

When Nazis go Pop...

New strategies of the extreme right in Germany

LFO Demon

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In the good old times everything seemed to be easy: The symbols, clothes and ideology of the extreme right were quite easy to identify. This was the cliché of the right-wing version of skinhead outfit ("boneheads"). Since a few years there have been massive changes in the far-right in Germany. There is the strategy to adopt symbols and clothes of other youth cultures including the left one.

Background on Extreme-Right Organisations

After a huge wave of repression against the far-right in the early 1990s and the ban of several parties and organisations there have been 2 main actors remaining:

One main actor in Germany's far-right is the NPD (National-democratic Party of Germany). With a crude mix of antisemitism and racism it's the legal arm of the extreme right. It is used to network different fractions of the right-wing extremists.

Its youth organisation "Junge Nationaldemokraten" (young national-democrats) is trying to recruit young people and to radicalize the mother-party. After the court procedure to ban the party failed in March 2003 the party is strengthened¹.

Because the NPD is a legal party there are boundaries to the levels of ideology: they can't hold extreme positions without legal consequences. So another part of the far-right, not willing to deal with those constrictions, was founding "Freie Kameradschaften" (free associations): local based, small groups forming (inter-)national more or less loose networks. There are 150 in Germany existing yet- and because they aren't legal organisations authorities can't ban them easily. They are organized internally strictly hierachical and due to their missing program used to connect various fractions of the far-right and people that wouldn't want to work in a regular party².

Although the relationship between NPD and "freie Kameradschaften" was tensioned in the past, it seems that they cooperate more and more³ e.g. on the demonstration on 1.5.2004 when NPD and "Freie Kameradschaften" made a demonstration with 2500 people in Berlin with a right-wing "black bloc".⁴

¹ NPD bleibt zugelassene Partei. In: Frankfurter Rundschau, 18.3.2003
here

² Documentated in an article on "Freie Kameradschaften" and "autonomous nationalists" by ALB (Antifascist Left Berlin) published on their website:

N.N.: Von "freien Kameradschaften" und "autonomen Nationalisten". 18.11.2002
<http://www1.antifa.de/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=64>

³ Jan Langehein: NPD und freie Kameradschaften: Jetzt alle zusammen! In: Jungle World, Nr.42/2004 <http://www.hagalil.com/archiv/2004/10/npd.htm>

⁴ Karsten Laumeyer: Neonazis und der 1.Mai: Black Block Nazis. In: Jungle World, Nr.13/2004 <http://www.klick-nach-rechts.de/ticker/2004/03/1mai.htm>

Also leaders of "freie kameradschaften" and militant neo-nazis are becoming now members of the NPD - there is the concept of a right-wing "Volksfront" (peoples front): all far-right forces should cooperate⁵.

Right-Wing Brands. The Example of Thor Steinar

Since the brand "Lonsdale" donates money to anti-racist projects and speaks out in public against racism, the former very popular brand becomes less and less famous in the far-right. So there have been new clothes companies founded by right-wing persons like "Troublemaker", "Walhal", "Masterrace", "Gang Violence".

One of the most successful is "Thor Steinar"- a clothes company from the far-right for the far right by nationalist activist Axel Kopelke from Koenigs-Wusterhausen (near Berlin) using modified runes of the SA/ SS as logo for his brand⁶.

The strategy with own labels is quite clever: on the one hand fascists are wearing their own symbols and not supporting somebody "outside" (in fact they are creating own economic structures), on the other hand even more people than the pure hardcore-fraction of organized nationalists are wearing those clothes. This a, helps to spread the fascist logos and symbols and b, supports the far-right financially through the sales.

But repression is hitting the extreme right hard: there have been court decision where persons got convicted for wearing Thor Steinar clothes in public⁷ and there are also restrictions for demonstrations of nationalists not to wear Thor Steinar clothes⁸.

Under Pressure- the Effects of Repression

This is really an important point one should keep in mind: Germany has tough laws on demonstrations and on right-wing symbolism. Not only swastikas are banned but a growing list of symbols.

⁵ Straßennazis strömen jetzt in die NPD. In: Die Tageszeitung, 24.9.2004 <http://www.taz.de/pt/2004/09/24/a0099.nf/text.ges,1>

⁶ There is an antifascist information site on Thor Steinar and its background documentating all kind of information and news on the label and connected activities.
<http://www.stop-thorsteinar.de.vu/>

⁷ Although it´s not sure that the actual Thor Steinar-logo will be forbidden, those decisions cause insecurity in the right-wing scene. Would you buy an expensive sweatshirt, if it could get get confiscated tomorrow? Nonetheless, Thor Steinar is sold still – even in "normal" shops.

Staatsanwalt gegen "Thor Steinar" Bekleidung. In: Berliner Zeitung, 6.11.2004
<http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/brandenburg/392893.html>

⁸ During a nationalist demonstration in Potsdam on the 30.10.2004 the local public prosecutor´s office wanted to arrest all people wearing Thor Steinar clothes.
http://buende.antifa.net/ts/t_tsverbot30_10.php

Even if some symbols are not banned, local authorities usually make strict requirements on right-wing demonstrations for their use. E.g. it's quite often prohibited to use the number "88" (meaning "Heil Hitler" for the 8th letter in the alphabet), which was invented by the right to bypass the ban of "Heil Hitler" in Germany⁹.

This seems to be an endless battle of repression-innovation of new codes-repression. Evaluating the results there are 2 points: on the one hand it's good that the far-right is put under pressure. They have to deal with court decisions which costs time, money and nerves. On the other hand this stimulates their creativity in evolving new tactics all the time which also has some risks. So there are less racists and nationalists speaking out in public but hiding their intentions and trying to deliver them with unobtrusive codes not directly linked with right-wing ideology.

Changing the dresscodes: Infiltrating Other Youth Cultures

Another strategy: infiltrating other (musical) scenes to get away from the image of "nationalists= nazi-Skinheads".

There's a tendency to form nationalist punkrock, hatecore, dark wave, black metal, industrial bands and associated symbols and clothes¹⁰. This follows the logic of annexing other symbols and re-coding them for their own purpose.

A benefit for the far-right resulting of this strategy is that in public the bad reputation of "Nazi" as the cliché of some bald bonehead is avoided. "Nazis" aren't some clearly identifiable persons anymore, which can be easily marked as "outsiders" any more but look like everybody else does. So they come a bit closer to their goal of not getting excluded at all but becoming a "normal" part in the political spectrum.

Also both trends seems to be contradictory they follow one goal: to create a huge, diverse right-wing lifestyle. So there isn't "one" right-wing style to identify any more but a variety where each new member can choose the one he likes. No more association with the Third Reich but modern, popular symbols and codes.

Stealing the Symbols- Occupying the Radical Left

Into those trend fits the adaption of former left-wing symbols: There are right-wing people nowadays wearing T-Shirts with Che Guevara on, the (palestinian) Kafiya-scarf

⁹ A detailed brochure on right-wing symbols (and clothes):

Agentur für soziale Perspektiven (Hrsg.) 2002: Versteckspiel. Lifestyle, Symbole und Codes von neonazistischen und extrem rechten Gruppen. Berlin

¹⁰ There's an antifacist network documentating right-wing approaches in musical scenes listing all their activities and giving antifascists strategies against: www.turnitdown.de

and unobtrusive clothes popular at antifascists: sneakers, jeans, plain carhartt jackets and baseball caps¹¹.

This is a strategy used by the far-right trying to copy the autonomous left scene. They call themselves "autonomous nationalists" and adopt even left parables like "smash capitalism" from the left. So nationalists use the logo of "Antifaschistische Aktion" (antifascist action); a circle with a red and black flag but calling it "Nationale Sozialisten" (national socialists). Some go even further and take the logo with the words "antifascist action"- pretending they are acting against some imaginary "left fascism"¹². Of course the intentions are clear: when left-wingers are the real "fascists" the fascists aren't morally bad any more. And also to humiliate their enemies and symbolically taking their power by absorbing their symbols.

That doesn't mean that these "autonomous nationalists" are pro-left-wing now. One main field of activity is the "Anti-Antifa" – the collecting of addresses and threatening against all kind of left and imaginary left people.

It's not only the addresses of left antifascists they collect, but also the ones of judges, teachers, scientists, Jewish people and politician acting against the far-right

Some commentators mention that the adoption of left symbols by the right isn't a historical new phenomenon: the Nazis in the pre-fascist Germany in the 1920s already adopted the red flag by the communists and re-coded symbols and ideology of the worker movement for their purposes¹³.

The intention behind this is clear: to make symbols useless for the left and to transport their racist/ national-socialist agenda with (former) left symbols.

Adopting Left Phrases

Of course this isn't all about clothes only. Nationalists also try to win supporters of the left e.g. with claiming "we want national socialism" pretending their concept of "Volksgemeinschaft" (roughly translated as "people's community") is socialism¹⁴.

¹¹ Alexander Fichtner.: Aneignung von rechts. In: Jungle World, Nr.21/2004
<http://www.jungle-world.com/seiten/2004/20/3160.php>

¹² Nationalists on the 1.5.2005 were wearing a banner saying "Antifascist Action Fuerstenwalde-ban the PDS". The PDS is the left-socialist succession party of former GDR-party SED.

It's documented by a photo here – and the photos of a right-wing black bloc on a demonstration in Cologne: <http://www.germany.indymedia.org/2004/11/97143.shtml>

Also there is a documented flyer by nationalists from Trier saying "fight facism" to bash an antifascist demonstration.

<http://www.de.indymedia.org/2004/11/97367.shtml>

¹³ Fascho Fasching. Des Nazis neue Kleider: Zur Übernahme linker Symbolik durch rechte Gruppen. In: Junge Welt 9.8.2004

documentated: <http://freeweb.dnet.it/treptow/presse04.htm>

¹⁴ As proclaimed by the NPD on demonstrations. http://www.npd.de/npd_info/meldungen/2003/m0703-2.html

This follows the logic to canalize popular political issues for their purposes. They were sticking themselves to social protests by joining the "Anti-Hartz IV" - protest against the merging of unemployment and social benefit in autumn 2004¹⁵.

Of course the fascists don't demand a free, equal society. They simply have a "shortened" criticism of capitalism. For them it's not capitalism itself to blame but the influence of some "evil" people and groups like "bad capitalists only speculating with money" (dividing capitalism in a "good" sphere of work and in a "bad" sphere of speculation), migrants (for "taking away German labour") and of course Jews (for "controlling the world" et cetera). Instead of abolishing capitalism, they want a hierarchical "Volksgemeinschaft" following racist criteria. They are not criticizing inequality but the imaginary exploitation of the German, white, able to work man by foreign forces¹⁶.

They also adopt views (formerly) carried by left-wing "anti-imperialist" groups: against the (Jewish) occupation of Palestine and the US-led invasion of Iraq.

This a, helps to relativize the role of (Nazi-)Germany and b, fits in their anti-semitic / anti-american concept: each "people" should have its own state at its "origin" place while the USA and Israel are blamed for not being "authentic cultures" but undermining and suppressing all other people worldwide¹⁷. Of course the concerns of the people in Palestine don't matter: the whole "solidarity" of the German right goes to the fact that they interpret the situation as a struggle against the Jews¹⁸.

¹⁵ It's not only the NPD sticking to these social protests. Activists of "Freie Kameradschaften" set up a page dedicated to the protest against HartzIV and the social democratic "Agenda2010".

<http://www.keine-agenda2010.de/>

¹⁶ A documentation on the infiltration of the "Anti-HartzIV" protests by Nazis and possible strategies of the left against it was published by the antifascist group ALB.

ALB (Hrsg.) 2004: Alles Lüge. Faschisten machen auf sozial. Berlin

Downloadable as pdf-file here: <http://www1.antifa.de/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=221>

¹⁷ This is another example that some left, anti-imperialist and right positions can be stucked together quite easily: At least the Nazis had in some towns in Germany no problems of entering "peace" demonstrations

Apabiz e.V. (Hrsg.)- Monitor Nr.9. März/2003

<http://www.klick-nach-rechts.de/ticker/2003/04/Bagdad-Dresden.htm>

¹⁸ At this point the ideology of the right really has some points where it can be connected to a, Islamic militants and b, anti-imperialist left-wing. E.g. Udo Voigt and Horst Mahler (former terrorist of Marxist-Leninist terrorist group RAF), both leading members of the NPD, attended a congress of Islamic-militant group Hizb ut-Tahrir in Berlin on 3.11.2002. Detailed webpage on this group: <http://www.stura.uni-leipzig.de/~fara0/gruppen/hizbtahrir.htm>

There are also cooperations between all 3 groups German nationalists, Islamists and anti-imperialists as German anarchist newspaper "Graswurzelrevolution" figures out at the campaign "10 Euros for the Iraqi resistance":

Alfred Schober: Antiimp.exe. Über die Frey-Gänger des Antiimperialismus. In: Graswurzelrevolution 293/2004. <http://www.graswurzel.net/293/antiimp.shtml>

In this picture also fits that some left-wing songs are played at far-right demonstrations like the song "Yankees raus" (Yankees go home) of German political punkrock band SLIME (which were very popular in the 1980s)¹⁹.

So the far-right is trying to take over more and more formerly left-wing dominated political issues like social protest. And the results are frightening: the extreme right party NPD could get 9,2% (former 1,4%) of the votes for the regional parliament of Saxony in September 2004 with an election campaign focussing only on social protest²⁰.

So the strategy of nationalists seems to pay off for them: occupying formerly left dominated political issues and strategies to gain popularity.

Advanced Copying in Progress: The Black Bloc of the Far-Right

One example for an advanced adoption of left strategies is the strategical concept of a right-wing black bloc. "Autonomous nationalists" are trying to form a black bloc on demonstrations²¹. This causes a lot of confusion at the police and at protestors- it's not easy to distinguish between nationalists and antifascists.

But the far-right didn't get the ideas behind of the black bloc. In the left version it never was a purpose but an aim- to avoid that individuals were caught by the police mainly as a form of protection.

So in the mid-90s the German police was able to cope with the black bloc in tactical terms. So this concept was abolished and was wandering through the media to denote all kind of left-wing activities.

The writers of the manifest for the right-wing black bloc try to denounce the left version as "they just used it for violence" while justifying their own bloc: "We dissociate from violence and decline categorical standardized clothes and mummery"²².

Does the first part of the sentence make any sense at all when dressing up all in black?

¹⁹ Like on a demonstration of "Aktionsbüro Norddeutschland" in Hamburg.

Note: For some strange reasons the song "Deutschland verrecke" (Germany has gotta die) by the same band isn't played at those demonstrations.

Apabiz e.V. (Hrsg.)- Monitor Nr.9. März/2003

<http://www.klick-nach-rechts.de/ticker/2003/04/Bagdad-Dresden.htm>

²⁰ Spiegel Online, 19.9.2004

<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,318797,00.html>

²¹ Examples for those black blocs on far-right demonstrations are on the 1.5.2004 in Berlin with 150 nationalists or the 16.10.2004 in Cologne-Kalk with 100-200 nationalists

Fotos: <http://www.germany.indymedia.org/2004/11/97143.shtml>

²² Quoted from the right-wing brochure by "autonomous nationalists" on the relevance on the right-wing black bloc http://www.schwarzer-block.de/schwarzer_block.pdf

It's contradictory when fascists are describing themselves as "non-violent" and adopting a mean of action of the left associated (by the media and also themselves) with violence.

They also didn't get the concept of using the black bloc for protection: during the far-right demonstration on 1.5.2004 in Berlin the police requested the 150 people in the right-wing black bloc to put off the cloths around their faces (to mask is illegal on demonstrations in Germany). And they immediately did. Also as some of their "comrades" were arrested- hardly any resistance arose²³.

Nonetheless the concept isn't without criticism in Germany's right-wing: many activists opposing it. There are critics saying it is just a stolen concept of the left. As one of Germany's most famous nazi leaders Christian Worch says (referring to his demonstration in Leipzig on the 1.5.2004) that he doesn't need a black bloc because the whole demonstration has to be "one" bloc²⁴. He and others view the black bloc as a concept dividing the far-right.

So there is still a huge "conservative" fraction that doesn't want right-wing people to copy left tactics and outfit.

But it's not possible to denounce this strategy only to be carried by some rudimentary parts in the far-right. There have been several demonstrations now in towns all over Germany- so at least some parts of the organized right are willing to use this strategy.

Conclusion

The question on effectiveness of the new strategies of the fascists has to be raised. On the one hand the more and more marketing of the right-wing attitude as a lifestyle has advantages in form of recruiting many new, young members.

On the other hand that causes the threat of constant political work of organized nationalists meanwhile. Because right-wing attitude is becoming a lifestyle, it's easy to drop out after a few years. So a, there are less and less experienced activists and b, was the agenda of national-socialism displaced by a diffuse mixture of racism and lust for action²⁵.

And the game with codes can also work like a boomerang and confuse their own people by causing a massive identity crisis: "who are we when some of us are wearing the

²³ N.N.: Alles nur geklaut? Die Übernahme linker Symbolik durch Nazis. In: Antifaschistisches Infoblatt#63, Sommer 2004

<http://www.nadir.org/nadir/periodika/aib/archiv/63/16.php>

²⁴ Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Berlin, News 24.2.2004

<http://www.berlin.de/seninn/verfassungsschutz/aktuelles/archiv.html#46>

²⁵ N.N.: Alles nur geklaut? Die Übernahme linker Symbolik durch Nazis. In: Antifaschistisches Infoblatt#63, Sommer 2004

<http://www.nadir.org/nadir/periodika/aib/archiv/63/16.php>

clothes of the left". The far-right still has some very conservative members not wanting to post-modern arbitrariness. But this is exactly what is happening when using the "pop" strategy. Che Guevara is a pop symbol and common like the "CocaCola" writing-but that doesn't mean the ideology he was standing for, socialism, is. A loss of the values once connected with symbols is happening always when symbol become part of the popular culture.

Also there will be attacks by nationalists on nationalists because of mistaking the other for a lefty (or simply not tolerating the left symbols he's wearing), the whole strategy will be questioned. So there is a destructive potential that undermines the expansive intentions of the far-right on the long run.

One shouldn't forget that it doesn't make much difference if a person get's beaten to death because the attacker had a fixed national-socialist or "only" a loose racist world view.

No matter how they might dress, which symbols or language they might use, the still remain one thing: unacceptable.

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<web.archive.org/.../www.lfodemon.com/whennazisgopop/index.htm>

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