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Carmen Heß & Johann Honnens

Introduction

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Floris Biskamp

Fascists vs. Anti-Fascists or Self-Righteous Cosmopolitans vs. Left-Behind Communitarians? Reflections on Political and Cultural Polarization Today

We undoubtedly live in polarized times. There are a host of issues on which opinions are sharply divided, with the opposing sides portraying each other's opinion not only as factually wrong but also as morally evil. In many Western countries, this is even true for seemingly nonpolitical, common-sensical issues such as wearing face masks during a pandemic of a respiratory disease. This polarization oftentimes takes the form of a "cultural war" in which a liberal and progressive culture on the one side is pitted against a traditional or even authoritarian culture (Reckwitz, 2016) on the other. While hardly anyone questions that such a polarization exists, the way in which it should be framed and explained is a matter of debate, as is the way one should deal with it. This paper adds to this discussion by contrasting two different approaches to framing the polarization. The first approach focuses on far-right ideology and frames the polarization as one between *authoritarianism or even fascism* on the one hand and *righteous antifascism* on the other hand. The second approach claims to be more neutral and portrays the polarization as one between *self-righteous better-off cosmopolitans* on the one hand and *frustrated forgotten communitarians* on the other. I argue that both approaches teach important lessons and should be taken seriously, but that neither of them shows the whole picture. Thus if one wants to understand the current polarization and act responsibly within it, one should heed the warnings from both approaches.

My argument consists of five steps: I will begin by 1) sketching the first approach focusing on the ideology of the far right and its depiction of different social groups, 2) to then summarize the cosmopolitanism/communitarianism hypothesis. In the next step 3), I compare the depiction of different social groups in far-right ideology with that found in the cosmopolitanisms/communitarianism literature and point to strong analogies. In the last two steps I discuss 4) the merits and 5) the shortcomings of this approach, 6) concluding that it does offer some insights but is also in danger of producing ideology itself.

1. The First Approach: In Opposition to a Hateful Ideology of Three Groups

The first of the two approaches is based on an analysis of and opposition to far-right ideology. Far-right ideology should not be reduced to populism, yet populism is one core component of far-right ideology today. Despite many differences in the details, most scholars agree that populism is marked by two ideological elements: first by the construction of a distinction between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elites," second by the claim that "the corrupt elites" took power away from "the pure people" and that this usurpation should be reversed. Within the specific form of populism articulated by the far right today, "the pure people" is defined in a nativist and authoritarian fashion, i.e., as an ethnical or at least cultural entity that should be safeguarded against the

corrupting influence of *other* groups who are not part of this collective (Mudde, 2019, pp. 24-31; Müller, 2016, pp. 19-34).

A particularly dangerous version of this ideology is the narrative of "The Great Replacement," which is spread by far-right online activists as well as by far-right parties and their leaders (Cosentino, 2020, pp. 74-81; Davey & Ebner, 2019; Mudde, 2019, pp. 29-31; Quent, 2019 pp. 211-213; Camus & Lebourg, 2017, pp. 206–207). This narrative holds that populations of Western nations are being deliberately "replaced" with non-Western foreigners in order to make the populations more easily governable and exploitable. Here, "the pure people" is composed of simple, hard-working, decent, and loyal people, pursuing a traditional lifestyle and trying their best in life. At least implicitly they are portrayed as white and heterosexual. Dutch far-right politician Geert Wilders refers to them as "Henk and Ingrid"—choosing two "typically Dutch" names—with their "typicality" being determined in a nativist fashion (Moffit, 2016, p. 106). The foreign others are portrayed as indecent, criminal, wild, sexually backwards, lazy, greedy, etc. Sometimes they are described as invading armies or colonizers, sometimes as a threatening natural force like water masses pushing against the flood gates of a city. Depending on the specific context, these outer enemies are either identified as Muslims, Africans, or Latin Americans.

Within the narrative of "The Great Replacement," "the corrupt elite" can be divided into two parts. First, there are those who supposedly rule the world, manipulating, dominating, and exploiting the masses. This small group supposedly masterminds and oversees the whole operation of the "Replacement," leading foreigners into Western countries. This group is identified with political elites and economic elites, particularly in the finance industry. To name names, individuals supposedly found among these evildoers are Angela Merkel, Hillary Clinton, or George Soros. Second, there is a larger group that can be considered to be part of "the corrupt elites" but that is bigger and plays a different role. Rather than all-powerful evildoers, these people are portrayed as degenerate naive weaklings who do not understand what is really happening but have fallen prey to an ideology misrepresenting this heinous crime as noble humane action. The social groups identified with this image are typically liberals, supporters of green parties, academics from the humanities, journalists, feminists, antiracists, etc.

The narrative of "The Great Replacement" is racist, anti-Semitic, and oftentimes also heterosexist (i.e., patriarchal, misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic). The portrayal of the migrant foreign others as an uncivilized, unruly, irrational, and sexually dangerous group is a direct continuation of classic racist stereotyping. The portrayal of the small conspiratorial elite dominating the world is a direct continuation of classic anti-Semitic imagery—and it is not by chance that the narrative of "The Great Replacement" often names Jewish individuals such as George Soros as the main culprits. The portrayal of the naive weaklings also has a pre-history in anti-Semitic imagery depicting degenerate non-Jewish groups who knowingly or unknowingly help the Jews. Oftentimes, this narrative is not only heteronormative but also misogynistic and homophobic when it portrays "the pure people" as "traditional" and straight but feminism, homosexuality, and queerness as degenerate. Yet, in some cases, it can also be combined with "femonationalist" or "homonormative" discourses pitting a sexually "progressive" West against Muslim others portrayed as culturally backwards (Hark & Villa, 2017; Mudde, 2019, pp. 147-162).

One can go one step further and describe this ideology not only as racist and anti-Semitic but also as a continuation of the ideology of National Socialism. National Socialist ideology was centered around the idea of the Aryan race being weakened by liberal degeneration and threatened by

a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. Of course, far-right discourses today cannot simply be identified with National Socialism. There are indeed fascist, terrorist mass murderers invoking the narrative of "The Great Replacement" as justification of their actions—this is true for the terrorist who killed fifty-one people when attacking two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019 (Cosentino, 2020, pp. 74-81). Most of the present-day far right articulates its ideology in less extreme forms. Yet the ideological continuity between far-right ideology then and now remains.

So what are the implications this first approach has regarding political polarization? First, the far-right ideology this approach focuses on is itself polarizing since it portrays the racialized others and the "replacists" as enemies that must be fought. Second, this ideology warrants a polarizing reaction from others. If relevant political forces pursue racist and anti-Semitic ideologies that are a continuation of National Socialist ideology, then democratic actors should react with direct antifascist opposition, not with conciliation or appeasement.

2. The Second Approach: A Sociology of Two Groups

The second approach questions this kind of antifascism and points to the danger that this righteousness might be sheer self-righteousness driven by the ignorance of people in a privileged position. The literature taking this approach argues that society is polarized between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism. Its proponents thereby add a twist to the undoubted polarization between the far right and its adversaries, claiming that this division is at least to some degree also a class struggle between the lower and the higher strata of society. Its authors in German include sociologist Cornelia Koppetsch (2019) and political scientist Wolfgang Merkel (2017), in English the most notable example is the journalist and best-selling author David Goodhart (2017). The most extensive attempt at empirical validation is being advanced by a research group at the WZB Berlin (de Wilde, Koopmans, Merkel, Strijbis & Zürn, 2019)[1].

In slightly different ways, these authors claim that the rise of the far right is driven by a "new cleavage," meaning a social and political divide between two groups: Goodhart (2017, chapter 2) calls these groups the somewheres and the anywheres; Merkel and the WZB group use the terms communitarians and cosmopolitans (Merkel 2017, p. 12); and Koppetsch shifts between terms. But while these scholars assign different names to the two groups, the way in which they characterize them and explain their emergence is very similar. Their basic assumption is that there have been several major social transformations over the course of the last decades. The most notable is the process of globalization, with national borders becoming less and less significant for economic, political, social, and cultural interactions. But it is not only the interaction between societies that has changed: societies have also transformed internally. There has been a general process of social liberalization. Traditional virtues and values have been weakened and more individualistic, aestheticized lifestyles have become more widespread. The proponents of the cosmopolitanism/communitarianism thesis emphasize that such social transformations tend to produce winners and losers,

[1] Norris and Inglehart (2019) also propose an empirical analysis of a new polarization: they describe a process in which universalist values became more and more widely accepted in Western societies but then produced a backlash, mainly among older generations who rejected these values, driving the rise of the far right. Yet they do not identify this backlash with a class struggle of down-to-earth communitarians defending themselves against a hegemony of ignorant, out-of-touch liberals, as the other authors cited in this section do.

supporters and opponents (Goodhart, 2017, chapter 4; Merkel, 2017, pp. 12-14; Koppetsch, 2019, pp. 65-94, 106-116).

The *cosmopolitans* or the *anywhere* are said to be winners and supporters of these changes. They typically hold degrees of higher education and have internalized the new values of neoliberalism, individualism, and diversity. Both their formal qualifications and their abilities to communicate in many languages allow them to cross borders with ease, to live in one country today and another one tomorrow. But within these countries they can mostly be found in the bigger cities—cities that largely resemble one another. They work in academic jobs, drink lattés, and collect a great number of frequent flier miles. They think of themselves as being very progressive, asserting this progressiveness by engaging in politics of identity, diversity, and antifascism (Goodhart, 2017, chapter 2; Merkel, 2017, pp. 12-15; Koppetsch, 2019, pp. 116-122, 191-196, 219-227).

The losers and opponents of these transformations are called *the communitarians* or the *somewheres*. They are disproportionately manual laborers, living in the countryside—but some of them are also more traditionally-minded elites and middle classes not benefitting from globalization and rejecting cultural liberalization. They have a harder time crossing the now porous borders because they are bound to the territory where they live. For some of them this is the case because they do not have a job qualification that would allow them to take up work elsewhere easily. Others among them might be able to do so but still do not want to because they like the more traditionalist, more collectivized lifestyle they enjoy in their communities at home. While the cosmopolitans strive for universalism, the communitarians strive for a particular community to protect them (Goodhart, 2017, chapter 3; Merkel, 2017, pp. 12-15; Koppetsch, 2019, pp. 123-148).

The interrelation between the two groups is portrayed as asymmetrical. The cosmopolitans have become a new dominant class, enjoying not only greater resources and chances in life but also hegemony, meaning that *their* values are the ones that count in public discourse. The communitarians on the other hand have seen their values being devalued and ridiculed as backwards. From this angle, voting for far-right populist parties is seen as some kind of (misguided and dangerous) resistance or self-defense by somewheres or communitarians fighting against their marginalization—or their loss of privilege. These groups used to have well-established stable positions in the world—but then the world changed and now they feel left behind. And not only do they have to cope with being the losers of social transformation, they also feel that all major political parties support these transformations, leaving them behind, unrepresented. This leaves them frustrated, and in their frustration, they turn to far-right populists to represent them and their anger (Goodhart, 2017, chapter 2; Merkel, 2017, pp. 17-22; Koppetsch, 2019, pp. 59-63, 123-148, 227-232).

In this second approach, culture, society, and politics still appear to be polarized. Yet the framing of this polarization is very different than the one offered by the first approach. What previously appeared to be the hateful assertive struggle of racist, anti-Semitic, and heterosexist successors of National Socialism, now appears to be the desperate resistance of groups that have been overrun and left behind. This also reverses the depiction of the opposing side: before, they appeared to be righteous democrats and antifascists fighting for equality and liberty. Now, they are depicted as the self-righteous dominant class ridiculing and vilifying a dominated class resisting its marginalization. That this dominant class depicts its opponents as the new fascists (as the first approach does, and I did in section 1) then only seems to be adding insult to injury.

3. Analogies Between the Two Depictions

There is a notable structural analogy between the ideology of the far right the first approach takes issue with, and the cosmopolitanism/communitarianism hypothesis brought forward by the second approach. The somewheres or communitarians have strong similarity to "the pure people" as they are portrayed in far-right populist ideology. The anywheres or cosmopolitans are somewhat similar to the elites as they are portrayed in far-right populist ideology, mostly to the degenerate naive weakling section but also to the secret rulers of the world.

And while the discourse on cosmopolitanism and communitarianism focuses on these two groups, it also mentions the third group of the foreigners or racialized others. These are mostly migrant groups in a lower economic position (Koppetsch, 2019, p. 19). They also cross national borders—otherwise they would not be migrants—but because of their lower social status, they do not really fit the description of the cosmopolitans. They thus belong to neither the communitarians nor the cosmopolitans. This group is consequently only at the margin of the cosmopolitanism/communitarianism literature. Yet it does play relevant role in this discourse. This role is to contribute further to differences between the cosmopolitans and the communitarians. According to this view, the cosmopolitans have nothing to fear from the immigrants. Due to the financial and social resources of their high-class position, their social status is not endangered by immigrants who have a much weaker position. Rather, cosmopolitans are seen as capable of welcoming immigrants for making their cities more colorful, and also as cheap service workers delivering food, sitting babies, and cleaning houses. For the communitarians, however, the stakes are presented as being different. Communitarians are presented as having good reasons to perceive immigrants as competition for jobs, for housing, and for welfare-state benefits—and hence as yet another factor changing the traditional way of life. Thus, if the cosmopolitans welcome and the communitarians oppose immigration, this should not be explained by claiming that the former are open-minded democrats while the later are resentful racist bigots. Rather it should be seen as a result of both groups having different stakes due to their different class positions (Goodhart, 2017, chapter 5; Koppetsch, 2019, pp. 140–141, 244–246).

After the addition of this third group, the structural analogy between the ideology of the far right and this sociological explanation of the rise of the far right becomes even stronger. In both cases there is one marginalized internal group that used to have a secure position in society but now faces a dual threat: from a new dominant internal group on the one hand and from an external group coming in on the other. Moreover, in both depictions the threatened group values traditional norms and national community, while the dominant group prefers individualism and open borders. Thus, it is no wonder that far-right politicians such as Alexander Gauland (at the time chair of the Alternative für Deutschland) cite the literature on cosmopolitanism and communitarianism to make their case for far-right populism (Biskamp, 2019).

Highlighting this analogy does not mean insulting or vilifying the scholars proposing the cosmopolitanism/communitarianism hypothesis. On the contrary, some of them explicitly intend a certain degree of analogy; Koppetsch (2019, pp. 33-34) explicitly states that her approach is to reconstruct the worldview of far-right supporters to then evaluate whether it is supported by sociological evidence. And of course Koppetsch (2019, pp. 12, 257) as well as Merkel (2017, pp. 19) emphasize that the far right constitutes a danger to democracy—so the analogy does not imply an endorsement. And even more importantly: the validity of sociological analyses is not determined

by whether or not they are similar to far-right ideology but rather by whether or not they are theoretically and empirically plausible. I will thus now discuss the merits and problems of this approach.

4. Merits

Many of the claims made by the proponents of the cosmopolitanism/communitarianism hypothesis are plausible. First, the claim that the process of economic, political, social, and cultural globalization and liberalization had different impacts for different groups can hardly be disputed. One obvious example is the different effects it has had on labor and capital in Western countries (Dörre, 2020, pp. 83-84). The relatively strong position blue collar workers had in the decades after World War II largely depended on their ability to organize collectively and negotiate with their employers from this position of collectivity and strength. This ability was the basis of and at the same time protected by the institutions of the (national) welfare state. In times of globalization, however, in which companies have the opportunity to offshore or outsource their production to countries with lower wages, weaker labor organizations, and a less protective welfare state, the negotiating position of the workforce has been weakened. Those, by contrast, who do have (mostly academic) qualifications enabling them to compete on the international job market are not affected in such a way. They can reap the benefits of globalization without facing all its dangers.

The analogous case concerning immigration is also plausible to some extent. Those with lower qualification have more reason to believe that immigration might weaken their position than those with higher qualification (Manow, 2018, pp. 13-25; Nölke, 2017, pp. 33-40).

It is also true that there has been a major cultural shift—a massive liberalization, individualization, and aestheticization of lifestyles (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Reckwitz, 2016). Some groups have learned the new codes and they have the qualifications to succeed on this cultural market of recognition while others are left behind here as well—and being left behind on the economic market does correlate with being left behind on the cultural market to some extent. This cultural shift is marked by a shift in values. Some positions that used to be the normative mainstream are nowadays considered to be far-right positions. This is particularly true for the discourse on gender, sexuality, and race. Therefore, a person might not have changed their political positions at all over the last fifty years. Yet their relative position within society might still have shifted from the mainstream to the right fringe.

Finally, it is also true that much of political activism on the left shifted from an emphasis on economic redistribution among classes towards feminist, antiracist, and similar struggles for emancipation. Oftentimes and particularly in the context of universities, these struggles take forms that do not speak to the grievances of large portions of the population or are even fully incomprehensible to them.

Acknowledging all these facts also means acknowledging that certain kinds of self-professed antifascism are indeed marked by hypocrisy and arrogance (Jörke & Selk, 2015). There have long been discourses about the backwardness of rural areas and the stupidity of their inhabitants. Seen in light of what I have discussed above, such discourses are adding cultural insult to social and economic injury. Much of the public discourse on the supporters of Donald Trump, Brexit, and

far-right parties in Europe lines up very well with these older discourses. They often take the form of discounting these people and their voices as dumb, backwards, crazy, and so on and so forth.

And even worse: these discourses often tend to be hypocritical. This is something that Koppetsch (2019, pp. 191-196) emphasizes by painting an unflattering picture of these milieus. She argues that many cosmopolitans use their financial, social, and cultural capital to insulate themselves, their peers, and their children against all kinds of risks. They live in highly gentrified and thusly segregated neighborhoods, sometimes even in gated communities. They send their children to private schools if the public schools in their neighborhoods are not good enough or have "too many" migrant children. They park their SUVs in the garage underneath their apartment building and drive it to their organic food store where they buy food and a good conscience for their family, never being forced to engage with other milieus. Then they get home, open Facebook, and rant about the ignorant Trump supporters and their fear of migrants.

In pointing to these grievances of the communitarians and this arrogance of the cosmopolitans, the authors making these claims do not deny that the far-right parties and politicians engage in racist and anti-Semitic discourses and that at least a part of their electorate holds racist and anti-Semitic views. They do not support or endorse these views, either—on the contrary, they warn against their dangers (Koppetsch, 2019, pp. 12, 253, 257). However, they argue that it is a much too comfortable and cheap position to reduce all that is happening to racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, and so on. This would, their argument continues, ignore the legitimate grievances communitarians have and the fact that their support for far-right parties or politicians is at least in part an expression of these grievances. Simply scolding these groups as racists and fascist would not only fail to address the causes; it would also amplify or deepen the current polarization.

In our polarized times, it seems important to take these warnings seriously. Anyone engaged in polarized debates should seriously consider whether the self-perceived legitimacy of their side is founded in good arguments or in a combination of privilege and ignorance.

5. Limitations

However, the description of society that these authors give and that I have just sketched is loaded with tired clichés—this is particularly true for the latté-drinking cosmopolitan and the SUV ride to the organic food store. And the mere fact that these are clichés already implies that the critique of the alleged self-righteousness of these milieus might not be that eye-opening and the values of those who are depicted this way might not be that hegemonic. What is worse: while the narratives of the cosmopolitanism/communitarianism hypothesis contain some elements of truth, they do not hold up to empirical scrutiny as depictions of society. Society cannot be plausibly described as being composed of hegemonic cosmopolitans and marginalized communitarians, just as the rise of the far right cannot be plausibly explained by resistance on the part of communitarians. Moreover, these narratives have problematic normative implications. I want to highlight seven problems in particular.

First, it is important not to rationalize racism by suggesting that the widespread attitudes against immigration are merely some sort of protest by those who have good reasons to believe that immigration will negatively affect their already weak economic position. It is not as if voters were in a situation where they have a stark choice between either supporting open borders or the politics

of the far right. On the contrary, with very few exceptions all major parties in Western countries support restrictions on immigration and all governments impose such restrictions. In the European Union this is admittedly not true for migration between member states. However, that is not what far-right discourses focus on. And more importantly, the European Union tries its very best (or worst) to limit immigration from outside Europe with all governments of member states supporting these efforts. Similarly, all U.S. governments in recent history have imposed restrictions on immigration—this is also true for the Democratic presidencies of Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden. A country such as Canada might have the reputation of being highly liberal on immigration; however, Canada has no land borders except for those with the United States and certainly does not let *everybody* in by plane or by ship. Thus, it might be true that there are parts of the population that are already underprivileged and have comprehensible economic reasons to oppose open borders. However, they have plenty of parties to choose from in order to make this wish for not-open borders heard. If they still vote for far-right parties championing racist discourses, one must assume that they support or at least do not strongly object to these discourses. Something similar is true for anti-Semitic discourses and conspiracy theories, and for heterosexism and similar ideologies. They cannot be reasonably explained as resistance against marginalization. They are what they are: the affirmation of the exclusion, marginalization, oppression, and violence against minorities, pushed forward by parties whose supporters are disproportionately white men. Thus, when heeding the warnings of the second approach, one should not ignore those of the first.

This leads to my *second* point: the voters of the far right should not be infantilized. They should not be viewed as minors throwing an electoral temper tantrum not knowing what they are doing. They are adults who are responsible for their actions. And every adult can be expected to know what these parties stand for.

Third, the claim that society is divided into winners and losers of globalization is undermined by the fact that determining whether someone is either of the two is far from easy. People are affected by globalization in many different ways at the same time. Some people might gain as consumers by being able to buy inexpensive products, while at the same time losing as producers/employees due to global competition. Others might benefit individually while seeing their collective lose out: those blue-collar workers working under a full-time contract with collective bargaining rights within the German export sector should be considered *individual* winners of globalization as consumers *and* as producers. However, they are also likely to witness a process in which new generations of workers, including their younger colleagues and their children, are unable to achieve the same secure position they grew up with, and therefore to experience *collective* loss. Moreover, it is hard to determine the exact degree to which globalization or automation/digitalization are responsible for transformations of the working life. Hence researchers who claim that social polarization is defined by a split between winners and losers of globalization will face problems in defining who the winners and losers are.

Fourth, if we look at the preferences people hold, the notion of society being divided into an individualistic progressive neoliberal cosmopolitanism and a collectivistic traditionalist communitarianism is quite far from reality. There is no strong correlation between supporting a strong welfare state and holding authoritarian, anti-immigrant positions. There are certain groups, most notably among blue collar workers, who do hold such positions. However, there are also a lot of people in favor of immigration, feminism, antiracism, and so on who also support a strong redistributive welfare state. Similarly, there are indeed people who hold promarket positions on the

economy while holding liberal positions on social and cultural issues. However, here too, we have groups combining a promarket position with anti-immigrant, racist, and heterosexist views. There is no plausible way of dividing these positions into cosmopolitanism and communitarianism. If we look at political parties, this is even less the case. Here, the parties that do support liberal positions on cultural issues are typically the parties that also support a stronger welfare state. On the other side, those parties that hold strong promarket positions are typically less supportive of migration and culturally progressive programs. Present day politics are simply not well described by the notion of a divide between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism. To be frank: the terms cosmopolitanism and communitarianism are *useless* in political sociology (Biskamp, 2020a; Biskamp, 2020b; Biskamp, 2020c; Mau, Lux & Gülzau, 2020).

Fifth, and in relation to that, there is no empirical evidence to support the assumption that the voters of the far right are in search of (national) community and social security. What does unite these voters is something very different: namely, an opposition to immigration and an authoritarian position on cultural issues (Mudde, 2019, pp. 100-101).

Sixth, the claim that the values labeled as cosmopolitan are simply hegemonic is also highly questionable. If we take issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, or immigration, it is simply not the case that cosmopolitan, progressive positions prevail in public discourse or in public policy. It is even less the case that these liberal positions are pushed by the elites against the resistance of the majority of the population (Biskamp, 2020b, pp. 288-297).

Seventh, the implicit or explicit notion that these struggles on cultural issues and the rise of the far right are a question of top against bottom does not hold. It is not the case that the richest and most powerful are those who support liberal positions or who oppose the far right. Nor is it the case that the supporters of the far right are by majority economic losers. It is true that the far right receives disproportionate support from ethnically white blue-collar workers (Biskamp, 2020d; Oesch & Rennwald, 2018). However, we should not forget that not all workers are white, and that "the white working class" is not the most underprivileged section of society. What is referred to as identity politics is not about the interests of detached elites but on the contrary oftentimes about the interest of marginalized groups.

Based on all these problems of the discourse on cosmopolitanism and communitarianism, this discourse itself must be considered to be ideological, producing at least two highly problematic ideological effects. First, it is in danger of rationalizing support for the far right as a defensive and rational strife for community, thereby even reproducing far-right ideology. Second, it creates an ideological image of cosmopolitanism that serves as a scapegoat for the rise of the far right and the problems of other parties—and creating scapegoats distracts from other causes. We do live in polarized times, but the polarization should not be framed as one between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism.

6. Takeaways

When discussing cultural and political polarization and the rise of the far right, one should never forget the warnings of the first approach: far-right ideology is racist, anti-Semitic, heterosexist, and authoritarian. It attacks the weakest members of society and encourages oppression, violence, and even murder. Therefore, there are good normative reasons for democrats to take a strong—and

polarizing!—normative stand against it. However, despite all the ideological problems of the second approach, its warnings should be heeded as well. A simple and self-righteous opposition between a good, liberal, open-minded, and progressive culture on the one hand and a bad, racist, close-minded, and regressive culture on the other is neither helpful nor justified. Those who take a stand against the far right should be very careful not to be hypocritical or arrogant. They should pay attention to legitimate social and economic grievances—not only but also to the grievances of those who support far-right parties and politicians. But in doing so they should never rationalize far-right ideology or—even worse—privilege the grievances of far-right supporters over the grievances of others. Supporting the far right should *not* become a pathway to receiving disproportionate empathy.

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Carmen Heß & Johann Honnens

Carmen Heß & Johann Honnens

Polarizing Interpretations of Society as a Challenge for Music Education

Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, processes that are perceived as social polarizations seem to have increased internationally. In the UK, the dispute over Brexit developed into a cultural battle between two opposing social camps. In the U.S., the gap between Republican and Democratic supporters deepened during Donald Trump's administration, which led Joe Biden, in his victory speech as the new president on November 8, 2020, to focus on the goal of listening to each other again and no longer viewing political opponents as enemies, but as Americans[1]. The list of countries that are known for increasing social polarization can be continued: Poland, Turkey, France, Brazil … In Germany, social polarization is less prominent in the political discourse, but processes of division are increasingly being diagnosed. For example, the Team Todenhöfer—Die Gerechtigkeitspartei (Team Todenhöfer—The Justice Party), led by the politician and publicist Jürgen Todenhöfer, is using the slogan "Racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are dividing our society" in its campaign for the 2021 federal election. During the coronavirus pandemic, a new generalizing and hierarchizing confrontation between vaccination supporters and vaccination skeptics emerged, the social consequences of which are hardly foreseeable yet. And within the progressive bourgeois middle-class, more and more people complain about the phenomenon of "cancel culture", arguing that "left-wing" and "identity politics" groups exclude people who hold opinions or use language that are no longer acceptable within the public discourse (see, e.g., Thierse, 2021). According to political scientist and sociologist Ulrike Ackermann, a culture of "Gesinnungslagerbildung that [is] antiplural from the outset, lead[ing] to uniformity and build[ing] up opportunistic pressure" is also spreading in academia[2]. Against this backdrop, an "Appeal for Free Debate Spaces" was published on September 1, 2020, by lawyer Milosz Matuschek and philosopher Gunnar Kaiser, claiming "a victory of opinion over rational judgment", with the assumption that "vocal minorities of activists [...] increasingly determine what may be said and how, or may become a topic at all"[3]. It has now been signed by nearly 20,000 people.

The narratives of social polarization and social division are not only relevant in political discourse, but have also been increasingly used in social science during the last decade as an analytical tool for interpreting societies. In sociology and political science, the thesis of an antagonistic conflict along cultural, political, and economic dimensions pervading Western societies across milieus has become very prominent. In the words of Andreas Reckwitz, there are, on the one hand, adherents of a "hyperculture" who are able to curate and optimize their individual identities drawing from diverse sources of a global culture. And on the other, he argues, there are representatives of "cultural essentialism" oriented towards homogeneous communities and a

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUzWjSdSUpA [29.10.2021].
[2] https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/politologin-ueber-die-spaltung-der-gesellschaft-die.1270.de.html?dram:article_id=472448 [29.10.2021; translation by the authors].
[3] https://idw-europe.org/ [29.10.2021; translation by the authors].

"symbolic boundary between the internal world and the external world" (Reckwitz, 2021, p. 22). Accordingly, our times are not marked by a "clash of civilizations" as Samuel Huntington claimed at the end of the twentieth century (Huntington, 1996), but rather by a "fundamental conflict between two opposed regimes of culturalization" (Reckwitz, 2021, p. 15): on one side, cultures are seen as a toolbox for individual identity tinkering; on the other, culture is a place- and origin-bound parameter for collective identity affiliation. Other juxtapositions employed by sociology and political science to develop this thesis of polarization are the concepts of "Anywheres" (in the sense of "globetrotters") and "Somewheres" (in the sense of "stayers") (Goodhart, 2017, p. 3), "transnational" and "neonational narratives" (Krämer, 2019), or—particularly prevalent—cosmopolitanism and communitarianism (Merkel, 2017a, 2017b; Koppetsch, 2019). Cosmopolitans, to cite political scientist Wolfgang Merkel, stand for the principles of "individualism, universalism, and openness" and "emphasize the opportunities of globalization" (Merkel, 2017b, p. 53; translation by the authors). Communitarians, on the other hand, "prefer manageable communities and controlled borders; they advocate limiting immigration, opt for cultural identity, and emphasize the value of social cohesion" (ibid., p. 54, translation by the authors). The dominant narrative in these antagonistic models is the thesis that cosmopolitanism has progressively developed into a hegemonic position of power occupied by the winners of globalization or modernization (see, e.g., Jörke & Selk, 2015, p. 492). This position, it is argued, is prevalent among the upper and middle classes and declines from left to right in the party system (Merkel, 2017b, p. 54).

An interesting music sociological confirmation of this thesis can be found in the analysis of online discussions about musical taste by Michael Parzer. His research finding is that in popular music "musical tolerance" has developed into a "central criterion of sociocultural distinction" (Parzer, 2011, p. 223; translation by the authors). Pop cultural capital is now signaled less by authentic affiliation with a particular musical culture, but rather by the narrative of a "fundamental openness to many different musical worlds" and a "symbolic crossing of boundaries" (ibid., p. 211). Parzer's study suggested as early as 2011 that musical taste in our times serves the function of drawing social boundaries based on a "cosmopolitan disposition" (Woodward et al., cited in ibid., p. 236).

Numerous traces of the polarization thesis so prominent in sociology can also be found within current music education discourses, even if the connection to the sociological and political science discourse mentioned above has so far been peripheral. Among others, in a keynote delivered at this year's symposium of the Wissenschaftliche Sozietät Musikpädagogik (WSMP) entitled "A Longing for Consensus? Identity Politics and Polarization", Øivind Varkøy (2021) asked whether music education is currently characterized by a longing for a left-liberal consensus that is primarily aligned to norms of identity politics and morally disqualifies those who think differently[4]. According to Varkøy, a review of conference programs dedicated to the philosophy of music education of past years reveals that a rather homogeneous spectrum of topics has developed. Studies oriented towards identity politics, including critiques of racism, cultural diversity, feminism, or LGBTQI* rights, dominated. He argues that this normative consensus tends to exclude colleagues who are more aligned with traditional or conservative values, or who otherwise see

[4] We would like to thank Øivind Varkoy for making his lecture manuscript available to us for the writing of this introduction.

themselves as left-liberal. Varkøy develops a discursive alternative model with reference to political scientist Chantal Mouffe. According to her book *On the Political* (2005), the currently dominant discourse on central social issues such as migration, fair distribution, participation, or climate change can be characterized as a post-political vision of a cosmopolitan, reconciled dialogue. Based on this hegemonic consensus, an antagonistic thinking between an "us" and a "them" emerges. Political controversies are no longer conducted on an equal footing and with equal value, but take the form of a moral delegitimization of the opponent. Political opponents become enemies in this way of thinking. Instead of a conflict based on moral self-valorization and devaluation of those who think differently, public discourse must once again be conducted more agonistically, i.e., in a competition of competing opinions among equals. Alexis Anja Kallio postulates a similar goal for practical music lessons. Especially in times of increasing polarization, she argues, one must strive less for the ideal of discursive consensus and more toward mutual political listening (Kallio, 2021, p. 164). Accordingly, hate music and hate speech should not be seen as pathological phenomena, but as products of social conflicts in which opinions about what is good and right are constructed and controlled by hegemonic social groups (ibid., p. 172): "we also need to cultivate skills in listening and responding to difference, even when—or perhaps especially when—such difference represents views and values we find reprehensible" (ibid.).

Other music pedagogical discourses assume completely different hegemonic relationships in institutionalized music pedagogy than Varkøy claims for the current academic discourse, but they base their analyses on patterns of interpretation that are no less antagonistic. The discourse on community music, for example, claims that music teacher training in most universities and conservatories is primarily focused on norms of European art music, and not toward values of cultural diversity, participation without preconditions, and inclusion (e.g., Higgins, 2017, p. 49; Willingham, 2017, p. 75). The critique that conventional music education continues to feature practices of Western art music is also prevalent within the sociology of music education. Authors argue that the focus on "serious music" reproduces the elaborate language codes of a traditionally minded middle and upper class, leading to barriers in understanding for members of less educated classes (Wright & Davies 2010, pp. 46-48). For these authors, the objective of constructing an institutionalized musically educated elite is to represent a normative concept of culture and a worldview that is averse to a diverse or cosmopolitan habitus. A confirmation of the thesis that the training of music teachers is primarily based on a hegemonic focus on European art music can be found in a study by Thade Buchborn on the qualifying examination requirements at German universities and conservatories (Buchborn, 2019). Buchborn comes to the conclusion that despite a clear opening of the artistic major offerings into the realms of jazz-rock-pop, large parts of music cultural practices that would be extremely relevant for music education open to diversity remain excluded: non-European musical instruments as well as subjects like songwriting, dance, and rap are rare, and electronic and digital instruments don't even play any role at all. Both the curriculum of arts majors and the exams in minors continue to reveal a focus on classical European art music. Buchborn sums up:

> In conversations with colleagues, there is often little evidence of an equal coexistence of all manifestations of music and an appreciation of musical cultures in particular, which traditionally have little room at the conservatory. Rather, a concept of culture that is hierarchical, elitist, and based in norms of high culture is also conveyed to

> students, and the preservation and transmission of our "cultural heritage" in schools and conservatories is demanded. (Buchborn, 2019, p. 46; translation by the authors)

The abovementioned discourses of music education are, of course, situated on different levels: while Varkøy primarily refers to contemporary scientific discourse, the latter findings primarily consider institutionalized hegemonies in teacher training at music conservatories and universities. Moreover, the analyses often only refer to specific national contexts, making it difficult to discuss cross-national trends in hegemony discourse. What they do have in common, however, are polarizing figures of thought and clusters of values that are in conflict with each other, corresponding with Reckwitz's hypothesis of a fundamental cultural conflict.

The book at hand ties in with the conference volume by Ivo Berg, Hannah Lindmaier, and Peter Röbke entitled *Change of accidentals. Socio-political Dimensions of Music Education Today* (Berg, Lindmaier & Röbke, 2020; translation by the authors). One of their central arguments is that music education can no longer escape a sociopolitical shift and must position itself more clearly on topics such as diversity, inclusion, and migration within a tense public discourse (ibid., p. 7). We agree with the observation that it is inevitable that current social developments will lead to a shift in the discourse around music pedagogical reflection in the twenty-first century. With the contributions gathered in this book, we would like to systematize, structure, reflect, and critically discuss, from a music pedagogical perspective, the widespread thesis that Western societies are increasingly undergoing polarization processes. Is political scientist Chantal Mouffe right that antagonisms sharpen the view of social conflicts in the first place (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 8-9)? Is it only through dichotomies that ambivalences, paradoxes, and simultaneities can be recognized? Or do polarizing models of thought such as cosmopolitanism versus communitarianism rather obscure the view of music pedagogical realities? Do they even run the risk of unintentionally preparing an ideological breeding ground for populist world views in their top-bottom antagonism?

The contributions collected in this book are largely based on the lectures given at the Siegen conference *Antipluralism and Populism: Polarizing Interpretations of Society as a Challenge for Music Education* and form a kaleidoscope of music educational perspectives on these questions. The book is divided into three sections: *Cultural Hegemony and Value Conflicts in Music Education* (I), *Music (Education) and Populism* (II), and *Normative Reflections on Music Education* (III). These sections are flanked by a prologue from a sociological perspective, a (self-)critical intermezzo, and an epilogue.

Prologue

The introductory text is based on the keynote of the Siegen conference. In that lecture, political scientist and sociologist *Floris Biskamp* explored phenomena of political and social polarization by contrasting two different approaches that frame and explain polarization in different ways. The first approach is based on the ideology of the far right and its (often racist and anti-Semitic) depiction of different social groups, the second on the view of scholarship on cosmopolitanism/communitarianism. Biskamp critically examined both and elaborated their respective normative implications, which led him to the assessment that even this discourse of cosmopolitanism/communitarianism is in danger of producing ideology—all the more stimulating a differentiated view of that debate in this publication.

I. Cultural Hegemony and Value Conflicts in Music Education

The first and most extensive section links the polarization debate to music education discourse, focusing particularly on matters of cultural hegemonies and providing different perspectives on which values, norms, and elites actually seem to (and should) prevail in music education at its various institutional and structural levels.

- *Dorothee Barth* identifies contending elites that develop significantly divergent norms for music education in schools: on the one hand, an elite that promotes a focus on Western art music (culminating in the unconditional demand for a secure knowledge of musical notation), and on the other hand, a cosmopolitan elite that strives for culturally diverse openness. Arguing that any normative approach in the educational field should be guided by the two basic ethical questions of *justice* and the *good life*, she analyzes the orientations of both elites and concludes that the cosmopolitan one is clearly more just, more inclusive, and allows to a greater extent for the development of one's personality.

- Subsequently, while *Thade Buchborn*, *Hansjörg Schmauder*, *Eva-Maria Tralle*, and *Jonas Völker* note that many educational institutions proclaim a broad, diversity-focused understanding of music, they discover a discrepancy between this demand and the actual guidelines and contents of school curricula and music teacher training programs. They diagnose a hegemony of Western art music, which takes expression both in its "naturalizing" linguistic-argumentative presentation and in implicit prioritization and stronger structural embedding. Since this hegemony is likely to shape the professional practice of future music teachers and thus to be passed on, the authors see a reproductive cycle of hegemony that needs to be challenged in order to reflect the diversity of musical practices today and increase accessibility to the music teacher profession.

- *Tobias Hömberg* refers to the cosmopolitanism/communitarianism discourse by taking up the aspect of conflicting individualistically or collectivistically shaped concepts of value. On the basis of two prominent publications, he examines whether this polarity can also be found in music pedagogical thinking in the form of pedagogical norms. A critical thesis by the educationalist Karl-Heinz Flechsig provides the impetus for this and adds a new facet, especially in light of the preceding texts: Flechsig identifies what he sees as a problematic universalization of individualism as a pedagogical norm in Western societies, which should not be projected unquestioningly and should also be balanced by additional consideration of collective orientations.

- In the following text, *Thade Buchborn* and *Eva-Maria Tralle* focus on individual music teachers, drawing from two studies on music teachers' perspectives on and ways of dealing with intercultural learning. In an effort to reconstruct shared norms as well as implicit knowledge that guides their teaching practices, they discover that the music teachers in question share diversity-oriented norms and express that their teaching should reflect these, but at the same time have very limited experience in actually embedding them in their practice, which is dominated by Western art music and a static, ethnic-holistic concept of culture. Interestingly, the male and female respondents deal with this discrepancy between habitus and norm differently, revealing gender-typical strategies. Moreover, in the light of the polarization issue

these findings could also be considered an indication that individuals cannot always be clearly assigned to one camp; rather, there may also be an intraindividual level of conflict.

- *Anne Bubinger* picks up on the focus on individual worldviews and beliefs. She provides migration-related and postcolonial perspectives on the phenomenon of borders and, in an empirical study, finds that they play a central part in individual teachers' reflections on interculturality in music education at school. Since reflexive-mental borders manifested in teachers' imagination can be traced back to systemic-institutional, personal-biographical and emotional aspects, they fulfill highly ambivalent functions—on the one hand as measures of protection and orientation, on the other hand as instruments of power that reinforce boundaries and stabilize existing hegemonic structures. An examination of borders under critical consideration of power structures could thus hold potential for intercultural music education discourse.

(Self-)Critical Intermezzo

The following contribution constitutes a kind of (self-)critical intermezzo. *Andreas Lehmann-Wermser* provides thoughts on the Siegen conference from the position of an observer and commentator. While the preceding contributions have described polarizations and conflicting norms and values in music education from different perspectives, he starts from the thesis that music education discourse in Germany is characterized by a high degree of unity and uniformity (fueled by a relative social homogeneity of its members) but at the same time sealed off from many fields of ongoing social unrest and conflict—partly due to the lack of actors representing opposing positions.

II. Music (Education) and Populism

Right-wing groups, but in sociological analyses such as Reckwitz's, as well the culturalization regime of cultural essentialism is repeatedly associated with populist appropriations. Where and how is music used populistically or does it become an element of populist staging? But also: to what extent is this classification already an attribution from a normative, biased cosmopolitan perspective? Are there other possible, plausible readings? The two texts in the following section unfold different facets and perspectives.

- *Mario Dunkel* explores populism and authoritarian nationalism in European music cultures as a challenge for music education. He argues that the debate about connections between music cultural developments and populism in Europe should be considered to belong immediately to music education discourse in order to actively determine the understanding of the nexus of music and populism that should become relevant in music education contexts. Departing from a discursive-performative concept of populism, Dunkel analyzes the interplay of populism and nationalism on a cultural and musical level, exemplified by the development of the song "Nélküled" (Without you) by the Hungarian rock band Ismerős Arcok. He then takes a look at political and cultural developments in Germany and discusses the use of music by populist-nationalist organizations as well as a piece from the genre known as New German Rock and its appeal to populist utilization.
- *Reinhard Kopanski* focuses the use of references to National Socialism in pop music. Sparked by the trailer and video clip *Deutschland* by the Neue Deutsche Härte band *Rammstein* whose release

provoked a major media controversy in 2019, Kopanski develops an analytical model building on Linda Hutcheon's (2005) *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. As a result, he presents alternative readings on Rammstein's teaser and video clip—striving on the one hand for a critical, but unbiased and differentiated view of Rammstein, and on the other more generally for a transparent and nonjudgmental approach that can foster an open, substantial debate on controversial artists and their work in music education contexts.

III. Normative Reflections on Music Education

The third section gathers four contributions that investigate ethical issues and dimensions of music education and relate the underlying norms in different ways to the social polarization debate as well as to cosmopolitan values in particular.

- *Oliver Kautny* outlines an ethically based model of dialogue for intercultural music education, building on a new reading of political scientist Rainer Forst's ethics of toleration (2013) that specifically aims for a balance between the construction and deconstruction of cultural ideas. Kautny adds the poststructuralist motivated dimension of *reflexive tolerance* to the *respect* and *esteem conceptions* introduced by Forster. He concludes his model of dialogue for music education by reinterpreting Ott's model of classroom dialogues (Ott, 2012) in terms of these three aspects. Finally, Kautny draws compelling parallels between his model and forms of recognition and communication claimed by Reckwitz (2021), even though their argumentations differ in detail.
- According to *Daniela Bartels*, music teachers can counter increasing phenomena of antipluralism and populism by deciding to act as *ethical practitioners* (Elliot, 1995) and to strengthen the ability to cope with plurality through deliberate pedagogical actions and the development of certain ethical capacities. With reference to Hansen, Bartels suggests an ethical understanding of cosmopolitanism that "signifies the human capacity to be open reflectively to the larger world, while remaining loyal reflectively to local concerns, commitments, and values" (Hansen, 2011, p. xiii)—and thereby not just tolerate others, but learn from them and deeply value plurality. In this ethical turn of cosmopolitanism, the clusters of values understood as opposites in sociology are reconciled to a certain extent.
- *Sara Hubrich* and *Fiona Stevens* conducted a small-scale pilot study at the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences in order to investigate whether low-threshold, participatory music interventions in different forms of active involvement with music might encourage prosocial behavior and democratic values in a group situation. If this were the case, it would—and here an affinity to Bartel's considerations arises—add responsibility and a political aspect to the role of music educators.
- In this section's final contribution, *Alicia De Banffy-Hall* and *Marion Haak-Schulenburg* address the critical question of whether community music—originally a bottom-up movement that championed values of equality, participation, and diversity and opposed high arts exclusivity and cultural hegemony—has recently become associated with a neoliberal agenda, as suggested by Krönig (2019). The authors dissent from Krönig's assessment and highlight community musicians' strategies for handling the tension between idealism and realism in order to participate in shaping politics under changing conditions, while also remaining rooted in their principles.

Epilogue

This ZfKM special issue closes with an article by *Jürgen Vogt*, based on a keynote at the Nordic Network for Research in Music Education (NNRME) conference in Copenhagen in March 2020, which we are pleased to include in this volume as a complementary perspective. Engaging with Adorno's critical theory, Vogt argues that—after it seemed for some time that critical music education had made itself obsolete—its aims "have not either been fully reached in the past or are in danger again in the present" (p. 209). He claims that strategies of the New Right can be interpreted as a direct attack on critical theory and its impact on all possible cultural spheres, and differentiates this thesis with regard to all three generations of critical theory, leading him to the concluding and resonating request to "(re)discover the political within music education" (p. 215) and "resharpen the tools of critique" (p. 215).

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