secures their own superior position within the majority-German collective. The reproduction of popular anti-Muslim patterns of argumentation thus compensates for the fragility of national belonging, and aims to place a far-right vision at the centre of the nation-building process.

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<sup>15</sup> Monika Maron (2016) ‚Merkels kopflose Politik macht die Rechten stark‘, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14.1.2016. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/monika-maron-merkels-kopflose-politik-macht-die-rechten-stark-14012515.html>.

Just like Lengsfeld, who initially was a member of the left-leaning liberal Green party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, and then joined the conservative Christian Democratic Union in 1996, Maron also shifted from the left to the right. In summer 2017, Maron confessed in the ‘*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*’ that she has not “been on the left for some time.” The media stigmatized people like her, she suggested, as “rightists”: “The newspapers and television stations say that I have a pathological fear of Islam. The truth is that I really am afraid of Islam. But why is that pathological and not reasonable? (...) Most Muslims are peaceful, it’s said. That is true. And yet, every time I pass a woman wearing a headscarf (the German term used here is “kopftuchbewehrt”, literally “armed with a headscarf”), I ask myself, what are you trying to tell me? That you’re different than me? That you’re better than me? That my granddaughters are going to be walking around like that one day?”<sup>16</sup> The motif of a looming Islamization frequently recurs in Maron’s writing. In addition, she uses a classic rhetorical reversal of oppressor/oppressed, insinuating the Muslim woman wore her hijab as a weapon and looked down on her as a non-Muslim. This rhetoric strategy, as Nadia Fadil notes, diverts from common projections of passivity and victimhood onto Muslim woman, turning her into a threatening untrustworthy ‘cunning figure’ (2018). It is precisely the ambivalence of such contradicting projections, Fadil elaborates, that make Muslims appear as the ‘ungovernable other’ whose presence “unsettles existing racial hierarchies and the established sense of Europeanness”, and thus invoke political efforts of domestication (ibid.).

Indeed, Lengsfeld worries “what ‘common values’” there can be between “immigrants from tribal, misogynistic, homophobic societies and self-determined, emancipated [German] women.”<sup>17</sup> Lengsfeld sees an insurmountable gulf between the majority and Muslim post-immigration populations. She articulated this observation in her

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<sup>16</sup> Monika Maron (2017) ‘Links bin ich schon lange nicht mehr’, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 30.6.2017.

<sup>17</sup> Vera Lengsfeld (2017) ‘Unsere emanzipatorischen Errungenschaften gelten nicht mehr. So entsorgt die CDU westliche Werte’, *Huffington Post* 30.8.2017. [http://www.huffingtonpost.de/vera-lengsfeld/cdu-werte-bundestagswahl\\_b\\_17866362.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.de/vera-lengsfeld/cdu-werte-bundestagswahl_b_17866362.html).

shocked response to a ‘Discussion Paper on Participation in the Immigration Society’ that minority organizations presented to Chancellor Merkel in November 2016. The paper highlighted common values between “long-established and new Germans” and made a case for the democratic participation of immigrants and their descendants in various domains of society. To Lengsfeld, the claims made in this paper “amount to the abolition of the old Federal Republic.”<sup>18</sup> It is interesting that she warns of a loss of the *old* Bundesrepublik. She refutes post-immigration population’s right to participation, although some have been citizens of the Federal Republic for longer than she has: by excluding them as outgroup, she inscribes herself into the ingroup. Shoshan (2016) has suggested that this differentiated process operates through an allochronic exclusion which places East Germans’ within Germany’s joint history, and thus renders their membership within the political collective as redeemable. Germany’s colonial and the two divided Germany’s post-war immigration history, in contrast, in which guest-workers (and East German contract workers) made an important contribution to economic prosperity is thereby omitted, while the ‘other’ is positioned as incommensurable outsider. By integrating herself and excluding others, she consolidates the boundaries of what to her should be a white national collective. Maron adopts a similar strategy. In a contribution to the newspaper ‘Die Welt’, she scandalizes “Muslim spokespeople” and their “list of claims” and asks politicians to “set boundaries” for them.<sup>19</sup> She brusquely rebuffs requests for Islamic burial grounds, or the provision of Muslim pastoral care in prisons or the armed forces. Embodying a host who has lost patience with her ungrateful guest, she insists on a hierarchy between herself as a member of the ingroup and the Muslim outgroup, who are to be disciplined if they make moves to leave the marginal social position allocated to them – by, for instance, claiming equal representation or

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Monika Maron (2014) ‘Politiker müssen Muslimen die Grenzen aufzeigen’, *Die Welt* 2.2.2014, <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article124442866/Politiker-muessen-Muslimen-die-Grenzen-aufzeigen.html>.



participation. In her public contributions, Maron frequently highlights that Muslims make up a maximum of five percent of the Federal German population and should hence accept a subordinate role, especially with regard to visibility in society: “Invoking religious freedom, Islam changes our everyday life — vegetarian food in preschools and schools, burkinis at swimming pools, mosques in places where Muslims do not live and with architecture that does not take the cityscape into consideration. (...) I do not want to be accosted by any religion in this way.”<sup>20</sup>

Remarkably, Maron’s scepticism and condemnation is not provoked by mosques that are tucked away in industrial sites, but rather by the prospect of centrally accessible places of worship, which render Muslims visible members of the cityscape. Paradoxically, it is not the lack of integration (of which Muslims are often accused), but rather their successfully proceeding integration that rouses her vehement condemnation. The upward mobility of minorities thus provokes a conflict of dominance in that it is framed as challenge to the majority’s privileged access to material and symbolic resources. Maron would prefer the Other to remain marginalized and invisible: “It is no longer part of the vernacular to self-evidently refer to ourselves as German. We are indigenous or ancestral Germans or Ur-Germans, not just Germans anymore. We no longer are German society, but the majority society. That means we create parallel worlds through language. If there is a majority society, then there is a minority society. Do we want that?”<sup>21</sup> But who is the German “we” in whose name Maron is speaking here? In any case, those perceived as Muslims, and particularly those who practice their religion, are not part of it (see also Weber’s contribution to this special issue). Their exclusion serves as an ipso facto self-affirmation of the contours of national identity.

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<sup>20</sup> Seibel (2010) see above.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Thus, by demarcating the boundaries of the collective both speakers adopt an authoritative position of entitlement to political membership; the assertion of an ethno-centric collective places themselves more explicitly within what they envisage as the inner core of the political community. As Salman Sayyid observes, Islamophobia reactivates the contingency of the inclusion of East and Central Europe as an authentic part of the western patrimony (2018). In this instance, the two speakers reject the imitation imperative, thus West German expectations that East Germans assimilate into liberal-democratic values. Despite their rhetoric endorsement of ‘liberal values’, they propose a revised, distinctly racialized image of the nation that places them at a par with West Germans – at the expense of who is marked as Other.

## **6. Outsourcing racism**

In the following, we discuss the two West German examples. While their arguments are not dissimilar, the two protagonists occupy a distinct speaker position which has implications for their mobilization strategies. They too demarcate the boundaries of the collective by fixating its essence; yet, their efforts are less directed at inscribing themselves into this construction, but rather at justifying their own privileged position within the dominant frame and purifying its contours. While the specificities of East German history play an important role in the East German speakers’ statements, similar explicit references to West German idiosyncrasies are absent. Previous research has pointed out that this lack of evaluative attention is reflective *and* productive of West Germany’s status as unmarked ‘norm’ which in itself contributes to elevating and normalizing its superiority (Cooke 2005; Kubiak 2018).

Alice Schwarzer, born in 1942, is a journalist, writer, and was West Germany’s public feminist par excellence. She is the founder of a social research institute in Hamburg, a

feminist archive, a publishing house in her name, the editor-in-chief of the women's magazine EMMA, the author of several monographs and a regular contributor to major German news outlets. Committed to first wave feminism with its focus on hierarchies of oppression and blind spot on intersectionality, Schwarzer is a contested figure within German feminism. She turned to discussing issues in relation to Islam in the 1990s, raising her public profile considerably with this thematic focus.

Beatrix von Storch was born in 1971 as Duchess of Oldenburg, studied law in the 1990s, and currently represents the far-right 'Alternative für Deutschland' (AfD) in the national parliament. As the majority of leading AfD representatives, von Storch is from the West of Germany. She refers to the Boston Tea Party as a major influence, and founded, together with her husband Sven von Storch, the 'Alliance for the Rule of Law' that mobilized to reclaim aristocratic property in former East Germany. Despite these interventions, she frequently problematizes the asymmetries of the German unification process and laments the relegation of East Germans to 'second class' citizens. Rather than proposing redistributive measures, however, she redirects East German grievances by framing Muslim immigration as the 'real problem'. Von Storch, e.g., is a founding member of a Christian AfD sup-committee named ChrAFD ('Kraft', thus 'power'), whose manifesto pleads to preserve "Christian-Occidental culture" from the threat of "immigrants and Islam".<sup>22</sup>

While East German speakers reflected on the significance of what to them was the 'last dictatorship' during the GDR, our West German examples engage with what to them are the last dark events in German history, namely the Nazi era. In this instance, projections onto the past too play a significant, albeit distinct role in advancing a vision of unified German society. Despite coming from opposite ends of the political spectrum, von Storch and

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<sup>22</sup> Alternative für Deutschland (2017) *Kirchenpolitisches Manifest*, <http://www.afd-rlp-fraktion.de/kommentare/kirchenpolitisches-manifest>.

Schwarzer engage in the re-telling of history and advocate a departure from ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’. The self-critical interrogation of German society’s involvement in Nazi crimes was a key pillar of West German national identity, which can now be ‘overcome’ in the crafting of a new ‘more confident’ unified nation.

Schwarzer says of herself “that the horror of the Nazi era and the Holocaust had a deep impact on her”; in particular, she was put off by the continuities within public office during the Adenauer regime.<sup>23</sup> After positioning herself as active participant in the post-war denazification debates, she goes on to compare the swastika, and on another occasion the Yellow Star that Jews were forced to wear<sup>24</sup> to the Islamic hijab – suggesting that the veil turned women into ‘second class citizens’ (see Kerner 2009; Schneiders 2010 for further examples). Despite her concern with more comprehensive denazification, Schwarzer supports the guilt complex thesis: “There is a particular German problem: the inferiority complex, which can easily turn into megalomania. This love of the alien, the elevation of the alien is an outcome of such low self-esteem.”<sup>25</sup>

Von Storch too thinks it is time to purify German history. She wants Germany “to find itself again after evil wars, crises and years of separation”, and proposes that “we become citizens again rather than subordinates.”<sup>26</sup> The new unified collective is thus positioned as ready ‘to move on’ from the dark side of its history. Other AfD functionaries have also departed from the self-scrutiny on which West German national identity rested, including by trivializing the Nazi era. Von Storch’s AfD colleague Alexander Gauland, for instance, described Hitler and the Nazis as ‘bird shit in more than thousand years of

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<sup>23</sup> Schwarzer, Alice (no year) ‘Mein Leben’, <http://www.aliceschwarzer.de/artikel/mein-leben-kuerze-264781>.

<sup>24</sup> Schwarzer, Alice (2006) ‘Die Islamisten meinen es so ernst wie Hitler’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 04.07. 2006, [http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/alice-schwarzer-im-interview-die-islamisten-meinen-es-so-ernst-wie-hitler-1358511.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex\\_0](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/alice-schwarzer-im-interview-die-islamisten-meinen-es-so-ernst-wie-hitler-1358511.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_0).

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Von Storch, Beatrix (no year) ‘Was mich antreibt’, <https://beatrixvonstorch.de/beatrix-von-storch/>.

successful German history'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly relevant is Alice Weidel's reaction to the recent #metwo campaign.<sup>28</sup> In her contribution to the twitter thread, Weidel argued: "Of course we have a problem with racism; but it is not the [problem of] German citizens, but of those who do not want to integrate and do not accept our values."<sup>29</sup> Despite projecting racism outward onto immigrant populations and playing down the significance of German racist crimes during the Nazi era, the AfD paradoxically instrumentalizes German resistance to the 'Third Reich'. During the 2017 election campaign, an AfD banner in Nürnberg-Süd Schwabach claimed that "Sophie Scholl would vote AfD". Björn Höcke, the regional AfD party leader in Thuringia, who also originates from West Germany, wore the symbol of the 'White Rose' on his jacket while marching next to Neo-Nazis in a rally in Chemnitz in 2018. The appropriation of the resistance movement against the Nazis, and its leading figure, Sophie Scholl, reflects the AfD's self-elevation as revolutionaries against the looming Islamization of Germany – a strategy not dissimilar to the one observed in the East German case, only that the main focus is on West Germany's last dictatorship, whose prominent position in the narration of West German national identity provides a key reference for those socialized in the West.

The Nazi legacy, as Iman Attia reminds us, poses an obstacle to positively identifying with 'Germanness' (2009). The projection upon an Other, e.g. the attribution of a specific proclivity to racism, anti-Semitism or violent oppression onto Islamic communities, makes it possible to distract and move on from Germany's own history of anti-Semitism, and identify positively with being German. Our two West German speakers engage in distinct ways in this

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<sup>27</sup> Deutsche Welle (2018) AfD's Gauland plays down Nazi era as 'bird shit' in German history, 02.06.2018. <https://www.dw.com/en/afds-gauland-plays-down-nazi-era-as-a-bird-shit-in-german-history/a-44055213>.

<sup>28</sup> The hashtag trended in summer 2018 after Meztut Özil resigned from the German national football team in response to racist abuse. Thousands who spent most of their lives in Germany problematized everyday experiences with racism on Twitter.

<sup>29</sup> Weidel, Alice (2018) ,Rassismus Debatte immer absurder!, facebook post 06.08.2018 <https://www.facebook.com/aliceweidel/photos/a.1063313067013261/2092144624130095/?type=3&theater>.

process. Although departing from a critical starting point that problematizes an insufficient denazification in the early years of the Federal Republic, Schwarzer instrumentalizes Nazi symbols to advance her feminist project. She also draws on her involvement in post-war denazification debates to legitimate and authorize her anti-Muslim racist agitation, such as her warnings of ‘megalomania’ and ‘love of the alien’.

Von Storch’s and her AfD colleagues delegitimize critical engagement with German history altogether. By trivializing the Nazi era, and appropriating the resistance movement against the Nazi’s, the AfD seeks to exonerate the public self-image. Although the left leaning Schwarzer, and the far-right AfD functionaries disagree as to the desirable scope of engagement with the Nazi era, they can establish common ground by locating *contemporary* evil outside the German nation. Thereby, both tell the public ‘what we currently are not’, which is anti-Semitic, racist, or guilty.

Thus, the mechanisms outlined above are very explicit here – anti-Muslim narratives divert responsibility for racism, anti-Semitism and violent oppression in Germany’s history, and arrive at new certainties about the contours of the German nation through attributing it exclusively to the Other. Indeed, Schwarzer considers her attention to Islam to be part of her wider emancipatory project: “I prefer to speak of the values we achieved in our society: enlightenment, equal opportunities, democracy. We need to start early with the transmission of these values. (...)”<sup>30</sup> Von Storch similarly sees integration as the „acceptance of our liberal European guiding culture which has been shaped by Christianity and the enlightenment.”<sup>31</sup> In both instances, the speakers construct enlightenment as an ‘organic texture’ of German culture, as well as a process that has already and exclusively been completed by Europe (see Mendel and Neuhold 2015). This narrative is highly selective in

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> von Storch, Beatrix (no year) ‘Wofür ich stehe’, <https://beatrixvonstorch.de/beatrix-von-storch/>.

that neither colonialism nor the Holocaust feature as part of the history of enlightened Germany, even though we paradoxically are to move on from beating ourselves up about the latter. The self that Schwarzer and von Storch are crafting is unified in being ‘free of guilt’.

## 7. Outsourcing Sexism

Anti-Muslim racist agitation places the Other outside of what it constructs as an exclusively civilized realm – this involves not only the outward projection of racism, but also of sexism. In post-war West Germany, Katherine Pratt Ewing notes, gender equality became “a key ideological site for the articulation of democratic values” (2008, 5). The process of post-war self-invention, she illustrates, involved the purification of the image of ‘German man’, but relied on the simultaneous stigmatization, denigration and abjection of the masculinity of the Other. West German activists reintroduce this mechanism in the current nation-building project, where it additionally allows bridging diverging gender norms and preferences, including across East and West, as well as across the political left and right. The debate that emerged in response to the New Year’s celebrations in 2015/2016 illustrates this vividly. Women attending public festivities in several West German cities, most prominently Cologne, were subject to a series of violent assaults including groping and rape. Before any arrests had taken place, recently arrived refugees from Syria were alleged responsible for these attacks.<sup>32</sup> Key public intellectuals and political representatives, including Schwarzer and von Storch, engaged in an animated public debate on cultural explanations for sexual violence, and both connected these events directly to the discussion on immigration from Muslim-majority countries.

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<sup>32</sup> 183 individuals were arrested in connection with the events. The majority was from North African refugee communities who hardly had a chance to obtain asylum in Germany, see Amjahid M. et al., ‘Was geschah wirklich?’, *Zeitmagazin* 23.06.2016.

Schwarzer, for instance, turned violence into a cultural phenomenon when she described those involved in the Cologne attacks as ‘fanaticalized (sic) adherents of Sharia Islam’, who had “humiliated the German state”. In the same breath, she accused the political left of a “false tolerance” and Islamic associations of “backwardness”. The following New Year, she spoke of “uprooted, brutalized Islamized (sic) young men predominantly from Algeria and Morocco”.<sup>33</sup> In her view, the events constituted a political demonstration of “Jihadism from below”,<sup>34</sup> and were intended to send a clear message to women – that they were not welcome in the public square. In Schwarzer’s view, the reception of refugees therefore jeopardized German feminists’ achievements (see Boulila and Carri 2017). During the national election campaign in 2017, von Storch posted on her Facebook page: “The New Year’s Eve attacks by refugees and migrants in Cologne (...) were only the tip of the iceberg. The constitutional state’s loss of control now hits not only the metropole, but also small and mid-size towns, where the world seemed to be ‘still in order’. The state of emergency, facilitated by Angela Merkel’s opening of the border and laissez-faire politics, has now also reached the province.”<sup>35</sup> The narrative is suggestive of an invasion by a violent mob, the systematic erosion of the rule of law and a permanent state of emergency. The political agenda resulting from this diagnosis is a catalogue of more restrictive immigration laws, faster and more rigidly enforced deportations. These, by no means only advocated by Schwarzer and von Storch, but were quickly implemented by the then Coalition Government – who also passed a new law governing sexual assault and linked it explicitly to the German Residence Act. These political reforms, as Boulila and Carri note, normalize the racialized terms of the debate about sexual abuse and gender violence a result of ‘open borders’

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<sup>33</sup> DPA (2017) ‚Entwurzelte, brutalisierte, islamisierte Männer‘ *Spiegel Online* 04.01.2017 <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/silvester-in-koeln-alice-schwarzer-wirft-nordafrikanern-provokation-vor-a-1128602.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Schwarzer, Alice (2017) ‚Der Rufmord‘, *Die Zeit*, 10.08.2017, p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> von Storch, Beatrix (2017) facebook post 19.07.2017, <https://www.facebook.com/BeatrixVonStorch/photos/a.555550651153051/1658896100818495/?type=1&theater>



(2017:291). Thus, the denigration of the masculinity of the Other diverts responsibility for sexism onto the Muslim man and justifies his abjection – suggesting that the problem of violence against women is solved if we just get rid of him.

Even though Schwarzer and von Storch seemingly agree on the scope of the problem with sexual violence – Muslim man’s barbaric inclinations – as well as on the solution – tighter immigration rules – their points of departure are very different. While Schwarzer describes herself as radical first wave feminist, who opposes hierarchical relationships between men and women and the attribution of specific roles in society,<sup>36</sup> von Storch would like to “pull the plug on feminism” and advocates a traditionalist conservative vision that rests on the heteronormative family as a “key emotional and social pillar of society”<sup>37</sup>. Despite the tensions between these two political projects, the two can establish common ground in what they think is *not* the way to do gender – by projecting sexism onto the figure of Muslim man. The stigmatization of the Other as patriarchal savage thus offers a strategy of consolidating disparities on the appropriate role for women in German society.

## **8. The Making of a New Nation**

Our analysis showed that both ‘old’ and ‘new’ Germans distinctly deploy references to German history, and contribute, each in their own way, to re-building a unified German nation as unmarked norm. Anti-Muslim racist agitation plays an important role in this endeavour. The participation of East German intellectuals and politicians, in this instance Maron and Lengsfeld, in Islamophobic agitation, invokes and stabilizes a unified West German identity, which, 25 years after the fall of the Berlin wall, can still be described as fragile for people with a GDR background. The denial of rights to people who are perceived

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<sup>36</sup> Schwarzer, Alice (no year) ‘Mein Leben’, <http://www.aliceschwarzer.de/artikel/mein-leben-kuerze-264781>.

<sup>37</sup> von Storch, Beatrix ‘Die Ehe für alle ist am Ende’, facebook post 30.06.2017 <https://www.facebook.com/BeatrixVonStorch/posts/die-ehe-für-alle-ist-am-ende-eine-ehe-für-keinen-und-darum-geht-es-den-protagoni/1632821356759303/>.

or self-describe as Muslims thereby serves as means of asserting their own belonging to this imagined collective. Their ethnocentric vision allows inserting themselves at the core of this new ‘we’. Maron’s and Lengsfeld’s interventions *simultaneously* derive their legitimacy from their experiences in the GDR. Their positioning as dissidents provides a foil for their sharp critique of German immigration and integration policy. Along with Muslims, West German ‘liberal elites’ (a category which includes all established political parties) are constructed as enemy agents which, today as in the cold war, work toward the weakening of the West.

Taking a closer look at two West German examples, Schwarzer and von Storch, we showed how their interventions draw on anti-Muslim tropes to advance diverging, if not contradictory political projects. Yet, both advocate a departure from the German ‘guilt complex’. Paradoxically, in the case of the AfD, the re-telling of Germany’s Nazi legacy is accompanied by an appropriation of the resistance movement against the Nazi state. Here too, historic references are to raise the agitator’s credentials. Two focal points of West German identity are at the centre of the West German case study – the emphasis on self-scrutiny in relation to racism, and the fore-grounding of gender equality as a site of self-invention. Propositions to control, unveil or abject those positioned as Muslim ‘Others’ perform a compensatory function in the modelling of an enlightened progressive collective self-image. Diverting responsibility for racism and sexism, anti-Muslim racist tropes enable arriving at a sense of certainty about the contours of the German nation.

Our analysis supports Farris’ (2017) observation of an ‘unholy’ ‘alliance’ between far-right agitators, feminist activists and liberal policy makers that congregates in legitimating and implementing anti-Muslim racism. We further showed that our four ‘examples’ are not marginalized or specifically radical voices, and that their discursive framing of ‘social problems’ and appropriate policy responses resonates with a range of legislative and executive political initiatives, including laws regulating sexual abuse, immigration and

integration. This is not to suggest, however, that our examples necessarily are representative of wider society as whole. Instead, longitudinal survey data suggests that a nationalist vision of society, which currently is strongly linked to support for Islamophobia, resonates with around half of the population in Germany's East and West (Decker et al. 2018).

Thus, anti-Muslim racism allows redirecting East German grievances about the asymmetric terms of German unification, and West Germany's reinvention as purified enlightened collective. Ethno-centric visions of new Germany gain stability via projections of alterity onto Muslims, which contribute to reaching, at least socio-ideological common ground on 'who we are not', and 'what we don't do'. The self-description as specifically modern and democratic-egalitarian collective thus not only masks, but also re-creates and reinforces hierarchical binaries between a privileged West and a disadvantaged rest. As a result, the population in East Germany,<sup>38</sup> as well as post-immigration populations, including those self-describing or perceived as Muslims,<sup>39</sup> remain distinctly, yet systematically economically and politically disadvantaged. Their experiences of disadvantage of course differ significantly, last but not least in a disproportionate likelihood to be exposed to racist violence (Lewicki 2018). The outward projection thus enables the fabrication of an egalitarian and post-racial self-image that stands in direct opposition to the discriminatory actions that it justifies.

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<sup>38</sup> Employment rates continue to differ across East and West: the mean household income in the former West currently is at 80.000 Euro, it is at 24.000 Euro in the former East (Kubiak 2018, 32). Although 87% of the population from the former East continues to reside in this era, only 23% of leadership positions, including in federal and regional government, media, the education system or the private sector are held by former East German citizens (Bluhm and Jacobs 2016).

<sup>39</sup> A range of studies have documented how Muslims currently face disadvantages in the labour market, the criminal justice system, the welfare sector, the education system and within various branches of the public administration (Lewicki 2017). They are systematically under-represented in leadership positions, parliament, and public office (Foroutan and Kubiak 2018), and frequently become the target of everyday racist abuse. Online hate crimes and violent attacks against individuals, refugee shelters and mosques have disproportionately risen in the last years (Shooman 2016, Lewicki 2017, 2018).

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