Routledge Studies in Fascism and the Far Right

THE GERMANIC TRIBES, THE GODS AND THE GERMAN FAR RIGHT TODAY

Georg Schuppener

The Germanic Tribes, the Gods and the German Far Right Today

The Germanic Tribes, the Gods and the German Far Right Today deals with the question of how right-wing extremists in German-speaking countries adapt and adopt elements from the history, culture, and mythology of the Germanic tribes.

It provides the first in-depth study of the adoption of these historical motifs by right-wing extremists. Using linguistic and historical perspectives, and drawing on both publicly accessible material and sources gathered by the intelligence services, the book delineates the influence and impact of Germanic tribal history and culture within extremist subcultures. The author demonstrates that references to the Germanic peoples, their history, culture, and mythology, are even more widespread among contemporary right-wing extremists than they were in the interwar National Socialist era.

This book will be of interest to researchers of right-wing extremism, German politics, and social movements.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in English 2022
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Translated by Michael Kane

This book has been translated with the financial courtesy of the institutional research of the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University, Faculty of Philosophy for the year 2021.

Published in German by Edition Hamouda, Leipzig 2021 as ‘Die Schatten der Ahnen – Germanenrezeption im deutschsprachigen Rechtsextremismus’

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Schuppener, Georg, author.
Title: The Germanic tribes, the Gods and the German far right today / Georg Schuppener ; translated by Michael Kane.
Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2022. | Series: Routledge studies in fascism and the far right | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021032588 (print) | LCCN 2021032589 (ebook) | ISBN 9781032070001 (hbk) | ISBN 9781032072791 (pbk) | ISBN 9781003206309 (ebk)
Subjects: LCSH: Right wing extremists—Germany—21st century. | Germanic peoples. | Political culture—Germany—21st century.
Classification: LCC HN460.R3 S386 2022 (print) | LCC HN460.R3 (ebook) | DDC 303.48/40943—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021032588
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021032589

ISBN: 978-1-032-07000-1 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-07279-1 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-20630-9 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003206309

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

'Where once the leader of the Germanic peoples liberated German land from the enemy, Hitler's flags of victory wave powerfully into a new era.'

Historical postcard from the period of the Third Reich displaying the Arminius monument in the Teutoburg forest. Used with kind permission of Brigitte und Wilfried Mellies Stiftung, Detmold.

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Introduction

Right-wing extremists in German-speaking countries today use all the most modern forms of communication; they address contemporary social issues and operate in a thoroughly modern fashion, including in terms of organisational structure. Yet one feature that distinguishes the far right fundamentally from other political movements and groups in the German-speaking world is the centrality for them of history: Particular aspects of history are seen as vital in the construction of their identity, their claim to legitimacy and elaboration of a tradition as well as in the representation of the groups to themselves and to the outside world. The significance of a particular history is evident namely in the frequent references of far-right groups to the ancient Germanic peoples and to Norse-Germanic mythology.

History is indeed often invoked in politics in order to establish traditions, to distinguish one group from others and for general ideological reasons. It is not so usual, however, for politicians to refer to events of more than a thousand years ago, especially when looking for ways to legitimate their contemporary political aims. Historical references in politics generally rather tend to be marginal or give just a broad context for political action. This is not the case, however, with the far right. It is particularly true here that: 'History represents a central aspect of politics for the extreme right' (Langebach/Sturm 2015: 8).

Research to date has only begun to examine the ways in which Germanic history and culture and especially Norse-Germanic mythology are being used by the contemporary far right in the German-speaking world. This book is intended to add to this research by offering a systematic overview and analysis of the ways in which this area of history is approached and then adapted by such groups.

The following discussions are based partly on the results of several studies which the author undertook in the last few years which have been supplemented and brought up to date here. The book also presents numerous fundamentally new findings and insights into this topic.

One should point out here also that some of the material considered and, in some cases, quoted in the present text, was the result of secret service investigations. It is not possible to give precise sources in such cases.

Despite intensive research it has not been possible to treat all aspects of this broad topic exhaustively here. The author welcomes all critical comments,

suggestions, supplementary information, corrections, and further material that may be relevant for further research in the area.

The author is particularly grateful to Dr. Plamen Tsvetkov (St. Kliment Ochridski University, Sofia/Bulgaria) for his critical review of the text and for his suggestions regarding research materials. Special thanks are due to the Univerzita Jan Evangelista Purkyně in Ústí nad Labem/Czech Republic, without whose financial support this book could not have been completed. Finally, I would like to sincerely thank the translator Michael Kane for his many expert comments.

1 Germanic culture and Germanic myth on the far right

Research to date and unanswered questions

1.1 General introduction

Since German reunification there has been constant interest in the topic of right-wing extremism in the German-speaking world evident among the general public, the media, and politicians. This interest has, however, often come in waves over the last few decades: In the immediate aftermath of spectacular incidents (crimes) and scandals (such as the exposure of right-wing networks), right-wing extremism is broadly treated in the media as an urgent societal problem. After a while, however, the interest declines noticeably, so that the topic to a large extent disappears again from public focus. This process is indeed understandable in terms of the workings of the mass media, but it does not reflect the continuity of right-wing extremism as a political and social phenomenon in the contemporary German-speaking world.

Understandably, the focus of the reporting, the commentary on and analysis of the phenomenon of right-wing extremism, of its underlying causes and various formations, tends to be above all on the political and societal aspects.

Academic approaches to right-wing extremism are also not entirely exempt from the general wave-like pattern of rising and falling interest. However, such discussions tend, for structural reasons at least, to take a longer-term view. Yet research in the area is also concentrated for the most part on sociological and political aspects of extremism. A large number of publications from these particular disciplines and with various aims and methods is now available.

The far right, like all political movements, also look to historical roots. This is not just a matter of maintaining and constructing traditions, but – and this is also an omnipresent phenomenon in the political landscape – history is interpreted to suit the ideology and used to legitimate a particular world view.

In doing this, political groups these days normally refer to the more recent past, such as, for example, to the period of reunification, to the 1970s and 1980s, to the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany, sometimes to the Weimar Republic or even as far back as the workers' movement or the liberalism of the nineteenth century. Events and historical epochs from before this time do not play any role for present day political programs and ideologies.[1] This is, however, not the case with right-wing extremists, who refer not only to the Third Reich, but

DOI: 10.4324/9781003206309-1

also to the ancient times of the Germanic peoples and to late antiquity as well as to the Middle Ages.

The far right thus shows itself to be unique in terms of its invocation of history: while references to national socialism and to its roots still lie within the relatively recent historical period – though of course no other political party or movement refers to the Nazi years in a positive way – the return to the culture of the Germanic peoples represents a unique exception in the political landscape. Contemporary right-wing extremists are thereby indeed deliberately associating themselves with the legacy of National Socialism, some parts of which also projected their own ideology back onto the Germanic peoples.[2] In fact the use of Germanic culture by recent far-right groups extends far beyond that of the National Socialists, as will be demonstrated in the following.

Even where historical references for far-right ideology, discourse and identity-building have as such been fully noted and considered in the academic research, the focus has mostly been, however, on the conscious association with National Socialism as well as with the models of *völkisch* and racist ideology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These are, of course, the immediate political and intellectual ancestors and predecessors of the contemporary far right. Moreover, references to National Socialism and its predecessors are clearly obvious, at least in parts of the self-representation of far-right organisations and groups to the outside world. This is naturally true first and foremost of the political-ideological foundations that the contemporary far right adopts – partly unaltered or in a merely slightly changed form – from National Socialism. But even on the surface, the unambiguous references take place on a particular symbolic-iconic level. The use of the Reich's colours black-white-red, the symbolism of the Third Reich, the association with uniforms of the Nazi party or archaic usages in other symbolic systems (e.g. through the use of special typefaces such as Gothic script) serve to establish a connection with National Socialism. Members of the far right also deliberately associate themselves linguistically with National Socialist traditions. One of the ways this happens is through the use of specific vocabulary from the time of the Third Reich, through the adoption of abbreviations and acronyms that are intended to remind the audience of National Socialism or its representatives, but also through the use of linguistic strategies that Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels and other prominent figures of the Nazi regime employed, such as, for example, the semantic reinterpretation of concepts, especially through the re-functioning of words as pejoratives or euphemisms, or the creation of neologisms using core ideological terms, such as *Volk* (e.g. Schuppener 2013: 175ff.).

The elaboration of far-right traditions is not restricted to references to this undoubtedly essential period for the movement: The far right in the German-speaking world reaches much further back into history.

Parts of the National Socialist movement (especially parts of the SS and in particular their leader Heinrich Himmler and those around him) already regarded as fundamental the identification with the ethnic roots of the German *Volk*, roots that one claimed to find in the ancient Germanic tribes. This was an essential component arising out of the *völkisch*, racial ideological foundations of National

Socialism. A further result of this was the necessity to become more deeply engaged with the ancient history, culture, and beliefs of the Germanic peoples or tribes. At the same time, history was interpreted in accordance with National Socialist ideology. Members of the contemporary far right position themselves in this tradition as followers and rightful successors of the ancient period of German history and of Germanic culture. It is precisely this aspect of far-right identity that has so far been given little attention.

1.2 A critical review of the research to date

Despite its significance in terms of how the movement presents itself to the outside world as well as to itself, especially also in the form of propaganda, etc., very little attention has been paid in studies of the far right in the past to the references to ancient Germanic culture and to Norse-Germanic mythology. Most investigations of how right-wing extremists legitimate themselves historically, which historical models they use and which historical references they actively cultivate, have focused primarily on National Socialism as well as its ideological predecessors, especially on those with the kind of racist and *völkisch* ideas that were developed in the nineteenth century. Not infrequently in such discussions one finds right-wing extremism even equated with National Socialism or understood as a merely modified continuation of National Socialism (e.g. Pfahl-Traughber 2019: 25f.).

On the other hand, far-right references to ancient Germanic history and to Norse-Germanic mythology, and the coded symbols involved, have indeed been mentioned and listed in various popular writings intended to inform people about the external marks, signs and badges of identity to be found on the scene (e.g. Banghard 2016; Versteckspiel 2017). It is, however, rare that such writings offer a comprehensive account of the implications associated with these or any deeper analysis of the contexts and backgrounds that goes beyond establishing a connection with National Socialism.

The sparse amount of literature dealing with the adoption of Germanic culture by the far right includes the paper by Banghard (2015) and the collected volume by Gallé (2015) which, however, concentrate above all on the particular issue of the adoption of Norse-Germanic Mythology.

One example of how deficient and poorly informed academic discussions of the far-right use of Germanic culture can be is the paper by Heß-Meining (2012) which simply categorises it as a form of esoteric culture (Heß-Meining 2012: 384f., 390). In other places, the topic is again only mentioned in passing and treated merely as a matter of marginal interest (thus e.g. in Braunthal 2009: 92, 119). Even in a study as comprehensive and foundational as that by Pfahl-Traughber (2019), the references in far-right groups to the Germanic peoples are also only dealt with in a marginal way. The study by Meier-Schuegraf (2005) considers at least some aspects, albeit related to a very narrowly defined area of investigation (right-wing extremist banner advertising on the internet).

In general, however, this topic is completely ignored. It is thus worth noting that the adoption of Germanic culture as part of the broad far-right conception

of history does not feature at all in Häusler's account of the right-wing extremist politics of history (Häusler 2016: 159ff.). The general neglect of the topic is evident also in the literature in English dealing with the far right, its roots and forms in the German-speaking world (e.g. Kiess/Decker/Brähler 2016; Mudde 2002; Kruglanski/Webber/Koehler 2020). One exception that may be noted here is the study by Miller-Idriss (2017) which focuses particularly on far-right youth culture. The situation is different with regard to the use of Norse-Germanic mythology in American right-wing extremism. Here, for example, a detailed study is available in the monograph by Gardell (2003). Despite its focus on the political-ideological use of Norse mythology, the anthology by Meylan/Rösli (2020) only marginally touches on German-speaking right-wing extremism.

The research reviewed thus far indicates how little attention has been paid to the topic in academic discussions of the far-right conception of history. Yet the historical references dealt with here contribute fundamentally to the identity of the extreme right-wing scene and they are of noteworthy significance for its propaganda, in particular in the recruiting of sympathisers. For this reason, a more detailed focus on the topic seems both timely and necessary in order to describe and to analyse recent right-wing extremism.

In particular, even if there are a few preliminary studies already in the area, to a large extent a detailed analysis of the general reception of Norse-Germanic mythology has yet to be carried out. Thus, Rüdiger Sünner looked at the function and the fascination of mythology for members of the far right from a journalistic perspective in a book (1999) clearly intended for a popular audience. Even if the book has been subject to some strong criticism – particularly on account of its supposedly being restricted largely to a re-telling of myths popular on the extreme right scene and to how they are aestheticized and functionalised (Guerlain 2010: 86f.) – it ought to be recognised as one of the few attempts to discuss the role of myth in National Socialist ideology and its renewed and intensified exploitation in the recent far right.

On the other hand, the above-mentioned paper by Karl Banghard (2015), dealing with far-right references to Germanic culture at special memorial places, does not address the topic of the use of mythology, even though there are clear references to the topic of Germanic mythology in the material he looks at (Banghard 2015: 68). The collected volume edited by Speit (2010b) also similarly touches upon the references to Norse-Germanic mythology, but, however, concentrates for understandable reasons largely on the religious level (neo-paganism). The same or similar is true of Banghard (2016), who further devotes himself to deconstructing the appropriation and falsification of history, especially in the use of symbols.

There are various reasons for the limited amount of academic engagement to date with the reception of Germanic culture and with the adaptation of Norse-Germanic mythology and the repertoire of symbols associated with it among far-right groups. Thus, for example, work on Germanic history outside of the academic subject area of history tends to be rather sporadic these days. There have indeed been forays into the area from the perspective of popular science, but these have often been dominated by a kind of 'Living History' outlook or esoteric approach. One often has the

impression that one is dealing in some cases here with the views of a perhaps rather eccentric bystander. Norse-Germanic Mythology is also rarely a subject of academic discussion these days. Even if there are of course exceptions, such as e.g. the publications of Simek (i.e. 1995, 2003, 2015), there is a lack of a broader body of research on this subject in the German-speaking world. The current situation thus differs significantly from that of the nineteenth century and of the first half of the twentieth century as well as from the engagement with Norse-Germanic mythology in Scandinavia and in the English-speaking world. There one can indeed find numerous recent publications that shine a light on this topic from various perspectives. Worth mentioning, as examples of such work, are the publications of Acker/Larrington (2016), Andrén/Jennbert/Raudvere (2006) and Lindow (2001).

1.3 Organisational forms of the far right

Before beginning to deal in more detail with the far-right manner of accessing Germanic history and Norse-Germanic mythology, it would make sense to look first of all a bit more closely at the term *right-wing extremism* and further to give some insight into how right-wing extremists organise themselves in the German-speaking world.

There is no generally valid definition of *right-wing extremism* and one as such cannot be delivered here. Even the term *extremism* is itself as such controversial. The associated definitional and ideological questions cannot be discussed here in detail, not to mention be answered. One of the basic reasons for the lack of a generally-accepted definition of *right-wing extremism* is the number of different forms of the phenomenon. Recent *right-wing extremism* in the German-speaking world has been neither fundamentally homogeneous nor static, but rather shaped by various ideological currents and subject to constant change even while apparently attempting to perpetuate structural, political core convictions. To that extent the term *right-wing extremism* under which one subsumes completely different political groups and convictions clearly represents a generalisation.[3]

However, the term still proves to be useful, especially also for the study undertaken here. For, however diverse and polymorphous (also in ideological terms) the far-right scene may indeed be, there are nonetheless some common constituents which are standard in all manifestations of contemporary right-wing extremism:

First and above all there is the *völkisch*, nationalist ideology based on a worldview shaped by Social-Darwinist thinking. This provides the basis for the decidedly hostile attitude to foreigners as well as the racist – but also individual – categorisation of human beings as either of value or not. Further essential characteristics include the association with National Socialism or currents within it, the affirmation of the principle of a natural born leader/*Führer*, the rejection of democracy and pluralism, of universal human rights and of the basic liberal-democratic order and the corresponding affirmation of an authoritarian organisation of the state. Violence is an integral part of how right-wing extremists understand themselves, and thus the use of violent means to enforce one's ideological aims is seen as legitimate.

Supposedly new phenomena frequently prove to be merely examples of a return to already familiar inherited patterns and traditions or as mere variations thereof. Topics such as protection of the environment, the maintenance of customs and traditions, the promotion of ideas of *Heimat* [the homeplace] are, for example, really just covers for xenophobic, racist convictions, that for their part are rooted in *völkisch* ideology. Advocating the right to freedom of opinion or to citizens' participation can serve as a way of spreading various far-right core beliefs, and, among other things, also to publicise *völkisch* ideas. Apparently, Europe-related topics can, in far-right hands, prove to be containers for nationalist material, such as has been the case, for example, in the so-called *Identitarian* movement.

With regard to its organisational forms and external appearance, the contemporary far right proves to be extremely polymorphous. While it is not possible to give a comprehensive and detailed picture of far-right organisational forms and their development, even a short overview of the structures reveals some peculiarities that are characteristic of the far right in general and which distinguish this political movement from others.

While in the German-speaking parts of Switzerland there is at present (and there has in the recent past been) no party with a clearly right-wing extremist profile, the situation in Austria and above all in Germany is different:

In Austria there were in the past always many tiny parties with extreme right-wing programmes. Among these were, for example, the *Verband der Unabhängigen* [Association of Independents] (1949–1955), the *Nationaldemokratische Partei* (NDP) [National Democratic Party] (1967–1988), the *Partei Neue Ordnung* [New Order Party] (1995–1998), and also *Die Bunten* [The Colourful] (2003–2010) as well as the *Nationale Volkspartei* [National People's Party] (NVP) (2007–2010?) (e.g. www.doew.at/erkennen/rechtsextremismus/rechtsextreme-organisationen). Because of the very strict legislation prohibiting Nazi activity in Austria (Verbotsgesetz 1947, StGBl. Nr. 13/1945) [Law of Prohibition 1947, State Law Gazette No. 13/1945] it is hardly possible for such parties to stand in elections. For this reason, right-wing extremists today tend to sympathise with the more properly termed right-wing populist *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* [Austrian Freedom Party] (FPÖ). To this extent, one can say there is at present no explicitly right-wing extremist party in Austria.

In the Federal Republic of Germany there are at present several active smaller right-wing parties. The *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* [National Democratic Party of Germany] (NPD), founded in 1964, above all belongs among these. The *Deutsche Volksunion* [German People's Union] (DVU, founded as an association in 1971, active as a political party from 1987) was subsumed by the NPD in 2011 (officially completed in 2012). The Party called *Die Rechte* [The Right] (founded 2012) is another right-wing extremist party which arose out of parts of the DVU and which is based primarily in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. This party saw itself from the start as a more radical alternative to the NPD. Also from North Rhine-Westphalia came the origins of the so-called *Pro*-movement. This is a conglomerate of de jure independent parties and voters' associations that started with the right-wing extremist voters' association *Pro Köln*

[Pro Cologne] (1996–2018), that in turn came arose from parts of the DVU and was the model for numerous further groups such as *Pro NRW, Pro Deutschland, Pro Sachsen* [Pro North Rhine-Westphalia, Pro Germany, Pro Saxony] etc. Today, most of the *Pro*-organisations have dissolved again; their members are now organising themselves in other groups. On the other hand, the tiny extreme right-wing party *Der III. Weg* [The Third Way] (founded in 2013) concentrates its activity in Southern and Eastern Germany. The authorities of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution further count the insignificant small parties with names such as *Freie Bürger Union (FBU) – Landesverband Saarland* [Free Citizens' Union – State Association of Saarland] and *Deutsche Konservative* [German Conservatives] among right-wing extremist organisations (e.g. Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Inneres und Sport 2020: 36). In view of the relatively manageable successes of right-wing extremist parties, right-wing extremists are turning to the *Alternative für Deutschland* [Alternative for Germany] (AfD), infiltrating it and also trying to gain a parliamentary platform through the party. The so-called *Flügel* [wing] of the party, which has now been officially dissolved but continues to exist de facto, is a welcome rallying point for right-wing extremists (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2020: 83ff.). Apart from the above-named parties, there are several far-right associations and organisations in existence in the German-speaking world which have, however, not been listed in the registry of associations. In Austria, for example, these include the *Identitäre Bewegung Österreich* [Identitarian Movement Austria] (IBÖ) (founded in 2012) and the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für demokratische Politik* [Working Community for Democratic Politics] (AFP) (since 1963). In Germany there are countless organisations of this kind, the majority of which have only a very small number of members. Among these are the *Identitäre Bewegung* [Identitarian Movement], the *Junge Landsmannschaft Ostdeutschland* [Association of Young Compatriots East Germany] (JLO), and the *Bewegung Neue Ordnung* [New Order Movement]. Several organisations have been banned in the past few decades, such as, for example, the *Heimattreue Deutsche Jugend* [Patriotic German Youth] (HDJ), the *Hilfsorganisation für nationale politische Gefangene und deren Angehörige e.V.* [Aid organisation for National Political Prisoners and their Families (registered association)] (HNG) or the *Skinheads Sächsische Schweiz* [Skinheads of Saxon Switzerland] (SSS).

Of particular significance for the right-wing extremist scene are the so-called *freie Kameradschaften* [free associations of comrades] in which right-wing extremists organise themselves on a local and regional level. Similar in terms of habitus and structure to groups of rockers are the so-called *Bruderschaften* [brotherhoods] which distinguish themselves to the outside world by means of their leather waistcoats emblazoned with various symbols and letters. Such groups are particularly present and active in the organisation of rock concerts and as security staff at events on the far-right scene.

Music groups also figure as focal points for the far-right scene right across the German-speaking world. They frequently make appearances on a supra-regional level too. Concerts thus serve not just as meeting points but significantly contribute to the networking opportunities of the scene.

Finally, one ought not forget the right-wing extremist terrorist groups which give very striking indications of the external impact and the identity of the scene. This has not only been apparent since the discovery of the series of murders carried out by the so-called *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* [National Socialist Underground] (NSU)[4]: Violence and the glorification of violence have always been associated with right-wing extremism.

In the estimation of some of the German security agencies [*Verfassungsschutzbehörden*] the so-called *Reichsbürgerbewegung* [Reich Citizens' Movement], whose number of followers in Germany is estimated at around 19,000 (as of 2019), also belongs to the immediate or wider circle of right-wing extremism (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2020: 103). The latter movement, while extremely fragmented in terms of ideology and organisation, has, however, a common core identity, deriving namely from the conviction that the German Federal Republic is either not legitimate or does not exist, and that therefore the German Reich continues to exist. The concrete shape and form of governance in which the German Reich supposedly persists is seen in different ways within the *Reichsbürger*-movement. A group similar to the German *Reichsbürger* exists in Austria: The so-called *Staatsverweigerer* [deniers of the state] also reject and regard as illegitimate the present constitution of the state of Austria. There are also *Reichsbürger* present and active in the German-speaking parts of Switzerland.

What is implied in this in any case radical political positioning is that *Reichsbürger* and *Staatsverweigerer* claim a superior right to interpret both history and the present, especially in relation to actual or supposed political realities. The claim connected with the narrative of the continued existence of the German Reich does not only negate the legitimacy of the German Federal Republic, its representatives, and the current legal order. It also means even more significantly that *Reichsbürger* claim the power of the state for themselves or for the institutions they have invented and which they generally regard as following the tradition of the German Reich.

As an obvious logical consequence of their denial of the existence of the currently sovereign states, there are no political parties of *Reichsbürger* and *Staatsverweigerer*. They are, rather, organised in more or less casual associations that frequently operate under cover names. *Völkisch*-racist, nationalist and in parts also National Socialist ideas are widespread in the *Reichsbürger*-movement, and thus it clearly overlaps in places with the right-wing extremist scene. However, it would not be correct to make a sweeping statement classifying all *Reichsbürger* as right-wing extremists (Speit 2017; Schönberger/Schönberger 2019).

The fact that right-wing extremism in the German-speaking world displays such organisational and structural diversity – itself also an expression of ideological heterogeneity – will naturally also influence the study of references to the Germanic peoples and to Norse-Germanic mythology on the far-right scene. For within the broad spectrum of manifestations and identities of right-wing extremism these aspects constitute only one facet among many.

With this in mind, in the following the use of Germanic history and culture as a whole will be considered first before the focus turns to the references to

Norse-Germanic mythology, which was of course a part of Germanic culture. The study concentrates on the German-speaking area, but on occasion the perspective will be widened to show how ancient Germanic culture and Norse-Germanic mythology have been received and adapted and used for far-right ideological purposes in other places too.

In all the thematic areas looked at here in detail the documentary evidence given is of an exemplary nature. This means, on the one hand, that it reflects only a (small) part of the much broader spectrum. On the other hand, it implies that the findings cannot be claimed to be representative, and thus may not be applied without any further consideration to the entirety of the far right in the German-speaking world. Nonetheless, they do offer a clear and informative insight into the manner of the adoption of Germanic culture on the far-right scene.

Notes

1 The former SED (Socialist Unity Party of the GDR) did invoke the revolutionary traditions of the sixteenth-century Peasants' Revolt.
2 For details on 'Ancestral Heritage' ['Ahnenerbe' was the name of an institute in Nazi Germany] see Kater (2006), in particular on the journal *Germanien*, 104ff., on the 'germanischen Wissenschaftseinsatz' [Germanic deployment of science], 170ff.
3 Pfahl-Traughber (2019) offers an instructive overview of the different ideological currents of the far right.
4 Between 2000 and 2007 this terrorist group not only murdered ten people but was also responsible for several bombings and robberies.

2 The reception of Germanic culture on the far right

2.1 A short history of the reception of Germanic culture in the German-speaking world

In order to understand the ways in which members of the far right refer to Germanic culture[1] it is important to have some idea of how, under what conditions and since when the German-speaking world in general has developed an interest in the Germanic peoples, their history, and their culture (including their mythology):

Indeed, the influential text of 'Germania' by the ancient historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus (ca. 58–120) was already rediscovered and given a political interpretation in the second half of the fifteenth century (Todd 2004: 5). However, a more focused engagement with the Germanic peoples, their history and culture only really began in the German-speaking world in the late eighteenth century and then above all at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The focus of the interest was on German history and on its roots.

The modern concept of the German nation developed – to summarise very briefly – as a consequence of the Enlightenment, of the French Revolution and of the Napoleonic Wars, as well as of the decline of the preceding Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Associated with the idea of a nation was especially the search for a national identity which almost of necessity had to look to history and culture for its nourishment. German history was in the process traced back not just to the Middle Ages but also further back.

It was in particular the search for the linguistic roots of the German language that led back to the field of the Germanic (Ur-Germanic). The newly founded academic discipline of *Germanistik* [German studies], which today is essentially subdivided into linguistics and literary studies of the German language, was still seen at the beginning of the nineteenth century rather as a comprehensive cultural discipline devoted to the study of everything Germanic. Thus, one came to base the historical origins of German culture [*Deutschtum*] not only politically but also academically in the history of the Germanic tribes.

This then found its way into many areas of social life: Material from Germanic history, from the Germanic literary tradition and especially Germanic mythology were used in literary works (i.e. Schmidt 2018: 27ff.). Material derived from literary tradition and Norse-Germanic mythology was re-worked in music, and

DOI: 10.4324/9781003206309-2

most prominently, of course, in the operas of Richard Wagner. In the visual arts, scenes and figures from Germanic and German history such as Arminius – also called Hermann the Cheruscan – as well as allegorical figures such as Germania were depicted. In the nineteenth century painters such as Alfred Rethel or Moritz von Schwind contrasted the Germanic tradition with the Romanic one. Large-scale monuments were erected – countless Germania monuments, such as the well-known Niederwald monument near Rüdesheim am Rhein (www.niederwald-denkmal.de/), the Arminius monument in the Teutoburg forest and the Widukind monument in Herford, among others. Nordic first names became more widely popular for the first time in the nineteenth century. There was more widespread interest in the history of the Germanic tribes among academic historians and more attention was paid to it in teaching in schools and universities. In archaeology more energy was given to the search for artifacts of ancient Germanic times.

The efforts of numerous Germanists to deal with Germanic mythology, German (and Germanic) legal history, the history of the German language and literature as well as with the folk tradition, especially in the form of fairytales, legends and customs, are to be seen in the context of this search for the roots of the nation – which was as such of course a construct. The most well-known representatives were undoubtedly the Brothers Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm.

The example of the Brothers Grimm – who famously protested against the illiberal breach of the constitution in the kingdom of Hannover in 1837 as part of the so-called 'Göttingen Seven' – shows that this movement was clearly progressive. Ideas of the nation and increased engagement with and search for national identity and national roots stood in contrast to the reactionary restored regimes of princes in the time after the Congress of Vienna. This is also clear in the person of Richard Wagner who was pursued by the authorities on account of his participation in the revolution of 1848 (specifically in the May uprising in Dresden in 1849).

It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century – and not least on the strength of the foundation of the empire in 1871 and thus the realisation at least of the *kleindeutsch* national state – that a conservative form of the idea of the nation was established (in contrast with a recognition of the class divisions of society going beyond the nation state from a Marxist viewpoint). Engagement with Germanic culture now also occurred rather in the context of a national-conservative perspective. Thus, the topic of Germanic history and culture, especially as part of the reception of national history and identity, can still be primarily seen as a bourgeois-conservative concern at the beginning of the twentieth century. There was no necessary or inevitable clear association with *völkisch*-racist ideas. Yet frequently exaggerated and excessively esoteric references to the Germanic peoples, their history and culture played an important role precisely for organisations of the *völkisch*-racist movement, and to an extreme degree for secret societies such as 'Germania' (founded in 1912 in Leipzig) and the 'Thule Society' (founded in 1918 in Munich) and others.

All these elements of the reception of Germanic culture were emphasised more in many ways in the Third Reich and they were re-interpreted and used for the ideological purposes of National Socialism. This is also true of the literary tradition,

such as, for example, in the case of the *Nibelungenlied*. Germanic heroes and prototypical leaders [*Führer*] such as Widukind or Arminius were increasingly highlighted as part of the historical heritage – interpreted in the appropriate ideological fashion (e.g. Winkler 2016: 81ff.).

However, the reception and interpretation of Germanic culture and especially mythology was not by any means always viewed in a positive light under National Socialism and the Third Reich; it was rather regarded in a thoroughly ambivalent fashion. While some parts of the National Socialist leadership, and in particular Adolf Hitler himself, tended to distance themselves from or reject the notion of creating a tradition by referring back to the Germanic peoples and their culture, this kind of historical reference and the reception of Germanic culture was intensively promoted precisely in the SS and above all in circles around the SS *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler. The most visible expression of this was the '*Deutsches Ahnenerbe*' [German Ancestral Heritage] organisation, a research facility of the SS that was founded in 1935 by Heinrich Himmler and the Dutch independent scholar Herman Wirth. This institution – the complex history and structural development of which cannot be portrayed in detail here (Kater 2006 for more detail) – was intended to give scientific support to the ideological construct of National Socialist teachings about race through research activities in various areas, such as anthropology, archaeology, biology, geology etc. Germanic culture was a quite fundamental aspect of the historical, cultural, and religious academic interests. The *völkisch*-racist ideological motivation for this was intensified further by the private, partly exaggeratedly esoteric, and partly crazed interests of the initiators of the institution, especially in the person of Heinrich Himmler (Gasche 2014; Koop 2012). The Germanic past was also looked to for inspiration in the design of places of assembly and training of the SS, such as for example in the case of Wewelsburg in the vicinity of Paderborn (e.g. Moors 2009). To this extent the reception of Germanic history and culture represents a prominent, if not omnipresent or dominant, part of the National Socialist worldview.

2.2 Far-right uses of Germanic history and culture

These days propagandists of the extreme right refer to the often-doubtful results of the '*Deutsche Ahnenerbe*' [German Ancestral Heritage] and to other sources of the first half of the twentieth century. They also, however, cite the frequently esoteric ideas and concepts of nationalist and national-romantic pioneers such as Guido von List (1848–1919) or Lanz von Liebenfels (1874–1954). The latter figures developed their own ideas about Germanic culture beyond the margins of academic historical research, including that taking place in German studies [*Germanistik*], and were invoked by further esoteric thinkers in the circles around National Socialism in the first decades of the twentieth century (e.g. Goodrick-Clarke 2004).

The forms of far-right references to the ancient Germanic peoples and their culture can be very different: Thus they refer to the ancient tribes, for example, in describing themselves as *Germanen*. The use of associated terms such as

Figure 2.1 'Germanen' T-shirt[2]

Figure 2.2 Germania hat

Germanenblut [Blood of the Germanic peoples] or *Germanicus* is also clearly an example of this kind of reference.

One example of such identification with the ancient Germanic peoples can be seen on the T-shirt identifying the wearer with the *Germanen*. This is one of the many such items available through an online retailer on the scene.

The line of tradition to the Germanic tribes established in right-wing extremist circles is also shown, for example, by the programmatic album title *Söhne der Germanen* (Sons of the Germanic tribes) by the band *Nordlicht* (Archiv der Jugendkulturen 2001: 199).

A similar indication of identification with the ancient Germanic peoples is the name chosen by one group of the extreme right for themselves: *Germanisches Bollwerk Mecklenburg* [Germanic Bastion of Mecklenburg] (Ministerium für Inneres und Europa Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 2019: 36).

The use of the Latin term for the Germanic lands, i.e. *Germania* – and precisely not the English name Germany or '*Deutschland'* – also clearly shows reference to the historical heritage of the Germanic peoples. The same is true for example of the band name *Division Germania* (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division_Germania). The first word 'Division' suggests both a military unit and a group of a certain size (not at all corresponding to the reality of this one-man band). Similarly martial in terms of both name and appearance are the *Hoolskins Germania* (Versteckspiel 2017: 9). The Latin country name is also prominently displayed on various items of clothing that are worn on the scene:

An online shop based in Sondershausen in Thuringia trades under the name of '*Germaniaversand'* (www.germaniaversand.de). The retailer is very active on the far-right scene and offers not only articles for the scene such as sound recordings, clothing and devotional items, but also its own recordings with various song writers and bands. Musical events are also organised through the '*Germaniaversand'* (Thüringer Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales 2019: 22).

An extremist sport group in Saxony gave itself the name '*Volkssport Germania'* [*Germania* People's/Volk Sport] (Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen 2019: 72). In the 1990s the far right founded their own radio broadcaster with the name *Radio Germania* (Pfahl-Traughber 2019: 159). There was then a successor of this station going by the name of *Netzradio Germania* [Net radio . . .] (2007–2020) that could be received over the Internet.

The far-right singer-songwriter F.i.e.L from the area of Grevesmühlen – or the band of the same name – produced the recording with the title *Hautnah in Germania* [Up close/'skin close' in Germania] (Ministerium für Inneres und Europa Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 2019: 29). While the internal rhyme [-nah and -nia] may have played a role in the choice of title, the same title also shows how well-known and widespread the term *Germania* is on the scene.

Reich citizens with networks in the right-wing extremist scene initiated a *Fürstentum Germania* [principality of Germania] in Brandenburg, which was to be legitimised by various conspiracy theories (Geisler/Schultheis 2011: 173ff.).

Another band of the extremist right whose members come from the federal states of Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Pfalz, and which is close to the NPD [National Democratic Party of Germany], uses the name *Germanium* (Verfassungsschutzbericht Baden-Württemberg 2019: 161). The name presumably refers to the chemical element of the same name with the atomic number of 32. It may be doubtful whether the (indeed noteworthy) significance of this element as an electronic semiconductor was the motive for the choice of the name; it was rather the reference to *Germanien/*the Latin name *Germania* that was intended here. The title of a CD brought out by this band in 2019 – *Imperium Novum* (i.e. 'new empire') – again clearly indicates the far-right claim to [political] power. At the same time, the Latin title and use of the term *Imperium*, i.e. '*Reich*,' also shows

a conscious reference to history, leaving the question of whether *Imperium* refers to the Roman empire or rather to the Third Reich completely open. In any case, the lyrics of the CD clearly glorify the use of violence (Verfassungsschutzbericht Baden-Württemberg 2019: 191f.).

An equation of Germany and *Germania* is also propagated on an individual level for example on social networks such as Facebook – or in the past on extreme right internet forums. Thus, for example, a user with the pseudonym Marcus Germanicus on the at one time very active forum *National Revolution* generally opened with the greeting *Heil Deutschland, heil Germanien, heil euch allen, liebe Freunde* [*Heil/*Hail Germany, *heil* Germania, *heil* to you all, dear friends] (www.nationale-revolution.net, 4 July 2014).

Apart from the direct reference to Germanic culture and to the ancient Germanic peoples the names of some individual Germanic tribes, such as, for example, the Vandals, are also used. An extremist group founded in East Germany as early as in 1982 gave itself the name 'Vandalen – Ariogermanische Kampfgemeinschaft' [Vandals – Aryan-Germanic Fighting community] (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vandalen_%E2%80%93_Ariogermanische_Kampfgemeinschaft). The group is organised 'like an "outlaw motorcycle gang" (OMCG) and, in appearance, resembles a classic club of rockers in the uniform wearing of leather jackets. The "Vandals" are still active today on the far-right music scene' (Ministerium des Innern und für Kommunales des Landes Brandenburg 2019: 81). The group is also very well connected on the scene (Ministerium des Innern und für Kommunales des Landes Brandenburg 2019: 83ff.).

Figure 2.3 T-shirt *Ariogermanische Kampfgemeinschaft* [Aryan-Germanic Fighting community]

Source: *Recherche Nord*

The attraction of the Vandals to such historical references lies in the widespread exaggerated and selective image of this tribe: Danger, raging fury, violence, and destruction are associated (in historical terms, to a large extent falsely) with the name, especially as a result of phrases such as '*hausen wie die Vandalen'* [wreak havoc/act like vandals], and the term, 'vandalism,' itself.[3]

Members of the far right, however, like to attribute these qualities to themselves. Even if this generally represents only a form of self-declaration of wishful thinking, the name conveys an attitude and a programmatic image of themselves that is at once simple, straightforward, and succinct.

Another far-right band chose the name *Cherusker* [Cheruscans]. They were thus referring to the Germanic tribe of Arminius, the leader of the Germanic peoples in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest (the so-called Varus Battle) in 9 AD (www.belltower.news/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher-50842/). The name of the Germanic tribe here has also not been chosen at random. It too carries a message – offering a reminder of the brave and victorious Germanic fighters who overcame and utterly defeated the apparently more powerful invaders (i.e. the Romans). The affinity with violence is therefore connoted in the use of the name.

Public perception of the Germanic tribe of the Teutons also often tends to be limited to an association with war and battle. The historical Teutons emigrated from their homeland in Jutland together with the similarly Germanic tribe of the Cimbri [Kimbern] to the Roman empire around 120 BC. They inflicted a significant defeat on the Romans in the battle near Arausio in the year 105 BC, but were then totally defeated by the Romans under Gaius Marius in the year 102 BC in the battle of Aquae Sextiae. There is a pub which is popular on the extremist scene in Leun in the district of Lahn-Dill which goes by the name of *Teutonicus*, clearly referring to this particular tribe. Numerous gatherings and events of the regional extreme right scene take place there (Hessisches Ministerium des Innern und für Sport 2019: 102f.).

The same name, albeit with somewhat altered spelling, is used by a far-right singer-songwriter from the state of Brandenburg who refers to himself as *Toitonicus* (Ministerium des Innern und für Kommunales des Landes Brandenburg 2019: 108). A band from Hoyerswerda also distorts the spelling of the tribe in its name, in this case *Thoytonia* – a word containing the beginning of the placename *Hoy-* (Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen 2019: 97).

Also widely used on the far-right scene is the term *Furor Teutonicus*, in the sense of 'Germanic aggressiveness' (Ministerium des Innern und für Kommunales des Landes Brandenburg 2019: 93).

The band name *Hermunduren* – a 'group' in fact consisting of just one far-right singer-songwriter – harks back to the Germanic tribe of the same name, one of the Elbe Germanic peoples (Thüringer Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales 2019: 31).

A sub-group of the *Bruderschaft Thüringen* [Thuringia Brotherhood], a rocker group with a distinct propensity to violence, calls itself *Turonen* (Thüringer Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales 2019: 47f.). The source of the designation is clearly a Germanic tribe of the same name, about which there is some

dispute as to whether it is not rather to be traced back to the similarly named Celtic tribe.

Identification with the Vikings is also especially popular. This early-medieval Scandinavian group of warriors was clearly the inspiration for the name of the Living History group *Thorswikinger* [Thor's Vikings], founded in 1985 by members of the Germanic-Neopagan 'Order of the Armanen.' The latter order continues the tradition of 'Ariosophy' of the esoteric thinker Guido von List and others (Banghard 2016: 13f.).

Much earlier, however, there was the so-called *Wiking-Jugend* [Viking Youth] (founded in 1952 and banned in 1994), an influential neo-Nazi organisation that referred to the Vikings in its name. This group saw itself as a successor of the Hitler youth and the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* [League of German Girls] (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiking-Jugend).

The band *Landser*, declared a criminal organisation by the Berlin Court of Appeal in 2003, lyricised in their programmatic song of the same name (1996): 'In our veins boils Viking blood' (Farin/Flad 2001: 35).

Viking references are to be found everywhere on the far right, including outside of the German-speaking area:

> In the early 1990s [. . .] the neo-pagan group 'Wotansvolk' of the right-wing terrorist David Lane was influential in stylistic terms for parts of the East European Viking scene. From the middle of the 1980s the so-called Blood & Honour network (banned in Germany in 2000, but still agitating freely in other countries) in particular contributed to the cult around the Vikings and the ancient Germanic tribes.
>
> (Banghard 2016: 14)

Members of the terrorist organisation calling itself *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (NSU) [National-Socialist Underground] were also present on the Viking scene in the Free State of Thuringia (Banghard 2016: 14). In Bavaria, a group named *Viking Security Germania* [sic] patrolled through various towns in order to suggest the presence of refugees constituted a threat to the peace (Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Innern, für Sport und Integration 2020: 106). The reference to the Vikings in the name was clearly intended to connote strength, masculinity and violence.

These far-right references to the Vikings do not, however, indicate any deep engagement with the actual, historical Vikings. In fact, only a very selectively adapted and clichéd picture is what is being utilised. Thus, the Vikings are represented as warriors, conquerors, wild, untamed men (and women), often together with martial weaponry, helmets and ships. This is merely an aspect of the culture of the historical Vikings that suits the political ideology and the tradition-construction of today's right-wing extremists. Reference to the Vikings is thus always a declaration of a readiness for violence (Miller-Idriss 2017: 96).

Another aspect of the far-right interest in the Germanic peoples and in the Vikings is the revival of more or less clichéd, supposedly typical Germanic

customs such as mead drinking, axe throwing or other activities – often some kind of martial arts (e.g. Banghard 2016: 14). Such competitive sports are sometimes organised by far-right groups as part of so-called 'Viking Games' (e.g. Ministerium des Innern und für Sport Rheinland-Pfalz 2020: 53).

References to the Vikings in names and titles are, furthermore, widespread on the scene. Thus, one online shop trades under the name *Wikinger-Versand* (www.wikingerversand.de) [Viking Mail Order]. The Vikings are celebrated in various songs by far-right bands and singer-songwriters, and there are numerous products that are part of the far-right lifestyle which indicate either explicit or implicit references to the Vikings (see below) (e.g. Versteckspiel 2017: 48).

Some other Germanic group names that are popular in extreme right-wing circles include those of the 'Berserkers' and of the *Ulfheðnar*. As these are particularly references to mythology, they will be treated in more detail in the chapter about Norse-Germanic mythology.

In addition to group names referring to the Germanic tribes – the Vandals, the Vikings, the Berserkers etc. – one also finds individual references for example on inscriptions on T-shirts or in pseudonyms used on the internet (see below).

A further aspect of the deliberate association with Germanic traditions is the return to and revival of actual or supposed traditional customs. By doing this, members of the far right succeed not only in giving their political messages an emotional content and turning them into something people can experience like an event; they also at the same time strengthen the internal cohesion of the groups and in part infiltrate even broad sectors of society.

The best known of these – and most effective externally – are the celebrations of the solstice (particularly at the summer solstice, but also at the winter solstice) (e.g. Engert 2010: 103; Borsdorf 2007: 10f.). These have long been an integral part of the ritual repertoire of the far right in the Federal Republic (e.g. Gewalt von rechts 1982: 301) and play a significant role especially for right-wing extremists with neo-pagan ideas (e.g. Speit 2010: 28f, 47). There is clear evidence that celebrations of the solstices are the kind of activity in which particularly female members of the far right demonstrate their organisational abilities (Esen 2016: 288). They are also important as experiences for the far-right youth, for the next generation of the extreme right (Hoyningen-Huene 2003: 97). However, solstice celebrations are not only popular as internal events intended only for right-wing extremists, but also as a means of reaching a wider public, especially when the celebrations in question have not been initiated by the far right at all. In such cases the opportunity is there in many ways for right-wing extremists to appropriate the events. Those celebrations originating from the far right, however, are constantly used as effective ways of publicising their political messages and as networking opportunities for the scene (Ministerium für Inneres und Europa Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 2019: 42f.).

In some small villages of East Germany such celebrations of the summer and winter solstices have now become almost permanent fixtures of village cultural life. Since the 1990s they have become popular in East Germany where they have been and continue to be dressed up as part of the ancient cultural heritage, even

if, as a rule, there is no tradition of such celebrations in the relevant areas. In this context, right-wing extremists again and again manage to position themselves and present themselves as the caretakers and preservers of the homeland [*Heimat*] and of supposedly traditional customs (e.g. Thüringer Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales 2019: 57). In keeping with this, such events are proclaimed on the scene as the maintenance and preservation of traditional customs and folk life and generally proceed according to a broadly stereotypical programme including elements such as: silent marching to the accompaniment of drum beats; gathering around the solstice fire; ceremonial speeches and singing appropriate songs, such as e.g. 'Flamme empor' [the flame rises]. Typical props used at such events include flags, torches, drums, insignia, and frequently also uniform-like clothing (e.g. Döring 2008: 191). Yet very little is really known about whether and how solstice celebrations ever actually took place in the area under Germanic cultural influence. It is true that there is evidence of festivals on these occasions – adapted to more or less Christian forms – in folk culture in some regions; however, the use made of these dates by the far right is rather more influenced by the interpretation and realisation of such festivals in the Third Reich. The National Socialists already sought to use such celebrations to associate themselves with pre-Christian traditions. In any case, solstice celebrations, along with Viking festivities, are part of the range of experiential events on the extreme right (e.g. Rühl 2007: 22) that – with whatever historical legitimacy they may or may not have – reach back to the Germanic past.

The far right views the Nordic Yuletide festival as a further reference to Germanic traditions, and this is what is promoted on the extreme right scene as an alternative to the traditional Christian Christmas festival.

Thus, one contributor to the pages of the *Freie Kräfte Neuruppin* (www.nsfkn.info) writes of 'Yuletide' rather than Christmas time and of the 'Yule festival' rather than the celebration of Christmas. This was in an article about the situation of right-wing extremists in prison, to whom it was suggested one might send a 'Yule card' as a sign of solidarity.

One extreme right online retailer offers Christmas products under the category 'Yule festival' (www.lokis-truhe.net).

A close inspection of the site www.nationale-revolution.net (one of the largest and most active internet forums of the extreme right scene up to its being shut down in October 2014)[4] revealed that the substitution of Yule greetings for Christmas greetings is very common in extreme right circles. One may therefore say that a new kind of phraseology imitating or adapting traditional forms is developing (Schuppener 2014). Traces of this are clearly evident in the repertoire of expressions of greetings and good wishes on the extreme right. When instead of the usual formulas of Christmas greeting one finds the wish that the recipient may have *ein ruhiges und friedliches Julfest, ein besinnliches Julfest* or *ein schönes Julfest* ['a quiet and peaceful Yule festival' or a 'contemplative Yule festival' or a 'beautiful Yule festival'], it is evident that the Christian Christmas is being replaced by the pagan Germanic Yule. The replacement of the conventions of wider society is, however, only partially successful: Some of these Yule

Figure 2.4 Julfestgruß [Yule greeting]

greetings still appear under the caption *Frohe Weihnachten* (e.g. Nordglanz 23 December 2009) or *Frohe Weihnacht* (Aryan Devil, 20 December 2007) [Happy Christmas].

A clarification of the meaning of the extreme right appropriation and interpretation of the reference to the Yule festival is suggested by the use of the word *Heil* [Hail] alongside the word Yule, e.g. in *ein heil dem Julfest* [a hail to the Yule festival] (Skarburz, 21 December 2011) or *Heil Jul!* [Hail Yule!] (Deutscher Krüppel, 21 December 2011). Even if the phrases make little sense, as *Heil* can only be addressed to people, the political-ideological motivation is clear.

Figure 2.5 Yule baubles as greetings on the *Patriotisches Infoportal Hessen*

Figure 2.6 Yuletide wishes via the *Bruderschaft Brigade 8* [Brotherhood Brigade 8]

Finally, the extreme right calendar of holidays also includes the celebration of a spring festival, the so-called Ostara festival, the name suggesting an etymological interpretation of the word *Ostern* [Easter] and an intention to honour a supposed Germanic goddess of the spring – Ostara. There probably never was such a goddess of this name in Norse-Germanic mythology, and the name of the Easter festival cannot be traced back to such a figure,[5] even if this interpretation was promoted in the nineteenth century and is still maintained in esoteric and neo-pagan circles. Nevertheless, the Christian Easter festival is substituted by this supposed Germanic festival in parts of the far-right scene (Hoyningen-Huene 2003: 220). In 2019, for example, members of the party called *III. Weg* [Third Way] once again organised Ostara festivities in various localities in Bavaria (Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Innern, für Sport und Integration 2020: 123).

Figure 2.7 Extract of an advertisement for an Ostara festival from the far-right *Volksgemeinschaft Niederrhein* [Community of the Volk of the Lower Rhine]

Source: *Michael Klarmann*

As part of a holiday calendar supposedly based on Germanic culture, members of the far right also include a so-called *'Ahnenfest'* [Festival in honour of Ancestors] which is substituted for the Christian holidays of All Saints' Day and Reformation day. However, this festival in autumn has not caught on much on the far-right scene, and there is therefore only a very small amount of documentary evidence of the actual occurrence of this festival (e.g. https://mobit.org/Chronik/Chronik_Rex-Thueringen-2012.pdf).

The far-right reinterpretation of the Germanic cultural heritage is not, however, limited to supposed or actual cultural traditions in the form of customs: The ancient Germanic literary tradition is also taken up to be used for the purposes of the far right. Examples of this can be seen in the use of pseudonyms on the internet adapting names from the Old English *Beowulf*, from the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, from the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* and the *Kudrunlied*, as well as from Old Norse sagas.

Reference to the *Nibelungen* is clear in an especially popular event of the far-right scene which serves to project a particular image of the group, as well as to strengthen its internal cohesion: This is the regularly held martial arts event called the *Kampf der Nibelungen* [Battle of the Nibelungen]. This event has attracted steadily increasing numbers of participants in the past; in 2018, 850 people attended (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2020: 61).

The following is an extract from the comments of The Office for the Protection of the Constitution of NRW [North Rhine-Westphalia] on this:

> On the 12th of October 2019, the annual martial arts event designated as the *Kampf der Nibelungen* (KdN) was due to take place. The planned location of the event was Ostritz (Saxony). As in previous years, the event (KdN) was organised by the right-wing extremist Alexander Deptolla, who also has a leadership role in the Dortmund branch of the party called *Die Rechte* [The Right]. Only after six events of the right-wing extremist martial arts series had taken place was it possible for the relevant police forces and the authorities charged with the maintenance of order to stop the tournament.
>
> (Ministerium des Innern des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2020: 131)

The name used for the event clearly conveys an image associating the participants with (the character of) Germanic heroes and warriors. Once again only particular aspects (battle and war) are foregrounded in this reference to Germanic culture. This is also evident in the title of the event organised to replace the cancelled KdN 2019: the *Schild und Schwert* [shield and sword] *Festival*. That this was in no way a marginal event, but one of central importance for the identity of the far-right scene, is shown by the fact that the federal chairman of the party *Die Rechte* also appeared as a speaker (Ministerium des Innern des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2020: 132).

Also included in the far-right adoption of Germanic culture are natural and architectural monuments as well as actual or supposed cult sites which are frequently of high symbolic significance and prestige in the eyes of the public. Just as was the case with the solstice celebrations, recent right-wing extremists here are continuing

Figure 2.8 Advertisement for the *Kampf der Nibelungen*, 2020

a National Socialist tradition, as becomes clear in the example of the *Externsteine* [a rock formation in the Teutoburg forest] and how they are interpreted.

These *Externsteine* were, after all, declared a supposedly Germanic shrine under the National Socialist regime by the institution referred to as the *Ahnenerbe* [Ancestral Heritage]. Even though the claim that this natural monument was a Germanic cult site can be regarded as having been refuted historically and archaeologically, the place was often used in the past for gatherings of far-right groups, such as, for example, the *Wiking-Jugend* [Viking Youth], the *Freie Kameradschaft Westfalen* [Free comrades of Westphalia], and others. At the time of the solstice, in particular, several paramilitary marches, so-called 'orientation marches' were organised by the 'Freie Kameradschaften' from various Federal states. The continued interpretation of the *Externsteine* as Germanic cult sites is further evident in the fact that right-wing extremists camped there, some wearing animal skins and Viking helmets, especially at the time of the solstice (Banghard 2015, Bad Meinberger Stadtblatt of 18 September 2003).

The case of the *Externsteine* clearly shows how, despite the lack of historical evidence, a connection to Germanic culture was manufactured as a historical tradition under the National Socialists and is now being taken up again by the far right – without any question being raised about the historical fraud (e.g. Banghard 2015: 70f.). The National Socialist construction of history is thus being adopted uncritically and communicated as fact, and this can then be used to influence the wider public. The primary aim thereby is to take over the relevant representative places and give them an ideological interpretation.

A similar case is that of the *Wewelsburg*, which is also one of the (pseudo-) Germanic sites that attract the attention of far-right groups. Under the National Socialists, the castle was converted by the SS into a prestigious meeting place for senior leaders. The reference to the Nazi organisation called '*Ahnenerbe'* [Ancestral heritage] and the association of the *Wewelsburg* with Germanic culture and mythology indeed represent modern constructs in right-wing extremism, and are thus at the same time reinterpretations of the National Socialist history of the building (e.g. Schlegelmilch/Raabe 2015: 83ff.).

One more place that is one of the central 'Germanic' memorial sites for far-right groups is the 'Sachsenhain' [Saxon grove] in Verden an der Aller. It was supposedly in this location in the year 782 that around 4,500 Saxons were put to death on a single day by the Frankish troops of Charles the Great/Charlemagne. In the Third Reich, a political cult site (the so-called *Thingplatz*) was erected there and was officially opened in 1934 by Alfred Rosenberg, chief ideologist of the Nazis. Given this historically one-sided interpretation promoted already in the Third Reich, the 'Sachsenhain' is today viewed in far-right circles as a place of great significance for their identity and is understood, as it was under the National Socialists, as a memorial to the suppression of the Germanic belief system by Christianity (Banghard 2015: 62ff.; Sünner 1999: 74f.).

In their appropriation and reinterpretation of the *Thing*, the far right is also constructing a tradition leading back to the historical Germanic peoples. The *Thing* was the ancient Germanic tribal and judicial assembly, the assembly of all free men. Under the National Socialists there was already an interest in reviving the *Thing*, and indeed this was in the form of a newly invented kind of drama, the so-called *Thingspiel*.

The open-air stages planned for the performance of the cult chorus dramas all over the Reich were referred to as *Thingplätze*.[6] The concentrated ideological function of these *Thingplätze* as places for mass gatherings is evident for example in the fact that Joseph Goebbels declared that the Heidelberg *Thingplatz* was 'National Socialism in stone' (Stommer 1985: 110). But other assembly places were also declared as *Thingplätze*.

These National Socialist *Thingplätze* were not only associated with the 'Thing' as the place of assembly of the Germanic peoples; they were also valued as places of ritual. Similarly, *Thingspiele* [Thing plays] were also understood as *Weihespiele* [Plays of consecration] (e.g. Sünner 1999: 75f.). The monumental plays that were performed, having come about without any real historical foundation, were only modestly successful.

Contemporary right-wing extremism also looks back to the meaning of the 'Thing' as a place of assembly. The purpose of these assemblies is principally ideological instruction and consolidation, even if this is usually on a smaller scale. Thus, one holiday camp for the next generation of far-right extremists was described as a *Mitteldeutsches Jugendthing* [Middle German Youth 'Thing']. The place of assembly of right-wing extremists in Grevesmühlen is called the 'Thing'-house, and also functions as a place of instruction.

One could also mention in this context the *Thing-Netz* ['Thing'- network], an electronic information system (Mailbox system) used by right-wing extremists in the 1990s to announce current events etc. (Fromm/Kernbach 2001: 15, 81ff.).

Meetings, sometimes in the form of concerts, taking place in actual or supposed Germanic cult or sacred sites are viewed as continuing in the tradition of the ancient Germanic 'Thing' and are part of the ritual repertoire of the recent far right in the German-speaking world (Banghard 2015).

The 'Thing' as the original Germanic council assembly finally also serves as a series of events:

> Axel Schlimper, the right-wing extremist from Thuringia, organised monthly meetings of a so-called 'Thing'-circle in Themar with the purpose of bringing

Figure 2.9 *Thinghaus* sign (with the low German inscription *Lever dood as Slaav!* = 'better dead than a slave!')

Source: *Michael Prochnow*

> the regional right-wing extremist scene together to exchange ideas. Since the beginning of 2018 this 'Thing'-circle has been gathering regularly at full moon on [. . .] an open area in Themar that is also used as an arena for rock concerts. The meetings are always held inside a stone circle erected on site surrounding a yurt and a campfire.
>
> (Thüringer Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales 2019: 56)

The significance of this 'Thing'-circle of Themar – in terms the exchange of far-right ideas and the identity of the scene – now extends well beyond the local region. It also exerts an influence beyond the narrow right-wing extremist scene by organising various cultural events (Thüringer Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales 2019: 57f.). The far-right adoption of Germanic culture becomes visible for the general public in both the 'occupation' of particular places (actual or supposed historical sites and /or ritual places) and the naming of meeting places of diverse kinds. The names used always have a symbolic aspect. This is true, for example, in the case of the 'Thing'- house in Grevesmühlen, but also of other pubs and shops with far-right clients that wish to display the extreme right adoption of the Germanic past and its culture. Even temporary places of assembly, such as the camps of right-wing extremists, make conscious reference to the ancient Germanic peoples in their names. Thus, for example, there were sections labelled *Germania* or *Alemannia* in a far-right holiday/training camp intended for young people (HDJ [*Heimattreue Deutsche Jugend* – Home Faithful German Youth] Camp in Fromhausen [North Rhine-Westphalia] in August 2008).

Since the very beginnings of the internet, there have been virtual meeting places too in the form of various far-right forums, but these have now largely been replaced by social media. From the start, these forums were frequently associated (at least nominally) with Germanic traditions – either with names that were actually or supposedly derived from Norse-Germanic mythology or with general references to the Germanic peoples or to specific Germanic tribes. The influential and much visited far-right platform *thiazi.net*, for example, was named after the mythical giant *Thjazi*. The site described itself as a Germanic global network community and bore the logo of the *Irminsul*.[7] A significant proportion of online shops for far-right propaganda material, clothing, and music have had and still have names containing Germanic references, such as: *Arminius-Versand, Germania-Versand, Thingplatz-Versand*, *Wikinger-Versand* [Versand = mail order], etc.

All of the listed meeting places – whether virtual or real – are intended one way or another (through naming, the use of symbols, actual or supposed historical references) to construct a line of tradition leading back from the present to the time of the ancient Germanic peoples (as whose heirs the right-wing extremists see themselves) and thus help establish an identity for the contemporary extremist groups. That much of this is pseudo-history is evident not least in the fact that historians really know little about the festivals and rites – or of the representative and symbolic cult sites of the Germanic peoples – in the German-speaking area.

Thus, a considerable portion of the connection with Germanic culture cultivated on the far right today is derived from the corresponding (not infrequently fanciful) interpretations of the National Socialist period, and has either a very limited basis in historical evidence or none at all. The construction of new Germanic connections by the far right is especially to be seen against this background.

One can clearly see how such connections are being made precisely in the case of the online shops mentioned. The latter namely supply various products that promote a Germanic reference. This is particularly true of T-shirts with inscriptions or images that either explicitly or implicitly make such associations. There are thus T-shirts even for children, such as, for example, the one with the inscription pictured in the image below.

The fact that the horned helmet in the image is ahistorical and was originally a nineteenth-century stage prop that then fed into the clichéd image of the Vikings does not perturb right-wing extremists in their generally stereotypical interpretation of Germanic culture.

This more or less clichéd image of the Germanic peoples is also employed in the wide range of drinking horns (mead horns) in different designs, some decorated with runes or other mythological symbols (www.wikingerversand.de).

The replicas that are sold show a strong focus on aspects such as battle, war, and violence, and all are related to ideas of masculinity and power. There are, for example, knives similarly decorated with runes in some cases, or other indicators of an actual or at least constructed association with Germanic culture. One can

Figure 2.10 T-shirt inscription *Kleiner Germane* [Little Germanic man]

also find a broad range of weapons such as Viking battle axes or shields, longbows, helmets, etc. (especially www.nordwelt-versand.de).

Apart from these categories of products, the online retailers supply an extremely broad range of goods for daily use which are rendered 'Germanic' either through selection, special characteristics, or just by the design (especially the use of inscriptions). Such products include groceries, shopping bags, stationery, lighters, keyrings, leather goods, jewellery and much more. The examples of a 'Berserker smoked salt' (www.nordwelt-versand.de) or a 'Berserker wine' (www.druck18.de) shows how a Germanic association is achieved simply by re-naming the product.

The same is true of a honey vodka sold under the name 'Viking Gold' by a far-right distributor on the internet (www.lokis-truhe.net/).

Some online shops also supply prints of works from the first half of the twentieth century dealing with the Germanic peoples, their history, and culture. One may, for example, find prints of Gustaf Kossina's *Altdeutsche Kulturhöhe* [The height of old German culture] (reprint of the 1935 edition) or Kurt Pastenaci's *Die großen germanischen Führer* [The great Germanic leaders] (Reprint of the 1939 edition) (e.g. www.nsheute.com). As a rule, these are works that came about as part of the National Socialist adoption of Germanic culture with [ideological] contents contemporary historians would dispute.

The extent to which distributors of supposedly unpolitical Germanic articles may not at first be necessarily connected with the far-right scene, but are however rooted in right-wing extremism, is shown in the example of Nordwelt-Versand [Northern world distributors] based in Sibbesse in the district of Hildesheim. It was founded in 1999 and is run by Oliver Bode, the former district chairman of the now banned far-right *Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* [Free German Workers' Party] (https://nazimelderhi.blackblogs.org/tag/bode/).

A further element of the use of Germanic culture is the phenomenon whereby right-wing extremists in various contexts employ archaic vocabulary,[8] especially

Figure 2.11 Replica of a Viking battle axe and shield

Figure 2.12 Berserker smoked salt

ancient Germanic and specifically old Norse terms. One example that one may just mention here is the name *Thrima* used by a far-right band from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Ministerium für Inneres und Europa Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 2019: 28). The old Norse *thrima* (*þrima*) means 'battle, din.' The connection with the martial/warlike self-image cultivated by right-wing extremists is obvious here.

Old Germanic and old Norse vocabulary may also, for example, be seen on T-shirts, frequently even in the form of runic characters.

2.3 Evaluation and the consequences of the far-right use of Germanic history and culture

Clearly significant portions of the far-right scene are appropriating the ancient Germanic peoples for themselves. In doing so, however, they are selective, choosing only certain aspects, especially those that may serve to support the far-right ideological view of the world. The use of historical elements is highly syncretistic, making anachronistic connections between historical/pseudohistorical events and modern topics. The references to the Germanic peoples are frequently closely associated with a continuation of the National Socialist interpretation of Germanic

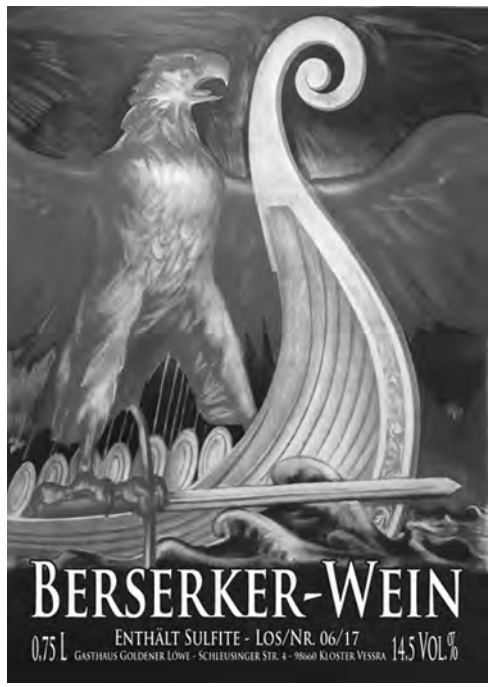

Figure 2.13 Berserker wine

history. What arises out of this is a mixture of symbol-laden historical references and pseudohistory. All this makes it difficult to precisely categorise and evaluate the far-right use of Germanic culture.

References to Germanic culture are not simply an internal affair of the far-right scene. A broader interested public is also aware of the far-right appeal to Germanic history and culture, even if this awareness remains in many ways quite diffuse. The subject is treated very little in academia and especially in the teaching of history in schools and there is, therefore, a lack of basic knowledge of the area. As a result, any kind of engagement with the ancient Germanic peoples – and this is particularly true of 'Living History' presentations that reach large audiences – is frequently viewed with suspicion as evident of far-right motives, or at least of proximity or indifference towards right-wing extremism. The consequences of the lack of knowledge and of the resulting oversimplification of the topic are extremely serious for the historical discussion of the ancient Germanic peoples.

There are many reasons why the far right uses Germanic culture for their ideology and to construct their identity.

Certainly, the earlier appropriation of the Germanic peoples under National Socialism and in the Third Reich plays an important role. The attempt to legitimate *völkisch*-oriented race theory by invoking the Germanic tribes as the actual

or supposed ancestors of *the* Germans is also popular in today's far right. Reference to the Germanic peoples appears all the more attractive, as it was during the Third Reich precisely the SS under Himmler that cultivated such references and institutionalised the appropriation, for example in the *Deutsches Ahnenerbe* [German Ancestral Heritage Institute]. The self-image of the SS as an elite unit within National Socialism appeals to contemporary members of the far right, some of whom similarly regard themselves as an elite social group with access to some higher knowledge.

The fact that there is such limited knowledge of the Germanic peoples, their history, culture and mythology in wider contemporary society makes precisely the engagement and identification with Germanic culture and the Germanic heritage attractive. Far-right groups are thus able not only to appropriate a topic almost exclusively for themselves, but also to interpret this period of history as they see fit, and to selectively lift out just those pieces that conform to the ideological orientation of far-right politics. In this way, right-wing extremists can portray themselves as bearers of a higher form of knowledge (i.e. a form that is otherwise not available to society).

The actual or presumed repression of engagement with the ancient Germanic peoples in broad sectors of society in German-speaking countries allows the far right further to consider themselves and present themselves as preservers of the cultural heritage, even if the focus of the historical interpretation on the Germanic peoples as ancestors is clearly selective.

Events with a ritual/sacred character, such as solstice festivities, are presented under the rubric of the preservation of traditional customs and the cultural heritage, and they are understood and publicised by those on the far-right as a return to the 'rites of the ancestors.' Their ceremonial form further makes such celebrations ideal as places for the far right to identify with and serves to create a sense of community (Döring 2008: 191) which is expressed symbolically in participation at the festivities.

The common far-right interpretation of the ancient Germanic peoples, their culture and history, is concentrated (as one might expect) on some ideologically relevant aspects. This is, on the one hand, the mostly unspoken, but always assumed, role of the Germanic peoples as ancestors of the Germans – and indeed as their only legitimate ancestors. A simple historical line is drawn, omitting any irritating details that might distract from the production of tradition. On the other hand, the Germanic peoples and their history are reduced to a great extent to the aspects of heroism, battle, and war. The image of the Germanic peoples thus completely accords with the Social Darwinist conception of life as a battle for the survival of the fittest. Right-wing extremists can then finally transfer and ascribe these warlike qualities to themselves as heirs of the Germanic peoples – in opposition to what they see as an effete and soft contemporary democratic society. In addition, precisely these warlike/heroic qualities are important for the *Endkampf* [final battle], the violent overthrow ('national revolution') envisaged by right-wing extremists.

One ought not omit to mention in this context the fact that right-wing extremists see themselves and present themselves as a martial male group (Versteckspiel

2017: 9). The corresponding 'Germanic' qualities fit well into this social group's image of itself.

The appropriate version of history offers the far right in particular a legitimation of their political ideology and of their political actions. Reference to the warlike Germanic peoples can justify and motivate current actions and the affirmation of violence as a means of achieving political aims that is an inherent feature of right-wing extremism. The association of the martial arts events popular on the far-right scene with 'Germanic' traditions and virtues is a supremely clear indication of this focusing of the interest in the Germanic peoples on the aspect of violence. The combat sports that are very popular on the scene emphasise characteristics central to the far-right, Social Darwinist oriented self-image, such as fighting fitness and physical strength.

Finally, the Germanic past also represents an ideal world, almost a golden age, in the perspective of the far-right. A romanticised image of Germanic culture is held up as a model of ethnic purity, autonomy, and freedom – as a contrast to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the contemporary multicultural and multilateral world. Moreover, according to the far-right perspective, the Germanic past exemplifies the Social Darwinist principle of the survival of the fittest and offers a picture of society characterised by a clear distribution of roles and by relationships of power. Idealised notions of violence and masculinity are viewed positively in the far-right image of the past, and such ideals and desires tend to crystallise around Germanic history and culture on the far-right scene.

The Germanic peoples are not only used by the far-right ideologically and politically: references to the Germanic peoples also influence the lifestyle of at least a part of the scene. Online retailers from the far-right scene sell numerous products with some Germanic connection, whether they are inspired by historical models or not. In any case, they fit well ideologically into the worldview and the identity-building of the far-right scene. Weapons and representations of war foreground a particular interpretation of Germanic history, one in which the Germanic peoples are seen as violent and warriors by nature. What is adapted is a picture of the wild, uncivilised, and violent primitive people [*Urvolk*], standing up to threats coming from the surrounding environment and successfully defending itself. This fits well into the social Darwinist image cultivated by right-wing extremists. It implies that the Germanic peoples found themselves in a constant battle for survival and were fully successful in this (as their glorification subliminally suggests). The veneration of the Germanic tribes involves especially a broad range of merchandise, including everything from decorative articles, jewellery to 'lifestyle products' that all refer in some way to (sometimes only supposed) aspects of Germanic culture, and thus contain the above-mentioned ideological core. This enables the construction of a closed 'life-world' related to the Germanic peoples in which many aspects of everyday life are carried out with a more or less clear reference to Germanic tradition. A clearly defined 'counter-culture' thus develops, defining itself in opposition to the majority of society (Pfahl-Traughber 2019: 184).

As a whole, this view of the ancient Germanic tribes is selective and clichéd. There is little or no detailed engagement with Germanic history and culture of the

kind that would reveal a vast number of different aspects not to be seen and judged the same way. One should mention that this stereotypical view of the Germanic peoples is in no way restricted to the far right in the German-speaking world: the glorification of these ancient tribes and of the Vikings in particular – at least as research so far shows – is also to be found in far-right circles outside the German-speaking area. Across Europe, such glorification plays a part, for instance, in the identity-building of the far-right so-called Hammer Skins. The adoption of Germanic references in this way indeed also certainly leads to some paradoxical results:

For example, far-right extremists in Slavic countries also refer to the Germanic tradition, even though there are no cultural connections in terms of inherited tradition or other links at all here. One illustration of this is the far-right Slovakian band indicatively called *Project vandal* whose CDs are also listed with German online retailers (www.heimdall-versand.de). The reference to the Vandals in particular can primarily be explained by the fact that this group is generally seen as the epitome of wildness, brutality, and destructiveness – qualities right-wing extremists like to ascribe to themselves as insignia of masculinity in accordance with Social Darwinist ideology. The reference to the proverbial destructive brutality of the Vandals is highlighted in the lower-case initial of *vandal*; the use of the capital letter would have suggested merely a reference to the tribe's name.

Even if it is very common for politicians to adapt social or political methods and models of procedures from other cultures to use them for comparison or as a (negative or positive) model, the connection being made with the Germanic peoples here, and in general in the Slavic world, is only possible if fundamental incongruities and incompatibilities are suppressed (Schuppener 2017: 216ff.). At the same time, however, this fact shows the eminent fascination of the corresponding one-sided interpretation of the ancient Germanic people developed to fit the far-right worldview.

2.4 A note on the use of archaic language

The use of archaic vocabulary can be considered a further form of reference to the Germanic peoples. The National Socialists in their time also used archaic terms for their purposes. Their typical political vocabulary included notably concepts that were intended to establish an association with actual or supposed aspects of Germanic culture. This involved the revival or more widespread use of terms such as *Gefolge* [followers], *Mannen* [archaic plural of man, a troop], *Odal, Anerbe* [peasant sole heir], *Thing, Mark* (in the sense of a border area or an area at the border of the Reich), *Sippe* [clan], or *Gau* [district – as in *Gauleiter*]. These words had largely disappeared from German in the preceding centuries and, if used at all, were seen as archaic (Schmitz-Berning 2000: 574). The use of these ancient terms was intended to suggest the supposed existence of a line of tradition stretching back to the Germanic peoples.

These terms are being used again occasionally on the contemporary far right. One example is the name of the group *Kameradschaft Gau Wendlstoa* [Comrades of the district of Wendlstoa – dialect form of Wendelstein] (www.verfassungsschutz.bayern.de/rechtsextremismus/situation/neonazis/index.html, Bayerisches

Staatsministerium des Innern, für Sport und Integration 2020: 187) or in the organisation of a so-called *Gau-Jugendtages* [*Gau* Youth day]. Far-right settlers in rural areas on occasion describe themselves as *Sippenverbände* [Associations of clans] (Röpke/Speit 2019: 155). The old German names of the months are also sometimes listed in far-right texts (e.g. Figure 5.31):

Eismond, Hartung [Ice month] (January)
Hornung (February)
Lenzing, Lenzmond [Lent month] (March)
Ostermond [Easter month] (April)
Maien (May)
Brachet (June)
Heuet (July)
Ernting, Erntemond [Harvest month] (August)
Scheiding, Herbstmond [Autumn month] (September)
Gilbhard, Weinmond [Wine month] (October)
Nebelung, Nebelmond [Fog month] (November)
Julmond [Yule month] (December)

It should be pointed out that there is no historical evidence of a general and widespread use of these old German names for the months.

The above-mentioned names for the months are to be found not only in texts such as reports, death notices, birth notices, or greeting messages in the social media; they also serve as names for groups. Thus, one far-right band calls itself, for example, *Julmond*.

Figure 2.14 Cover of the CD *Der Tag X* [Day X] (2003) by the band *Julmond*

One also finds an archaicising style especially in declarative texts of the far right. This also can be understood as an attempt to make a historical reference. At the same time, the style concerned also serves to make the texts appear more loftily dramatic (e.g. Jakubetz/Narr 2010: 125).

In principle, however, such linguistic references to the Germanic peoples through the use of archaisms (and historical terms) do not represent a very significant aspect of the extremist right use of Germanic culture. The main reason for this can be seen in the fact that such archaic vocabulary tends to make the texts less comprehensible for both communication with the outside world and within the scene itself.

Notes

1 What exactly is to be understood by the terms 'Germanic peoples' and 'Germanic culture' is itself a thoroughly problematic issue – and one that cannot be discussed in detail here. On the early history of the Germanic peoples, see e.g. Todd (2004).
2 All figures in this book are the author's own photographs unless otherwise specified.
3 The term 'vandalism' was first coined during the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century (Castritius 2007: 165).
4 The site was the successor of the very effective extreme-right internet platform *www.thiazi.net* that has been shut down since June 2012. On this, see, among others, http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiazi.net.
5 See Chapter 3.2.1.3.
6 The National Socialist 'Thing' movement is portrayed in great detail by Stommer (1985).
7 On the *Irminsul* see Chapter 3.2.1.4.
8 See Chapter 2.4 on these archaising tendencies.

3 The far-right use of Norse-Germanic mythology

3.1 Background

Reference to Norse-Germanic mythology was just one of the many directions taken under the National Socialist regime by *völkisch*-religious ideas that were, as a whole, extraordinarily diverse. In many ways, the National Socialists sought to position themselves on questions of religion by broadly locating themselves within Christian traditions and circumstances, even if these were re-interpreted and re-aligned according to National Socialist ideology, as in the case of the *Deutsche Christen* [German Christians]. However, there was also some sympathy for new approaches (including neo-pagan and esoteric ideas). On the whole, the National Socialist approach to religious questions was not uniform, but rather pragmatically diverse, or even diffuse (for details, see e.g. the anthology by Puschner/Vollnhals 2012).

The fact that the far-right scene refers to mythology has, for decades, attracted only minor interest in discussions of the phenomenon of right-wing extremism. The instrumental use of mythology in the far-right context has indeed occasionally been noted. However, there has been a lack of attention – with some exceptions (Speit 2010b; Gallé 2015) paid to the causes and the purposes of this use. The focus is rather on dealing with the explicit political statements and aims of right-wing extremist groups. Hardly any attention is given, however, to the fact that there is a close connection between the political program and the use of mythology.

The general public has on the whole only a very vague idea of the use of Norse-Germanic mythology by the far right. This is also a result of the limited knowledge of historical facts and of the problematic issues associated with the historical record: The appropriation of mythology on the far right is judged precisely without real knowledge, with the consequence that opinions are formed as a rule on the basis of sweeping statements. Even if the following observation by Langebach/Sturm is meant slightly differently, it also finally applies to the attitude of German society from the Second World War to the present toward the National Socialist misuse of Germanic mythology: ‘Nevertheless, a deeper engagement with the myths and apologias of the far right are not uncommonly shied away from’ (Langebach/Sturm 2015: 8).

DOI: 10.4324/9781003206309-3

References to Norse-Germanic mythology on the far-right scene are to be found not just in terms of argument and content (such as contributions relating to the topic in fanzines, the relevant internet forums or on social networks or lyrics of songs glorifying the beliefs and the lives of the Germanic tribes). They are above all evident in the adaptation of terminology and names from mythology.

This will be illustrated with selected examples that follow. From these, one can at the same time see the strategies behind these references and the objectives being pursued. It is important to consider here to what extent concepts from mythology are also being conveyed in addition to the simple use of components such as names and symbols. This will help answer the fundamental question of why Norse-Germanic mythology is attractive for the far-right scene in the first place.

One must first point out that what Walter Burkert noted as early as 1993 is still true today: There is, namely, a lack of a generally accepted definition of myth. Nevertheless, the three elements he names in this context as characteristic of myth (however narrow they may individually be) offer a basis for what is understood in the following as myth and hence mythology (as a system):

> Stories of gods;
> Stories of the origin of the world;
> Stories connected with rituals.
>
> (Burkert 1993: 9)

It is on this basis and on a general understanding of myth as a story about the relationship between human beings and gods and other higher beings that Norse-Germanic mythology can be discussed in the following.

Only a little has been handed down from the pre-Christian period concerning the myths of the Germanic tribes. Most contemporary knowledge is based on the Norse-Germanic heritage, especially in the Edda, but also in Skaldic poetry. To what degree these sources offer reliable information about the mythic ideas of the Germanic peoples is a matter of dispute (e.g. Simek 2003: 264f., 2015; Lindow 2005). In every case one must recognise that almost all the sources are derived from Christian times, and that they are not factual reports but of a literary nature, and that they further only cover a part of the area of Germania. Notwithstanding this, the contents of this heritage are commonly understood today in a sweeping fashion as 'Germanic mythology' per se. References by members of the contemporary far right to the relevant myths are also to be seen in this context. It would be more accurate to speak not of Germanic, but rather of Norse-Germanic mythology.

Since its effective 'rediscovery' in the context of the nation-building processes of the early nineteenth century, Norse-Germanic mythology has passed through various stages in terms of perception, appropriation, and interpretation. In the area of German studies, viewed as a national science dealing with all aspects of German and, more broadly, Germanic history and culture, mythology played a central role. In the eyes of the Romantics, the past and tradition were reliable sources of 'true' knowledge of what constituted the *Kulturnation* [the cultural nation]. Figures such as Adalbert Kuhn (1812–1881), Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831–1880), Friedrich

Leberecht Wilhelm Schwartz (1821–1899) and many others – not least also Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) with his 'Deutsche Mythologie' – saw the Norse-Germanic mythological heritage as giving access to the foundations of real national 'German-ness' and of its spiritual-cultural origins. Grimm's 'Mythologie' and translations of sources such as the Edda by Karl Simrock popularised the Germanic past and all that was supposedly known about it (in terms of a nineteenth-century positivist understanding of history). They also portrayed Norse tradition as the true cultural-spiritual heritage of the German people. The fact that there was such a large number of academic and general overviews of Germanic mythology is an indication of the popularity of the topic up to the years around 1900. Among the many here one may mention just Wolfgang Golther's *Handbuch der germanischen Mythologie* [Handbook of Germanic Mythology] (1895), Elard Hugo Meyer's *Germanische Mythologie* [Germanic Mythology] (1891) and Richard M. Meyer's *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* [History of Old Germanic Religion] (1910).

The work of Richard Wagner also introduced mythological material to the wider public. Individual pieces of Norse-Germanic mythology thus became part of the culture of the educated middle classes. Wagner's artistically free interpretation in particular continues to exert a powerful influence on how the mythology and its characters are perceived and understood. In the nineteenth century, interest in Norse-Germanic mythology was still quite progressively motivated and was not automatically associated with right-wing politics – although this is often suggested (e.g. Speit 2010: 17f.). It was, however, increasingly taken over by conservative nationalists (Gugenberger/Schweidlenka 1993: 88). As the National Socialist ideology of race viewed a supposedly Nordic-Germanic – in Nazi terms, 'Aryan' – race as the superior race in Social Darwinist terms, Germanic culture as a whole was interpreted accordingly. The culture of the Germanic peoples, their customs, their beliefs, and their mythology were intended to serve as proof of the superiority of the Nordic race. Proving this superiority was one of the aims of the *Forschungsgemeinschaft Deutsches Ahnenerbe* [German Ancestral Heritage Research Institute]. The creation of a Germanic identity and sense of community and an emphasis on common cultural roots were intended to help in 'recruiting' soldiers in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, and Norway to be deployed in the war. In keeping with National Socialist ideology, the particular aspect that was especially highlighted in this interpretation of Norse-Germanic mythology was heroism. The latter is, however, only one of many aspects of the mythological heritage (Gugenberger/Schweidlenka 1993: 131ff.). Even if the attitude of leading National Socialists to the creation of a *völkisch*-Germanic tradition was certainly not uniformly positive, but rather ambivalent – even in the case of Hitler, among others (e.g. Speit 2010: 25ff.) – the topic was seen as highly significant at the time. The ideological role played by the exploitation of myths and symbols in National Socialism has so far only been given marginal attention in the research:

> Apart from the economic, political, historical and ideological backgrounds, so far the mythological components of the 'Third Reich' have been inadequately examined. National Socialism was not just a political program that

> promised jobs and collective cohesion; it was rather a 'movement' of grand legends, images, symbols and rituals.
>
> (Sünner 1999: 8f.)

Gugenberger/Schweidlenka (1993: 91) and Heller/Maegerle (2007), for example, give an overview of the various interpretations and appropriations of Norse-Germanic mythology since the nineteenth century, and of the objectives being pursued in each case, in particular in National Socialism.

Today's right-wing extremists adopt these National Socialist models of the interpretation of myths, but they go further in adding fundamentally to the instrumentalization of myths. Just like the National Socialists, contemporary extremists refer above all to elements of Norse-Germanic mythology from the so-called Edda. The focus primarily on the Scandinavian mythological tradition is easily explained as the result of the lack of comparable comprehensive records of mythology for the German-speaking area of today. The few sources recorded in central Europe in which Germanic mythological elements may be found – such as the *Merseburger Zaubersprüche* [Merseburg Charms] – only put a spotlight on aspects of the mythology, without enabling one to see the wider context from these alone.

It is therefore only possible to refer in more detail to Norse-Germanic mythology and the records relating to it. The far right thereby implicitly assumes – insofar as the issue is considered at all – that this mythological tradition is identical in terms of structure and content with that of the other Germanic tribes. The far right thus adopts the National Socialist construct in which Norse-Germanic culture was taken as the essence of Germanic culture as a whole (Heller 2002: 20).

Right-wing extremists do not, however, restrict their interest to myths alone; they also pay attention to all kinds of matters related to mythology, such as cult sites, the runes, and other symbols. Their interpretation of mythology is thus rather syncretistic and liberally integrates elements from other early cultures as well. The National Socialists, in their day, also fused elements from various mythological traditions, religions, and cults that could be incorporated into their ideology and used to promote it (Sünner 1999: 9).

The same is true of the contemporary far right that likes to refer not just to elements of Norse-Germanic mythology but also, for example, to Celtic material, such as the so-called 'Celtic cross' that is used as a sign of identification (e.g. Fahr 2004: 130f.).

The far-right recourse to mythology constitutes – at least at first sight – a comparatively recent phenomenon. From the post-war period up to the 1980s, mythology was seen by far-right groups as either of no significance whatsoever or only of marginal interest. One only finds the odd mention of the topic in post-war extreme right-wing circles of the 1950s and 1960s, as, for example, a look at the comprehensive two volumes of documents compiled by Tauber (1967) will show. So-called '*artgläubige'* ['race-believers'] or neo-Germanic communities with far-right attitudes were indeed founded again in the years after the Second World War – such as the *Artgemeinschaft – Germanische Glaubensgemeinschaft wesensgemäßer*

Lebensgestaltung [Artgemeinschaft (racial community) – Germanic Faith Community of a race-appropriate way of life] in 1951 – but their membership remained very low (Haack 1981: 73ff.). They did not have much of an effect outside of their groups. One of the few exceptions, showing references to Germanic culture being used by right-wing extremists already in the early post-war period, was the so-called *Wiking-Jugend* [Viking Youth], founded in 1952 and banned in 1994. The title of the magazine *Wiking-Ruf* [Viking Call] (first appearing in 1951/1952) of the *Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit* (HIAG) [Mutual assistance community], the interest group of former members of the Waffen-SS, is similarly motivated (e.g. Wilke 2015: 163). The choice of the title quite openly indicates an intention to establish a connection with the National Socialist reading of the Germanic past. In the field of music, the group named *Ragnaröck* was one of the first bands that sought to join rock music with neo-Nazi ideas and showed their agenda when they invoked Germanic mythology in the choice of their name. The band was founded in 1979 by a circle around Dietmar Lohrmann, son of the then-NPD chairman in Markgröningen. Even after the band had broken up, their titles were reissued several times (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ragnaröck).

It is only since the 1990s that mythology has become part of the far-right self-image in a more significant way. Today there are references to Norse-Germanic mythology everywhere on the far-right spectrum, which gives an indication of its relevance for the far-right scene (Miller-Idriss 2017: 90ff.). Pseudonyms, names of groups, inscriptions on clothing, tattoos, jewellery, stickers and badges with mythological motifs, far-right printed publications, and discussions on webpages as well as particularly on social media – all bring up Norse-Germanic mythology in very different ways. One also finds mentions of Norse-Germanic mythology in extreme right-wing music, whether in the names of the individual music groups or in explicit or implicit references in lyrics (e.g. Fahr 1995). Raabe (2010: 107) even considers music as the most important medium for conveying mythological contents in far-right circles.

Although the political science literature hardly deals with the topic of the far-right exploitation of Germanic culture and Norse-Germanic mythology, it is at least noted here that the interest in mythology has taken root particularly strongly precisely in the NPD and in the circle around it (Backes 2012: 156). This observation is also backed up by the findings in relation to Germanic culture discussed earlier.

These phenomena will be looked at in more detail in the following. Even if some parts of the public are inclined to generalise and make a direct connection here, one can in no way conclude that every reference to Norse-Germanic mythology automatically comes from a far-right background. There are, rather, other approaches – such as those coming from a neo-pagan perspective or from an engagement with the Germanic past in the context of Living History or re-enactments – with which there is no necessary connection with far-right politics (e.g. Schuppener 2011a: 95ff.). This is even true of some kinds of esoteric thought or of parts of the Gothic scene in which the fascination with mythology has a spiritual motivation.

What distinguishes the clearly extreme right-wing interpretation of Norse-Germanic mythology is the understanding of myths as a part of history. This is shown, for example, in the fact that the far-right internet forum *thiazi.net* placed the subforum 'Mythology' under the heading, 'History.' The discussions there were also characterised by an approach to the myths in terms of cultural history rather than of religion (for more detail on the forum, see Schuppener 2011b).

3.2 Findings

As was mentioned above in relation to the precise definition of the term 'myth', mythology is not only concerned with the world of the gods, but it also involves many other elements. The documentary materials compiled here may accordingly be divided into references to the world of the Norse-Germanic gods in the narrower sense, and references to mythology in a more general sense.

3.2.1 References to the world of the Germanic gods

3.2.1.1 Odin/Wodan

In terms of the adaptation of Germanic gods, *Wodan/Odin* and *Donar/Thor* are particularly popular. The names of the two gods appear both in their traditional southern form – *Wodan/Wotan* and *Donar* – as well as in the north Germanic *Odin* and *Thor*.

Odin was seen as the most supreme god of Norse-Germanic mythology, as the god of war and of death in battle, as well as of the god of wisdom and of poetry. According to mythological tradition, he was regarded as the inventor of the runes. Among his attributes were especially the two ravens *Huginn* and *Muninn*, considered to be particularly wise, as well as his spear *Gungnir* (Krause 2010: 102).

One of the earliest references to the god on the German-speaking far right was the name *Wotans Volk* [Wotan's People] adopted by a far-right group in Berlin in 1987 (Grumke/Wagner 2002: 415). The inscription *Wotans Volk* can similarly be found on T-shirts from the scene (Korgel/Borstel 2002: 212). A band that was part of the National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) also bore the name *Wotansvolk*.

Other group names imitating this one can also be found elsewhere. One may mention the name *Söhne Wotans* [Sons of Wotan] (Fahr 2004: 132) used by militant right-wing extremists (also as a band name); a band called *Sons of Odin* [sic] (Ministerium des Innern und für Kommunales des Landes Brandenburg 2019: 108); or another band describing itself as *Odins Erben* [Odin's heirs] (Fahr 2005: 10; Farin/Flad 2001: 56). The name *Odins Erben* was also chosen by a right-wing order in the 1990s (Heller/Maegerle 1998: 172). There is evidence of the existence of an extreme right-wing group in Bavaria called *Wotans Erben Germanien* [Wotan's heirs Germania] that repeatedly carried out patrols in various towns (Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Innern, für Sport und Integration 2020: 107, 119). Similarly formed and conceived is the name of the group *Odins Volk Sachsen*[1] [Odin's People, Saxony] (Schuppener 2007: 99f.). In this case the use

Figure 3.1 Cover of the *Wotansvolk* CD – *The NS Will Never Die!* (2019)

of 'Saxony' is an example of the far-right liking for references to a local home-place [*Heimat*].[2] The term *Volk* is also a significant part of the name, as it was a fundamental concept in the National Socialist ideology of race and interpreted in a purely ethnic manner.

There is evidence of the existence of a fanzine from Gera going by the name *Kraft Odins Erben* [The Power of Odin's Heirs] as early as 1994. The use of the word *Kraft* in this title is intended to evoke military associations. Explicit references to Odin/Wodan are further shown in band names such as *Wotanskrieger, Wotanorden* [Wotan's warriors, Wotan order], or names such as *Krieger Odins* [Warrior(s) of Odin] adopted on the Internet (Fromm/Kernbach 2001: 173). As English is commonly used in music, there are also examples of titles in English, such as *Voice of Odin*, the name of a band from Borna near Leipzig. A right-wing extremist band from Koblenz that produced several albums in the 1990s called themselves *Wotan* (Archiv der Jugendkulturen 2001: 213). One music label on the far-right scene called itself *Wotan Records*.

The name of the god is also used as an acronym for an ideological agenda. The band *Absurd*, in the booklet accompanying its CD *Asgardsrei* (1999), thus called upon its fans to 'dedicate your life and action to the battle for Wotan (W.ill O.f T.he A.ryan N.ation).' This or similar may have been the reason behind the name chosen by a band in East Saxony: 'W.O.T.A.N.'

Odin is referred to not just by name, but also using his sobriquets such as *Allvater* [Father of all] – the name used by one far-right band (www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/lexikontext/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher) – and indeed with reference to the Old Norse *Alföðr* (Father of all).

The sobriquet *Walvater* (Father of War) is in use on the scene, such as on various accessories with which the owners may publicly declare their commitment to heroism, war, battle, and an ideology of violence.

In recent times, more and more instances of overlapping between the far-right scene and the rocker scene have come to light. The *Soldiers of Odin* ('Soldaten Odins'),[3] originally founded in Finland, have now become an international phenomenon of the far-right scene (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soldiers_of_Odin). They also have a presence in the German-speaking area – in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, for example. The group has characteristics similar to those of rockers. It also, however, acts as a self-appointed citizens' defence group and successfully generates publicity for itself by organising patrols – supposedly to help the population feel safe in the face of a supposed threat from migrants, among others (Ministerium für Inneres und Europa Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 2019: 24).

However, it is not just groups that identify with Odin/Wodan: The name of the god can also mark places frequented by members of the far right, such as a pub called *Wodan* in Mücka/Saxony, a meeting place for the far-right scene. In 2004, this discotheque was the site of a concert that was legendary on the scene, and where musical homage was paid to the Germanic gods and to the whole Germanic belief world, but especially also to the memory of Ian Stuart (1957–1993) who had introduced the references to the Germanic gods into the music of the far right (Raabe 2010: 105).

One online retailer called itself *Odin-Versand* [Odin distributors] (www.odin-versand.de, now subsumed in www.nationales-versandhaus.de). The use of the name of the god is not to be seen as a coincidence, but rather as a programmatic declaration of a deliberate association with the Germanic peoples and their culture.

There is further an especially broad range of variants of references to Odin/Wodan to be found in pseudonyms (or nicknames) on the relevant internet forums or in the social media. One may mention examples such as: *Wotanskrieger* [Wotan's Warrior(s)], *WotanskriegerVlbg*,[4] *Krieger Odins* [Warrior(s) of

Figure 3.2 Walvater [Father of War] Wotan keyring

Odin], *Odin77*, *ODIN, Vril Odin*,[5] *GottVaterOdin* [God the Father Odin], *Wotan, Bolverkr*,[6] *Wotan88, 14wotan88, Odins Weib* [wife], *odins tochter* [daughter], *Odins Berserker, Odins sleipnir, Odins Raben* [ravens], *Odins-Rabe* [raven], *odinssohn88* [son], *ODINS_KRIEGER1985* [warrior(s)] (Geisler/Schultheis 2011: 110, 119; Schuppener 2011b: 47f., www.strassenkunst.info). In summary, the name of the god has been used for decades again and again on far-right internet pages (Fromm/Kernbach 2001: 117, 127).

Finally, references to Odin/Wodan on clothing worn in far-right circles (and especially produced for them) serve as a means of displaying one's commitment to the far right to the outside world, and at the same time to proclaim an adherence to an archaic belief and legal system. This may include inscriptions such as the mere name of *Odin* or *Odins Law*[7] or *Odin statt Jesus* [Odin instead of Jesus] (Korgel/Borstel 2002: 212). One also finds use of the greeting *Odin mit uns* [Odin with us] on right-wing extremist internet sites and on social networks.

References to Odin/Wodan are often also contained in lyrics and titles of songs. One may mention just a few examples here: *Odins Land* was used as the title of one of the first CDs of the popular far-right musician, Daniel Eggers, who died in 2001 (Grumke/Wagner 2002: 465). The song *Thule* of the band with the same name is an explicit reference to Odin and to the whole dynasty of gods of the Æsir. The same holds for the song *Wikinger* [Vikings] by the group *Division Wiking*.

The names of the attributes of Odin/Wodan are similarly used in the far-right context: *Sleipnir*, the name of the eight-legged steed of Odin, was the title of a magazine (Pfeiffer 2002: 107; Wagner 2002: 27), the name of a band, and the stage name of an extreme right-wing singer (Fromm/Kernbach 2001: 89; Musik – Mode – Markenzeichen 2006: 61). The group Sleipnir is even seen as 'one [. . .] of the hottest right-wing rock bands from Eastern Westphalia' (Langebach/Raabe 2016: 377). The band has also been very active at events of the far-right scene in the last few years (e.g. Thüringer Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales 2019: 33ff.).

Figure 3.3 'Odins Law' hat

The appearance of a member of the band at an event of the NPD [National Democratic Party of Germany – far-right party] recently made the proximity of the band to this party as well as the close ties and connections within the extreme right-wing scene clear (Hessisches Ministerium des Innern und für Sport 2019: 103).

Stickers and textiles with images of Sleipnir are available from far-right mail order firms in various forms:

Sleipnir soft toys are also sold by online shops on the scene (www.lokis-truhe.net).

The name Sleipnir is further popular for pseudonyms on the internet. One female contributor to the internet forum *thiazi.net*, for example, used the name *Sleipnirgirl*.

The names of Odin's two ravens – *Huginn* and *Muninn* – are similarly often adapted by members of the far right, if written in different ways. One far-right band, for example, took the name *Munin* (Fahr 2005: 10).

In 1958 the so-called *Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit* (HIAG) [Mutual assistance society] – a group saturated with extreme right-wing ideas – founded a publishing house called *Munin* that specialised in literature glorifying the Nazi period and the Waffen-SS (e.g. Wilke 2015: 163, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munin-Verlag).

Odins Raben [Odin's ravens] is frequently used as a cover name on the internet. So also are combinations with numbers, such as *munin78* or *Hugin1499* (Schuppener 2015: 23f.). A magazine close to the so-called *Armanen-Orden* [Order of the *Armanen*] was called *Huginn und Muninn* (Schnurbein 1992: 38; Sünner 1999:

Figure 3.4 Sleipnir sticker

Figure 3.5 *Munin* CD cover – *Vergiss die treuen Toten nicht* [Do not forget the loyal dead] (1998)

176). The sponsorship associations of the far-right *Thule seminar* – a group that has not been so widely effective – were similarly named after *Huginn* and *Muninn*.

Visual representations of Odin's ravens are also popular, for example on stickers or T-shirts.

Odin's spear, *Gungnir*, was the name chosen by another sponsorship group of the *Thule-seminar* (Grumke/Wagner 2002: 434). The magazine issued by the far-right *Asgard-Bund* (founded in 1980) appeared under the title *Der Wotansspeer* [The spear of Wotan] (Eschebach/Thye 1995: 47).

Finally, one far-right band named itself after Odin's magic ring, *Draupnir* (www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/lexikontext/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher).[8]

The examples listed here, while numerous, represent only a selection – if a persuasive one – of the references to Odin. It is difficult to both document and give a full picture of the sheer variety of the propaganda and lifestyle products referring to Odin/Wodan available from far-right distributors.

3.2.1.2 Thor/Donar

Similar may be said about the references to the god Thor/Donar, whose name is frequently also appropriated by far-right groups.

Figure 3.6 T-shirt printed with the legend *Hugin & Munin Rabenbrüder* [Raven brothers]

Thor is represented in mythological tradition as an especially strong and violent god, of whom one of the principal attributes is the hammer *Mjöllnir* with which the god can annihilate the enemies of the gods. Thor is in particular the god of the thunderstorm: flashes of lightening come about – so one believed – as a result of the impact of Thor's hammer; the thunder is produced by the loud rolling of the god's goat-drawn war chariot.

One of the best-known fashion labels in the far-right circles of central Europe is currently *Thor Steinar*. The *Thor Steinar* logo on T-shirts and other outer wear is popular as a means of declaring far-right identity and group allegiance. The specific description of Thor as *Thor Steinar* – which can be interpreted to mean 'Thor the golden eagle' – highlights this very aspect of power and violent force.

Members of the far right would clearly like to adopt for themselves these particular, selectively chosen qualities of the mythological Thor, and to see the annihilation of enemies as a metaphor for their own hoped-for defeat of their political opponents. Declaration of a commitment to Thor is therefore a declaration of commitment to violent force, the use of which the far right categorically affirms as a means of achieving its own objectives.

Aside from the *Thor Steinar* label, one could mention numerous further examples of how the name of the god is used in far-right contexts: these include, in terms of far-right fashion, the T-shirts with the legend *Thor Donnergott* [Thor god of thunder] that could be ordered from the far-right *Deutsche Stimme Verlag* (Riesa).

Figure 3.7 Thor T-shirt

References to Thor are also popular in pseudonyms on far-right internet forums and on social networks that similarly frequently mention this god, in some cases also in the form of metonymic names. The moderator of the site www.nwbb.org (Nationaler Widerstand Berlin-Brandenburg) [National resistance Berlin-Brandenburg] thus used the pseudonym *Thor18*, thereby referring not only to the Germanic god Thor, but also in numerical code (18 = AH) to Adolf Hitler and, in doing so, unambiguously situating this adaptation of Germanic mythology within the National Socialist tradition. Further examples of such pseudonyms are: *Der Donnerer* [the thunderer], *ThorS*, *Thorson, Son of Thor* (Schuppener 2011b: 47f.), *ThorsRache* [Thor's revenge], etc., and *Soldat.Thor* [Soldier.Thor] as well as the feminine form derived from Thor *Thorina*, used as a cover name by a particularly active female contributor (Schuppener 2010a: 29).

References to the name of the god can, however, be found not only in the form of declarations to the outside world, but also in the naming of groups and institutions:

There was thus a pub in Dresden called *Thor* (closed again in 2003) that served as a meeting place for the right-wing scene. A far-right band from Schneeberg

(Erzgebirge) [Ore Mountain region] chose for itself the name T.H.O.R.[9] A Berlin skinhead-band used the name *Legion of Thor* (Brodkorb/Schmidt 2002: 98; Stöss 2000: 164; Senatsverwaltung für Inneres und Sport 2020: 67). Another far-right band is called *Donars Groll* [Donar's rancour] (www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/lexikontext/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher). Similarly warlike in tone and also referring to Thor/Donar is the name of the band *Donnertyrann* [Thunder tyrant]. In exactly the same way the name of a far-right music shop called *Donnerschlag* [Clap of thunder] contains an obvious reference to Thor/Donar, as well as to his hammer and his violent work (Musik – Mode – Markenzeichen 2006: 40).

Ása-Thór, the honorary name of the god (Simek 1995: 25), is used by the far-right band *Asathor* (www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/lexikontext/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher). This name refers not just to the god himself, but to the whole Germanic dynasty of gods of the Æsir.

A band from Brandenburg chose the above-mentioned most significant attribute of the god as its name – *Thorshammer*. *Thors Hammer* is also the title of a song dealing with the power and violence of the god by the group *Volksaufstand* [People's uprising]. The Old Norse name of Thor's hammer is found in the name of the band *Mjölnir*. A Swiss distributor of extreme right-wing material traded under the name *Mjölnir Diffusion* (Fahr 2005: 10; Fromm/Kernbach 2001: 151, 187). *Mjölnir* was the name used by one of the most important administrators/supervisors of the far-right internet forum *thiazi.net* (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiazi.net). *Mjölnir* is also a popular pseudonym elsewhere on the internet.

3.2.1.3 Other gods, giants, and companions of the gods

The names of other gods are clearly of less significance and feature less frequently in the linguistic appropriation of Norse-Germanic mythology by the contemporary far right. Naturally, this is a result of the fact that Odin and Thor figure most prominently in the Norse-Germanic mythological tradition, but their martial characteristics also fit in very well ideologically with extreme right-wingers' view of the world and of themselves. Despite this focus in the use of the mythology, one may mention numerous cases in which other gods are adapted for contemporary times.

Women on the far-right scene like to refer back to the female divinities Skadi and Freyja as they seek to create an identity for themselves. Skadi is, according to mythological tradition, the daughter of a giant. She was taken up to Asgard when she bore arms against Thor to avenge the murder of her father. She subsequently appears as a goddess of hunting.

Freyja is regarded in Germanic mythology as the most significant and the most beautiful of the Germanic goddesses. She belongs to the divine dynasty of the Vanir and is, according to her origins, a goddess of fertility.

In far-right references to the name *Freyja* it is often difficult to determine whether what is meant is actually the Vanir divinity or rather the similarly named Æsir divinity *Freia* (North Germanic: *Frigg*), the wife of Odin/Wodan.

One of the references to the goddess can be found in the name *Freyja's Germanenorden* [Freyja's Germanic order] used by a band from Oberhausen (Guerlain 2010: 100). There was also a fanzine issued in Neubrandenburg/Oberhausen from 1997 under the title *Freyja* (Bitzan 2002: 91, 95).

On the internet one could find far-right sites using the title *Freyja88* and also *Skadi* (Fromm/Kernbach 2001: 117, 131, 158). The use of female pseudonyms referring to the same divinities – such as *freya Thüringen, xXFrijaXx, Frea*, *Skadixx* – was also evident on various pertinent internet forums. The multilingual *Skadi-Forum* (Musik – Mode – Markenzeichen 2006: 44) was not solely reserved for women. The *thiazi.net* forum later split off from this as a specifically German-speaking platform.

In addition, there are various items of clothing for women with the legend *Freya* available under the well-known fashion label *Thor Steinar* mentioned earlier in this context.

Figure 3.8 Long-sleeved top bearing the legend *Freya*

Usernames such as *Gefjon* and *Nanna* on internet forums refer to the names of two less significant goddesses.

Fjörgyn is an apparently androgynous figure in Germanic mythology. On the one hand, this is (e.g. according to the Völuspa) a name for Jörd, the mother of the god Thor. On the other hand (e.g. according to Skáldskaparmál), this was also the name of the father of the goddess *Frigg*. *Fjörgyn* was the cover name for Daniela W., one of the most important supervisors/administrators of the *thiazi.net* forum in Germany and Austria (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiazi.net).

The supposed Germanic goddess of Spring, Ostara, is also a figure with whom right-wing extremists identify. Following the example of the magazine of the same name, published by Lanz von Liebenfels at the beginning of the twentieth century (Hundseder 1998: 36), a magazine of the scene from Sangerhausen appeared under the title *Ostara* (Stöss 2000: 164). An Austrian internet platform also chose the same name (Fromm/Kernbach 2001: 265ff.). A far-right female band from Leipzig similarly called itself *Ostara* (Uecker 2014).

There is, however, no mention of a goddess named Ostara in the mythological sources. The Anglo-Saxon monk and scholar Beda Venerabilis (673–735) attempted to trace the name of the Easter festival back to a goddess of Spring of this name. This interpretation was revived in the nineteenth century, but is, however, today regarded as outdated (Udolph 1999). Reference is also made on the right-wing extremist scene to the gods Tyr (Ziu, Proto-Germanic **Tîwaz*), Forseti/Forsite, Balder, Bragi, Heimdall, Loki, Magni, Vidar and Óðr, as is shown in the following examples:

The use of pseudonyms such as the following could be found on the far-right forum *nationale-revolution.net* as well as on other internet forums: *Baldur*, *Balder*; *Forseti*; *heimdallr*; *Magne*; *Sohn Vidars*; *Tiwaz, Ziu, Tyr* (Schuppener 2010a: 30f., 2011b: 47f.).

Tyr is the god of war, assembly, and law of the Germanic tribes. He is traditionally depicted as one-armed. The right-wing skinhead site *Tyr88* used the name of this god. The warlike profile of this god was clearly behind the title of a far-right combat sports event, held for the second time in Zwickau in 2019, namely *Tiwaz – Kampf der freien Männer* [Tiwaz – battle of the free men] (Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Inneres und Sport 2020: 72). The use of the name *Tiwaz* is intended to promote a new notion of the human person, developed along Social Darwinist lines (Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Innern, für Sport und Integration 2020: 125). *Tiwaz* is also the name of a martial arts organisation that assumes responsibility for the above-mentioned event (Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Innern, für Sport und Integration 2020: 126, 141).

Heimdall, the wisest of all the gods, plays only a minor role in the far-right use of mythology. There is, however, a mail order company by the name of *Heimdall-Versand* (www.heimdall-versand.de/de/).

Forseti was a god who only seldom features in the mythology and is understood to have been a god of law. He was chosen as a patron by a publishing house in Bottrop that used the Friesian form of the name – *Forsite* (Simek 1995: 108). The same publishers distribute an intensely *völkisch*/esoteric selection of publications

through the so-called *Parzifal-Versand* [Parsifal mail order](www.forsite-verlag.de). Their focus on a far-right audience is evident not only from the selection of writings they offer – which often deal with National Socialist topics – but also in the repertoire of symbols they use in their internet presence.

One user of the *thiazi.net* forum called himself *Vidar*, the name of the son of Odin and the female giant Grid, supposedly the strongest Æsir god after Thor. A far-right band with the name *Odur* has apparently derived this from the name of a god not frequently mentioned in the mythological tradition, namely Óðr (www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/lexikontext/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher).

Balder, the son of Odin, is portrayed as a thoroughly positive figure among the Germanic gods. On the initiative of Loki, the blind god Höd pierced his body with a branch of mistletoe and killed him. References to Balder on the part of members of the far right among the various pseudonyms on internet forums mentioned above are rare, perhaps not least because of the way he figures in the mythology as a philanthropic/aesthetic character. A contemporary band has adopted the name of the god Bragi – according to mythology a god of poetry, a son of Odin, and he who greeted the fallen heroes in Valhalla.

Loki is the most multi-facetted of the gods in the tradition of Germanic mythology and is a figure with very ambivalent traits on account of his position as the father of the world enemies. The former giant Loki was adopted by the Æsir because of his cunning nature. He is referred to by a music group using the name *Lokis Horden* [Loki's hordes] (Fahr 2005: 10). There is an online mail order company from Leipzig calling itself *Lokis Truhe* [Loki's chest/coffer] (Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen 2019: 110). Among the few pseudonyms used on the internet that refer to Loki is, for example, *Lokisblut* [Loki's blood] (in the sense of 'belonging to the clan of Loki'). The name *Loki* is also a popular name for dogs among extreme right-wingers. There is, in addition, a fanzine from Sondershausen with the title, *Loki* (2005).

Figure 3.9 Wooden plaque with the legend: 'My sword for Tyr, my blood for Thor, my life for Odin'

Figure 3.10 Bragi CD cover – *Im Herzen treu geblieben* [remaining loyal at heart]

Names of giants (and, of course, Loki is known to have originally been one of these) are used occasionally. An example of this is the name used by the far-right internet forum *thiazi.net* (shut down in 2012), referring to the giant *Thjazi*, and through which the name of this giant achieved a certain prominence on the far-right scene. The platform was founded in 2007 and emerged from the German-speaking part of the *skadi.net* forum, itself similarly bearing a name taken from mythology. 'The Thiazi.net page had over a million posts to its forum from over 20,000 members and operated via a server in the United States. It was the largest German neo-Nazi platform' (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiazi.net). The forum was finally shut down in June 2012.

The title of the fanzine *Mimir's Born* [Mimir's well] from Löbau (2006) referred to the giant Mimir who functions as a guardian of one of the original springs/wells under Yggdrasil, the tree of the world. Mimir is renowned in mythology for his wisdom and his powers of divination.

Empirical research of pseudonyms used on the internet reveals the use of further names of giants, such as *Utgard-Loki* or *Brimir*,[10] and further the name of the Norn *Skuld*, the name of the servant and messenger of Freyr, Skirnir, in the form *Skyrnis* as well as the reference to the mistress of the empire of the dead in the pseudonym *Gesandte der Hel* [ambassador/envoy of Hel] (Schuppener 2011b: 48). The Norn's name *Skuld* was also similarly appropriated by a band from Eisfeld in Thuringia (Rühl 2007: 20).

Agnar, another human companion of the gods was taken as a name by a far-right band (www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/lexikontext/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher). In mythology, this was the name of the son of king Geirroðr who helps Odin after he has been martyred by his father (Simek 1995: 5).

One very well-known figure is also the Fenris wolf, who plays a significant role in Norse-Germanic mythology as he is not only known as highly dangerous, but specifically as a world enemy. The far-right band named *Fenrir* is clearly referring to him and to his special characteristics (www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/lexikontext/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher). Indeed, a similarly dangerous image is intended to be conveyed by the fashion label *Fenriz*, also a reference to the Fenris wolf.

As pointed out above, the far-right reference to mythology concentrates to a large extent on the Norse-Germanic tradition as a result of the situation regarding the mythology that has been recorded. There are however occasional adaptations of the few other records relating to the belief-world of the Germanic peoples. One of the most important and well-known sources for this is the 'Germania' by the Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus who, in addition to describing the ways of life, the morals and customs of the Germanic tribes in his work, also made some statements about their beliefs and the world of their gods.

The primordial god Tuisto is a hermaphrodite and is recorded in 'Germania' by Tacitus as the mythical father of the Germanic peoples. A reference to this figure is found in the title of the magazine of the *Deutsche Heidnische Front* [German Heathens' Front], *Tuisto*. The name of the goddess *Nerthus*, similarly recorded by Tacitus, is also adopted, namely as a pseudonym on far-right internet forums (e.g. on *thiazi.net*, Schuppener 2010a: 31).

One ought also to mention that, in addition to the use of names, visual representations of the gods, particularly nineteenth century and early twentieth century emotionally dramatic/romantic images, are popular on the far-right scene. For identification purposes the pictures are usually supplied with the relevant names of the gods. Moreover, the attributes of the gods are visually embedded in the far-right context, such as the image of Thor's hammer conspicuously displayed on a CD cover, or the two ravens ornamenting the heading of the internet site of the far-right *Asgard-Versand* [Asgard Mail Order Company] (www.asgardversand.net).

3.2.1.4 Other references to the world of the gods

Apart from mentions of individual divinities or other figures of mythological tradition, one also finds references to the Æsir gods in their entirety. Even if it seems, for example, that the legend on the hooded pullover illustrated below rather vaguely praises loyalty 'to the gods,' the central image of Thor's hammer makes clear that the gods meant here are the gods of Norse-Germanic mythology.

A declaration of such loyalty to the Norse-Germanic gods is also evident, for example, in the name of the band *Asatru* (= Æsir belief).[11] The far-right group *Artgemeinschaft – Germanische Glaubensgemeinschaft wesensgemäßer Lebensgestaltung* [Racial community – Germanic Faith Community of a race-appropriate

Figure 3.11 Hooded pullover with the legend 'Loyal to the gods'

way of life] also uses the same word in the name of its internet site – www.asatru.de. Another reference to the world of the Germanic gods is made by the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Naturreligiöser Stammesverbände Europas* [Work community of natural religion tribal unions/associations of Europe], whose acronym ANSE represents the gothic description of the gods, etymologically identical with *Asen* [Æsir] (Grumke/Wagner 2002: 355; Simek 1995: 23).[12]

The fashion label *Ansgar Aryan* (Ansgar = god's spear) also refers to the Æsir gods and associates this with the idea of all things Aryan.

The legend *Asenblut* ['Æsir blood'] – in the sense of 'descendant of the Æsir' – is used on textiles of various kinds to indicate a profession of faith in the Norse-Germanic gods.

On social networks and on extreme right-wing internet forums one may find various usernames that refer to the whole of the Æsir, or that promote loyalty to them, as in the case of the pseudonym *asentreu* [loyal to the Æsir]. One also finds greetings such as *Mögen die Asen euch beschützen* ['May the Æsir protect you'] (Schuppener 2011b).

Figure 3.12 T-shirt bearing the legend *Asenblut* [blood of the Æsir] and an image of the *Irminsul*

The far right refers to Norse-Germanic mythology not only by mentioning the gods and the giants, but also very often by adopting other elements, including the image of the world recorded in the mythological sources.

The name of the tree of the world, *Yggdrasil*, was and is used on the far-right scene as the name of a band, for example, or the name of a shop known on the scene in Freiburg im Breisgau (Guerlain 2010: 76; Fahr 2005: 10; Archiv der Jugendkulturen 2001: 213).

The *Irminsul*, the Old Saxon cult sacred object, is also adopted as a name. Not only an expression of a *Pfahlkult* [pillar cult] among the pagan Saxons, the Irminsul was also a counterpart of the Norse Yggdrasil, the world tree. The historical sacred object of the Saxons was destroyed by the Frankish troops of Charlemagne after the taking of Eresburg in the year 772. The word *Irminsul* probably means 'mighty pillar' (Simek 1995: 216f.). There have been and there continue to be numerous references to the Irminsul on the German-speaking far-right scene: the magazine of the far-right oriented *Armanen-Orden*, for example, bears the title *Irminsul* (Sünner 1999: 173; Schnurbein 1992). On account of its presumed connection with Yggdrasil, the world tree, the Irminsul is seen as representing the universality of the racist ideology promoted by the *Armanen Orden* (Schnurbein 1992: 34f.).

A far-right band similarly referred to this cult symbol in its choice of the name *Projekt Irminsul* (www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/lexikontext/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher). A few years ago there was still an extreme right-wing online radio station using the name *Radio Irminsul* (https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2011/06/01/razzia-gegen-nazi-onlineradio_6467).

One may find images of Yggdrasil and the Irminsul above all on items of clothing and accessories.

In Norse-Germanic mythology, the world is divided into three areas: *Asgard*, the seat of the gods; *Midgard*, the area where human beings live; that in turn borders on *Utgard*, the harsh, hostile external world where the giants and dwarves reside.

These mythological toponyms are used on the far-right scene in the names of (music) groups, though to what extent the name indicates a political agenda would need to be clarified in each individual case. Band names such as *Asgards Helden* [Asgard's heroes] (Fahr 2004: 132) or *Asgard* refer to the residence of

Figure 3.13 Title page of the extreme right-wing internet radio station *Radio Irminsul*

Figure 3.14 Leather wallet with the legend Yggdrasil

the Germanic gods (Sünner 1999: 186). The ideologically far-right *Asgard-Bund* [Asgard alliance] was founded in Berlin in 1980 (Eschebach/Thye 1995: 47). Pseudonyms such as *Ansgard*, *Stalker of Asgard* or *AsgardCH*, the cover name of a Swiss contributor, were used in far-right discussion forums. For a long time there was also an online shop using the name *Asgard-Versand* [Asgard mail order] (www.asgardversand.net.). Finally, Asgard is also a reference in far-right song lyrics, such as in the song 'Fels in der Brandung' [rock in the surf] by the band *Die Lunikoff Verschwörung* [the Lunikoff conspiracy], where *die schneebedeckten Gipfel Asgards* [the snow-covered peaks of Asgard] are extolled.

A band from Wurzen in Saxony with the name *Utgard* was one of several uses of that name (Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen 2003: 20). *Midgard* is used in the title of a far-right magazine. The previously mentioned magazine *Hugin und Munin* is also subtitled *Deutschsprachige Mitgart-Zeitung für europäische Religion, Kultur und Mysterien* [sic!] [German language Mitgart paper for European Religion, Culture and Mysteries] (Heller/Maegerle 2007: 24; Schnurbein 1992: 40f.). The fanzine of the *Skingirlfront Deutschland* – renamed from around 1995 as *Skingirl-Freundeskreis Deutschland* [Friends of Skingirls, Germany] (in both cases abbreviated as SFD) – originally also bore the title *Midgard* (Menhorn 2001: 179). An extreme right-wing environmental protection association, based in Landshut, has used the name *Midgard e.V.* since it was established in 2006. What this association understands by 'environmental protection and conservation' is protection of the 'Heimat' [homeland], and the latter is primarily understood as resistance against immigration (Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Innern, für Sport und Integration 2020: 184f.). *MidgardWyrd*[13] and *Midgardsomr* were employed as usernames on the far-right internet forum *thiazi.net*.

Asgard and Midgard are connected by the bridge Bifröst, representing the means of access from the human world to the world of the gods. *Bifröst* has been used as the title of a far-right magazine (Gardelegen/Sachsen-Anhalt) (Schuppener 2007: 106).

Located within Asgard is Valhalla, the place to which fallen warriors are led by the Valkyries and where they are cared for by them. In Germanic mythology these warriors are called *Einherjar*. This part of the myth is also used by contemporary members of the far right to designate themselves: there are thus bands with names such as *Walhall* [Valhalla] and *Einherier* or *Einherjer* (Musik – Mode – Markenzeichen 2006: 62; Fahr 2005: 10; Sünner 1999: 186). *Walhalla* or *Walhall Germany* are popular clothing labels/brands in far-right circles (Flad 2001: 110). Especially in the 1990s, Walhalla Records was an extremely popular label in the extreme right-wing scene, where numerous extreme right-wing bands produced their albums (Archiv der Jugendkulturen 2001: 184ff.). There is evidence going back to 1997 of a fanzine from Unterdietfurt with the title *Victory of Walhalla*. Pseudonyms on the internet such as *Walküre* [Valkyrie] similarly use the myth of the Valkyries, the Valhalla myth in the case of the username *Lord of Walhalla*,[14] or refer to the brave warriors in the case of the pseudonym *Einherjer Hetzer* [*Einherjer* agitators] (Schuppener 2011b: 48). Valhalla and the Einherjar are also the

subject of song lyrics: an example of this is the title *Heroes of Valhalla* by the group *Division Wiking* [Viking Division].

The notion of Valhalla as the place of the fallen heroes and, at the same time, as the place from which the warriors depart for the final battle between the gods and the enemies of the world (Ragnarök) is communicated in several places on the far-right scene. Extreme right-wingers' portrayal of themselves as heroes also implies that they will enter Valhalla after their death. This is also the latent message in the legend on the T-shirt below (underlined by the image of Thor's invincible hammer, a symbol of violent force).

In many ways similar to the Einherjar are the Berserker, described in medieval sagas and in Skaldic poetry as almost invincible and fiercely raging, ecstatic warriors with no sense of pain. They can be regarded as an elite unit. The word is derived etymologically from the Old Norse *ber* ('bear') and *serkr* ('shirt, skin') and thus means something like 'men dressed in bearskin' (Simek 1995: 47f.). It is particularly the tremendous destructive rage associated with this group that has entered German phraseology in the expression *wüten wie ein Berserker* [to rage and destroy until one loses consciousness].

The Berserkers feature in the names and identifications of the far right on account of their extraordinary heroic qualities. Examples of this are the previously mentioned pseudonym *Odins Berserker* as well as the names of active groups of comrades [Kameradschaften], such as: *Berserker Kirtorf* (Kirtorf/Vogelsbergkreis), *Berserker Pforzheim*, *Berserker Wolfsburg* etc. (Versteckspiel 2017: 6, 47).

Figure 3.15 Valhalla T-shirt

Figure 3.16 Valhalla T-shirt
Source: *Recherche Nord*

These groups are certainly not always purely local phenomena. The *Berserker Pforzheim* [SW Germany], for example, has a branch – however small – called 'Lahn-Dill' in Hessen [i.e. central Germany] (Hessisches Ministerium des Innern und für Sport 2019: 77).

Berserker was also the name of a fanzine issued from 1994 to 1997 in Littau/Berikon (Switzerland). The right-wing extremist assailant who seriously injured Henriette Reker, the contender for the position of mayor of Cologne, in 2015, had an e-mail address containing the formula *Berserker 1488* (Aachener Nachrichten, 23.4. 2016, p. 9).[15] The *Heimdall-Versand* [mail order company] supplies a sampler by the name of *Berserker*, a compilation of music by various far-right performers (e.g. www.heimdall-versand.de/de/product_info.php?info=p239_berserker-sampler-teil-3.html).

Not quite as common as the adaptation of the Berserker is the tendency of far-right groups to present themselves as *Ulfheðnar*. The name means 'wolfskins.' In mythological tradition this is the name of an elite warrior troop dressed in wolfskins, that was, like the Berserker, dedicated to Odin. They are mostly mentioned in Old Norse literature in connection with the Berserker (Simek 1995: 435). There are far-right groups in the German-speaking area that call themselves *Ulfhednar*, and that, among other things, are also active in the area of Living History (e.g. Versteckspiel 2017: 47).

Yet other figures from mythology, the Valkyries, offer women on the far-right scene a welcome opportunity for identification, especially because – as has already been clear – only a few female divinities stand out in the world of the Germanic gods. The Valkyries are multifaceted figures in the Norse-Germanic mythological

Figure 3.17 T-shirt with the legend 'Berserkerkult' [Berserker cult: Live fast, die young!!!]

Figure 3.18 Ulfhednar T-shirt (front and back)

Figure 3.18 Continued

tradition: originally daemons of death, they were then understood as earthly shield maidens and female warriors, who select the fallen warriors on the battlefield for Valhalla. They are dedicated to the god Odin (Simek 1995: 471).

While identification with the Valkyries may be interpreted as an affirmation of the role of women in the neo-Nazi view of the world, they are depicted in the romantically coloured adaptation of mythology as strong and corresponding to the ideal image of the Germanic woman. This reference and assignment of [gender] role can be seen in items of clothing bearing the legend *Walküre* [Valkyrie] or also *Odins Walküren* [Odin's Valkyries].

There is also a perfume conceived for far-right women with the label *Walküre* (Bitzan 2002: 94). The magazine initially titled *Midgard* of the *Skingirl-Freundeskreis Deutschland* [Friends of Skingirls, Germany] was re-named *Walküre* after experiencing some legal problems (Menhorn 2001: 179). The band names *Wallküren* [sic!] [*Wall* with two 'll' suggests 'rampart'] and *Walküren* should also be mentioned in this context (Sünner 1999: 186; Uecker 2014).

The women's group of the extreme right-wing organisation *Nordic 12* calls itself *Nordic Valkyrien* [Nordic Valkyries] (Versteckspiel 2017: 35). The female members of the group of comrades [Kameradschaft] *Bruderschaft Brigade8* [Brotherhood Brigade8] describe themselves as *Walküren* (https://de-de.facebook.

com/pages/category/Social-Club/Bruderschaft-Brigade-8-1743896382544375/). All in all, the Valkyries are the central mythological figures that women on the scene identify with.

References to these mythological figures are also to be found on social networks and in the relevant internet forums as usernames, such as *Walküre*, *Walküre28*,[16] *Valkyrja*, *Totenwählerin*[17] [(female) selector of the dead] and *Hjoerthrimul*.[18]

Figure 3.19 *Valkyrie* clothing imprint
Source: *Recherche Nord*

Figure 3.20 Aryan Valkyrie hotpants

Figure 3.21 Brigade8-Valkyrie
Source: Kai Budler

Valhalla – as the gathering place of warriors who have lost their lives in heroic fashion on the battlefield – is significant in Norse-Germanic mythology especially with regard to Ragnarök, the final battle of the gods and the enemies of the world. In support of the gods, the Einherjar also march out from Valhalla into this final battle that ends with the fall of the old order. Ragnarök was hailed under the National Socialist regime as the model for the final, decisive battle (Sünner 1999: 122). Members of the recent far right relate this final battle to their confrontation with pluralist society. They thus promote the notion of a coming epochal change the core result of which will be the violent replacement of parliamentary democracy (the so-called 'national revolution'). The comparison with Ragnarök serves both to represent this objective as the necessary fall of the current order and to endow their own campaign with a religious component and higher legitimation. The concept and the naming of the event of this final battle have been in many ways the subject of adaptation and appropriation by the far right for a very long time. As mentioned previously, a far-right band was founded as early as 1979 with the name *Ragnarök*. There were various shops on the scene – such as a shop in Reichenbach in the Vogtland or a far-right shop in Halberstadt – also trading under the tendentious name *Ragnarök*.

Implicit references to Ragnarök are evident in compound words including the component *Endzeit-* [End time] to identify institutions in extreme right-wing networks. Examples include the music label *Endzeit-Klänge* [-sounds],

Endzeit-Versand [-mail order], *Endzeit-Forum*, etc. Pseudonyms such as *ragnarok tyskland*[19] or *Ragnaroek* are also evidence on the internet of the adaptation of this cathartic aspect of Norse-Germanic mythology (Schuppener 2011b: 48).

Similarly including an implicit reference to Ragnarök is the following death notice: *Kamerad Untersturmführer Herbert Schweiger zur Großen Armee abberufen* [comrade Untersturmführer Herbert Schweiger re-assigned for duties with the Great Army] (Freier Widerstand Kassel [free resistance Kassel], www.logr.org/freiesks). What is understood by this 'Great Army' in the afterlife is clearly the group of Einherjar who, after their death, wait in Valhalla for the final battle with the enemies of the world in the Ragnarök.

A further indirect reference to the final catastrophe – which has also been handed down in tradition in the form of a global conflagration [*Weltenbrand*] as in the Old High German poem *Muspilli* – can be seen in the title *Funkenflug* [flight of sparks], used by a far-right periodical directed primarily at the youth (Versteckspiel 2005: 33). The same name was chosen by a far-right band (www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/lexikontext/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher). Apart from referring to the global conflagration, the name can also point to another central event in mythology, namely to the sparks flying from the fire empire of *Muspellsheim* leading to the emergence of the Ur-giant *Ymir* and thus indirectly to the origin of the world (Schuppener 1999: 107).

No matter which of the two mythological narratives the name *Funkenflug* refers to in both cases, it brings to mind in each case the initial sparks that ignite a revolutionary process leading to something fundamentally new.

Figure 3.22 *Ragnarök* T-shirt

3.2.2 References to mythological material in the wider sense

Apart from the already mentioned references to Norse-Germanic mythology primarily derived from the Old Norse Edda, there is also evidence on the far right of allusions to the folk tradition, particularly to the figure of the werewolf. The image of the werewolf handed down in this tradition portrays a being that is man by day, but that under certain conditions, especially in darkness, is transformed into a wild, raging animal (wolf) (e.g. Petzoldt 1990: 181ff.). This notion is reflected also in the etymology of the word werewolf, the first part of which is derived from the Old High German *wer*, meaning 'man.' (< Germanic **wera*- 'man, human being') (Pfeifer 1993: 1559).

The motif of the werewolf has no direct connection with Norse-Germanic mythology, though the Fenris wolf plays a similar terrifying role there. In fact, the image of the werewolf was in the Middle Ages still only of lesser significance in folk belief. For it was rather a notion that largely came from scholarly literature and then spread into the broader folk beliefs (Petzoldt 1990: 182f.). Nevertheless, it very much fits some of the patterns that also predestine the myths for adaptation by the far right. It is above all the aspect of the mysterious, together with the superhuman danger, that makes identification with the werewolf attractive. There was, for example, a skinhead band calling itself *Werwolf*. The band made an appearance supporting the far-right flagship band *Skrewdriver* in 1989 in Nieheim (NRW – North Rhine-Westphalia) and performed many times in the new federal states in the 1990s (Menhorn 2001: 205, 213f.).

Figure 3.23 Schlachtruf [battle cry] – CD cover of the band *Werwolf*

Since about 2010, there has been a group called *Kameradschaft Kommando Werwolf* [commando werewolf comrades] with members from Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt (Ministerium des Innern und für Kommunales des Landes Brandenburg 2019: 86f.). A far-right fanzine from Switzerland similarly gave itself the name *Werwolf*. Items of clothing popular in extreme right-wing circles display inscriptions and brand labels such as *Werwolf Germany* or *Wehrwolf* (the spelling here intended to conjure up an association with battle and with the *Wehrmacht*). When sympathisers or member of the far-right scene wear clothes with the legend *Werwolf* or decorate their cars with the corresponding stickers, the intention is to attribute the characteristics of this figure to the wearer or the car driver.

The recourse to the werewolf myth particularly relates to the appropriation of this by the National Socialists: On the second of April 1945, the National Socialist regime proclaimed the formation of an underground army by the name of *Werwolf* that was to continue fighting until the 'Endsieg' [the final victory]. Inspired by this, two groups emerged in the 1970s: the *Wehrsportgruppe Werwolf* [werewolf martial arts group] and the *Werwolfgruppe Stubbemann* [werewolf group

Figure 3.24 Werwolf Germany T-shirt

Figure 3.25 Werwolf badge

S] (the latter named after the group's initiator, the neo-Nazi Frank Stubbemann), that both adopted the terror concept of partisan activities (Pfahl-Traughber 2019: 242). The names chosen by the Swiss *Kameradschaft Wolfssturm* [wolf storm comrades] as well as the internet site *Wolfssturm* [wolf storm] may be regarded as similarly motivated (Fromm/Kernbach 2001: 127ff.).

The homophonic association with *Werwolf* was evidently also behind the choice of the name of the right-wing rock music label *Wearwolf Records* (as well as the online mail order company of the same name) (e.g. www.endstation-rechts.de/news/kategorie/straftaten/artikel/berlin-hausdurchsuchungen-bei-betreibern-von-rechtsextremistischem-online-shop.html).

All kinds of references to the werewolf are similarly found in pseudonyms used on the internet by participants in discussions on social networks and the relevant forums with names such as *Werwolf*, *Werewolf, Wjerewulf, Wolfsmensch* [wolf man]*, Bunkerwolf, Wolfsklaue* [wolf's claw]*, Blutwölfin* [blood she-wolf], *Heidewolf* [heath wolf]*, Neowulf*,[20] and *wehrwolf* [*wehr* as in *Wehrmacht*] (Schuppener 2011b: 49, www.augsburg.tk). In addition to the connection with the werewolf, the fascination with the wolf may not only result from its characteristics, but also from the fact that Adolf Hitler used the pseudonym *Wolf* in his correspondence in the 1920s and named his Eastern Front Führer headquarters the *Wolfsschanze* [the Wolf's Lair]. This also shows a connection between references to the wolf and the Third Reich.

In the extreme right-wing fanzine *Feuer & Sturm*, one author adopted the ironically diminutive pseudonym *Werwölfchen* [little werewolf]. In the same magazine, *Werwolf* was used as a component in e-mail addresses, apparently also with the intention of making the owner's adherence to the right-wing scene clear via the address. The far-right Black Metal band, *Absurd*, used *Werwolfthron* [werewolf throne] (2002) as a title for an album. The same band treated the topic of the werewolf myth in the song, 'Tod vor Sonnenaufgang' [death before sunrise], on their CD, *Asgardsrei*, that came out in 1999. Finally, a quite productive right-wing extremist band from Gütersloh also gave itself the name *Werwolf* (Archiv der Jugendkulturen 2001: 212).

Far-right references to the werewolf are also clear in visual images. One can find representations of wolves everywhere on the extreme right-wing scene. This is also true of internet sites, especially those of mail order companies. Images in silhouette of a howling wolf (or wolves) are particularly popular. The very frequent appearance of references to the werewolf is not merely an expression of the general familiarity with and popularity of this image: It is evidence especially of the attractiveness of this part of folk tradition on the far-right scene.

3.3 The adoption of myths as a source of transcendence

A central feature of every religion is the mediation of hopes of salvation associated with transcendence, i.e., the expectation of some prospect in the hereafter ['Jenseits'], not least as an answer to the question of the meaning of life.

The racist-*völkisch* ideology of the far right itself indeed leads to certainty of salvation already on the basis of belonging to the *right* race and nation (Huene

2007: 27). This is, however, to a large extent related to this world ['Diesseits'] and is directed at the racial collective in which the individual participates. Along with the expectation of a better future in this world – in far-right terms explicitly in the form of the establishment of a *völkisch* Führer state – individual hopes of salvation can, nevertheless, sometimes include the hope for an afterlife in eternity ['Jenseits'], ideally under desirable conditions. This eschatological component certainly plays a noteworthy role in the adaptation of Norse-Germanic mythology by the far right. This becomes clear, for example, when the Saxon band, *Asatru*, sings of the Fylgjur ('soul-beings' 'released' from the bodies of human beings) in their song, *Fylgjur* (Simek 1995: 119). Other uses of the term show that the reference to these transcendental beings here is not a one-off case: Thus, the songwriter Sebastian Döhring, known to be close to the NPD, also uses *Fylgien* as a pseudonym. Originally, *Fylgien* was the name of a duo. Döhring continued using the name after his partner had left (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fylgien, www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/lexikontext/liste-rechtsextremer-bands-und-liedermacher). Up until 2018, there was also a mail order company in Templin operating under the name *Fylgien-Versand* (Ministerium des Innern und für Kommunales des Landes Brandenburg 2019: 115).

In any case, the mere mention of the *Fylgjur* alone does not yet give this idea of transcendence any concrete content. The prospect of transcendence is clearly different, namely unambiguously ideological, in the far-right interpretation of the myth of Valhalla.

The frequent invocation of Valhalla as well as of the Valkyries and the Einherjar clearly conveys a reference to another world ['Jenseits'], even if the Valhalla myth specifically stands for life after death on the battlefield. Certainly – and herein lies the ideological component – this afterlife is only granted to the brave. All the other dead, according to Norse-Germanic tradition, enter the Hel's realm of the shades. Translated into present day circumstances, this notion offers right-wing extremist militants an eschatological perspective. Thus, the song, *Ein Krieger* [a warrior], by the band, *Nahkampf* [close combat], includes the line: 'Und wird man ihn je besiegen, so nehmen sie ihn bei sich auf' [and if he is ever defeated, they (the Germanic gods) will take him up to their place].

The idea that the fallen heroes enter Valhalla is thus clearly represented here. The life-and-death battle – quite in the Social Darwinist sense – thus leads the far-right combatants after death to a sacred place of glory where a (transcendental) afterlife is guaranteed.[21] This death is given inflated significance as sacrifice (e.g. Raabe 2010: 116f.) so that it is seen as something inherently sacred. The prospect of an afterlife in Valhalla is opened even for all those around the extreme right-wing scene who can be seen as warriors even if only in the broadest sense, as becomes clear in song lyrics (Huene 2007: 25).

This promise of an afterlife ['Jenseits'] is conveyed in many places on the far right: Thus, for example, the combination of the song title, *The road to Valhalla*, by the band, *08/15*, with the album title, *Unsterblich* [immortal], suggests that the way to Valhalla leads to immortality. The song, *Zorn der Götter* [wrath of the gods], by the same band, follows the same lines in terms of content, connecting

statements such as *Willkommen im Reich der Götter* [welcome to the empire of the gods] and *Walhalla ruft seine Söhne* [Valhalla calls its sons]. Risking one's life in the far-right battle – according to the subliminal message – leads to a final destination in the sphere of the divine. Entry into the other world ['Jenseits'] (Valhalla) thus occurs within a context where meanings are created by a particular ideological perspective.

It is not only the concrete reference to the Valhalla myth, but the entire far-right adaptation of Germanic mythology which serves to provide right-wing extremist action and extreme right-wing convictions with meaning, legitimacy and frequently also with a religious component. Specifically present objectives are supplemented with a higher motivation: An example of this is when the far-right band, *Absurd*, translates the name of the god Wotan as 'W.ill O.f T.he A.ryan N.ation,' implying that extreme right-wing ideas and objectives are identical with the divine.

Right-wing extremist action becomes – through the reference to Norse-Germanic mythology – the implementation of the divine will (the mightier prevail). In particular, the presentation of the battle against democracy as an emotionally-inflated final battle directly parallel to Ragnarök, positions members of the far right as the good guys who are leading the world to its predetermined end, as well as to a glorious new beginning.

The reference to a higher mission has quite concrete consequences, as mythology is called upon as an argumentative principle and as legitimation for the actions of right-wing extremists:

> What has been ordained by god or the gods cannot be questioned. When it is understood as a mission or order, it must be carried out. This is also true for murders. In 1996, the right-wing extremist Thomas Lemke confessed to five murders that he claimed Odin had commanded him to commit. In 1997, the right-wing extremist Kay Diesner shot and wounded a left-wing bookseller and killed a policeman, both at the command of Odin. Political texts are also fond of resorting to mythological phrases when they run out of arguments.
>
> (Heller 2002: 204)

Apart from this, ideas of transcendence are not least produced linguistically by the adoption or modification of patterns that were already developed for this purpose under the National Socialists.

A transcendent-spiritual level was addressed in the language of National Socialism through the frequent use of terms such as *Opfer* [sacrifice], *Ewigkeit* [eternity] or *Unsterblichkeit* [immortality] (Sünner 1999: 122; Klemperer 1990), and this is what is adopted by the contemporary far right. The use of these and other religious terms is not just a matter of terminology, but rather of the ideas behind these terms. Song lyrics emphasise, above all, ideas of strength and heroism in connection with supposed Germanic traditions – ideas of freedom and independence, power and violence, of return to and reflection on the roots of one's 'own' culture. Of central importance here is always the attempt to elevate the significance of one's own action and its consequences.

As under National Socialism, religious vocabulary familiar from Christianity is adapted, such as, for example, when a contributor speaks of the *Wiederauferstehung* [resurrection] of the far-right portal 'Altermedia' (www.fk-sbh.net). Certainly, what is intended here is not a reference to Christianity, but rather to a broader general pattern, not confined to any particular religion, that is also present in Germanic mythology, namely in the Valhalla myth. In the same way, the SS had earlier invoked Norse-Germanic mythology in their ideology (Sünner 1999: 121f.).

Resurrection and *salvation* [*Auferstehung* und *Erlösung*] are generally central transcendence-related topics that are common on the far right, and this goes beyond the matter of references to Norse-Germanic mythology (e.g. Strube 2012: 261).

3.4 Myth as response to a lack of meaning

Bearing in mind that Norse-Germanic mythology is clearly being used as a way of satisfying a need for transcendence, one could simply see a religious orientation as a fundamental motive for the far-right recourse to mythology. In fact, religious notions do play a role on the far right and its various forms, and this has hitherto received little attention in terms of its breadth and significance. Generally speaking, Hoyningen-Huene pointed out as early as 2010: 'Religiosity is virulent "on the right edge" of society. Young people and young adults on the scene are turning with particular enthusiasm to religious concepts and rituals' (Hoyningen-Huene 2010: 49).

Even if the reasons behind the turn to Norse-Germanic mythology on the far right are manifold and clearly go beyond the religious dimension, one ought not ignore the religious component. One can, rather, recognise basic functions of religions also in the references to Norse-Germanic mythology – as was illustrated already above with regard to transcendence. There are, however, also further religious aspects that can be ascribed to the adaptation of myths on the far right.

An eclectic selection from the historical records of Norse-Germanic mythology takes on, in extreme right-wing thinking, functions related to the provision of a sense of the meaning of life and ultimate justification that are otherwise especially attributed to religions (for more on this point, e.g. Jennerjahn 2006: 59ff.). To an extent, reference to the myths actually functions as a religion. From this, one can conclude that the use of myths is apparently a reaction to a societal deficit, consisting in the lack – or what is perceived as an insufficient availability – of meaning in contemporary society, and therefore the revival of mythology satisfies a latent need. It is not only apolitical neo-pagans and esoteric thinkers who position themselves as part of this trend involving the reactivation of Norse-Germanic mythology, but also precisely – in varying forms and intensity – those on the far right (e.g. Hoyningen-Huene 2010: 49).

The adaptation of myths is not least one of the reasons for the success of the far right. Churches, as well as other large organisations by which society gives itself meaning, have lost their power to bind people together, as is shown in the declining membership figures. The gaps arising from this are being filled by various parties. Compared with other forms of meaningfulness offered by religions and worldviews, Norse-Germanic mythology has a not inconsiderable advantage

against the background of an increasingly individualised society. As Germanic neopaganism lacks any definite theology, canonised cults, and rites or priests – i.e. characteristics frequently ascribed to religions as foundational – modern adaptations of Norse-Germanic mythology can be interpreted individually and are flexible in terms of content, or, to put it more negatively, largely random. This makes Germanic neopaganism easy to instrumentalise, especially as the Old Norse sources do not offer any coherent teaching in terms of belief, life, or morals. A mere reference to the past is sufficient to legitimate the creation of meaning and identity. Nonetheless, frequently used phrases such as *Odins Law* show that mythology is being regarded as a guide for present times.

Whether East Germany – having been largely deprived of religious bonds as a result of the GDR past – is particularly receptive to such offers of greater meaning, as has been occasionally suggested (e.g. Staud 2006: 171), does indeed seem plausible, though it remains to be proven with empirical evidence. With regard to the material evaluated, the view can, however, be confirmed generally speaking for the appropriation of Norse-Germanic mythology.

Well beyond the far-right scene, attention is being paid to esoteric material and traditional matter that has survived from an indeed very distant past. An example of this is the appearance of medieval markets or goods with a medieval aura at almost every large fair as well as at Christmas markets. Similar developments may be observed in relation to the print media where there is a growing spectrum of publications and periodicals with both historical and pseudohistorical content pertaining to mythology and paganism. The fascination with the ancient and mysterious, as is becoming clear in this pattern, can serve far-right circles as an opportunity to address those in search of greater meaning in what, at first, appears to be an apolitical arena. At the same time, the extreme right-wing use of these areas discredits engagement with such topics not coming from a far-right position. In addition, it is possible for such groups to use references to a supposedly-better past to embed themselves in widespread currents of cultural and societal critique (also in the form of critiques of capitalism and of globalisation) in order thus to reach people searching for alternatives.

In a world going through radical changes, myths and the adaptation of myths can give meaning and support, as they are already – through their great age and their (actual or supposed, i.e. constructed) relation to German history – regarded as legitimate and contribute to the sense of identity.

Notes

1 See Figure 91in Chapter 5.5.
2 The word *Heimat* thus appears as the first element of compound nouns in the names of some ‘groups of comrades,’ e.g. in *Heimatwacht*, *Heimatschutz*. [Home Guard/Home Protection].
3 See ‘Rechtsextreme “Soldaten Odins” in Finnland,’ p. 9.
4 *Vlbg* is an abbreviation here for *Vorarlberg* in Austria.
5 *Vril* is a reference to the Vril-society, an ‘esoteric-ufological’ group that concerns itself with supposed UFOs – a topic that is very popular among right-wing extremists. For more, see Strube (2012: 239ff.).

6 This is *Bölverkr*, a sobriquet of Odin following Hávamál meaning 'doer of evil.'
7 The inscription does not, of course, follow correct English spelling (*Odin's law*).
8 *Draupnir* is also the name of a dwarf in Germanic mythology (Simek 1995: 77).
9 A helpful piece of information supplied by the Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz des Freistaates Sachsen [Federal office of the protection of the constitution of the free state of Saxony]. Whether this is an acronym remains uncertain, despite the particular spelling of the band's name.
10 The name has two meanings: *Brimir* can refer both to a sword and to a giant.
11 One should point out here that *Asatru* is also a name used – without any connection to right-wing extremist ideology – by members of neo-pagan groups invoking a Germanic tradition.
12 According to Fahr (1995: 90), the ANSE organisation is not to be straightforwardly or exclusively aligned with the far-right scene.
13 *Wyrd* is the Anglo-Saxon form of *Wurt*, the personification of fate / destiny.
14 www.nationale-revolution.net.
15 The numerical code 1488 has been interpreted as 'Auf Deutschland! Heil Hitler!'. This was not confirmed by the accused. It is also conceivable that the reference was to the American right-wing extremist David Eden Lane, also popular among right-wing extremists, and to his 14 words: 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children' (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rechtsextreme_Symbole_und_Zeichen).
16 The 28 here stands as a numerical code for the initial letters of the extreme right-wing network *Blood & Honour*.
17 This is to be seen as transferring the meaning or the function of the Valkyries.
18 Name of a Valkyrie. It is worth noting that this pseudonym was chosen by a male member of the forum.
19 The geographical term derived from Danish. *Tyskland – Deutschland /* Germany.
20 This may also be a pun playing on the name Beowulf, referring to the hero of the Old English heroic epic of the same name.
21 There are also parallels here with expectations of salvation in the context of the Holy War, e.g. in Islamic fundamentalism.

4 Aims, causes and consequences of the far-right appropriation of Germanic history and culture

4.1 Functions of the far-right appropriation

References to Germanic history, culture, and especially Norse-Germanic mythology are found in a significant portion of the far-right scene in the German-speaking world. The far right is indeed here following the model of National Socialism, that also at least partially used the Germanic peoples as a means of legitimating their own ideology. However, the extent of the reception and the quality of the reference for the political programme of the far right can be evaluated on its own, especially as the mythological elements are emphasised far more strongly here than may be shown to have been the case in the Third Reich.

One might initially explain the fact that the far right refers to the Germanic past to this extent as an attempt to create historical traditions. In significant portions of the far-right scene, the ancient Germanic peoples are in fact regarded as the ancestors of contemporary Germans. This highly simplified and selective view of history may presumably be one of the primary motives behind the references to the ancient Germanic peoples. However, there are far more complex reasons for the recourse to this particular period of history, especially if one considers the functions of this appropriation of history on the far right. A purely historical understanding of motivations would not do justice to a large proportion of the findings, especially as the appropriations are too selective and fragmentary to provide evidence of any consistent historical interest.

Some aspects have already been mentioned in the presentation of the findings. Now, the functions will be looked at in more detail, permitting a more comprehensive understanding of why the far right is attracted to Germanic history, culture, and mythology.

Firstly, much of the documentary evidence shows that the references back to Germanic history and culture serve far-right groups as a means of **creating a sense of identity**. In particular, Germanic names are used to identify groups. Such references are intended in a broadly programmatic way: The creation of a definite line of tradition stretching back to the Germanic tribes distinguishes the far right from mainstream society and from its view of history. At the same time, the far right can appropriate – exclusively for itself – a period of history to which the rest of society pays little attention. In the area of mythology for example, references

DOI: 10.4324/9781003206309-4

to Odin/Wodan or Thor/Donar (at least symbolically) are intended to proclaim the transfer of the characteristics of these gods to those who identify themselves with them. The divine is transferred along with the name to the user. The same is also true for the uncivilized, primitive, wild, fiercely aggressive image of the historical Germanic tribes (particularly extreme in the case of the Vandals) that members of the far right thus attribute to themselves.

In contemporary German society, the far right has, at least in the eyes of the public, to a very large degree succeeded in instrumentalizing and appropriating parts of the legacy of the ancient Germanic peoples. They have, however, been especially successful in interpreting Norse-Germanic mythology according to their own outlook, and in simultaneously transforming it into a **badge of allegiance to the right-wing scene**. For this reason, Speit, for example, in his assessment of the reception of Germanic mythology on the far right, speaks of the 'return of the brown gods' (Speit 2010a: 8) – as if Germanic mythology per se belonged to the far right and prior to that to the National Socialists. Open references to the Germanic peoples are frequently immediately – and uncritically – associated by society at large with the far right.

The far-right interpretation and view of Germanic history is stereotypically confined to certain aspects. This results above all in the **highlighting and idealizing of particular qualities and virtues such as honour, loyalty, courage, fearlessness, self-sacrifice** and so on. The limited perspective is evident in the selection and reception of the Germanic tribes and, with regard to mythology, in the selective reference to the motifs of war and battle. The emphasis on the violent aspects becomes especially clear also in visual representation where Germanic culture in general as well as the gods are associated with weapons.

One example of the emphasis on these characteristics is the beginning of the song, *Ein Krieger* [A Warrior], by the group, *Nahkampf* [close combat], that was also presented on the *Schulhof* [school yard] CD of the NPD:

Ein Krieger

Ein Krieger aus alter Zeit
saß stolz auf seinem Pferd,
dem Kampf hat er sich geweiht,
zu streiten fiel ihm nicht schwer,
für die Armen und die Schwachen
kämpfte er mit all seiner Kraft,
umgeben von Getreuen
und seinem Glauben, den er hat.
Lo-lolo-lo-o . . .

Vor seinen Göttern da schwor er:
'Ich gebe niemals auf!'
Und wird man ihn je besiegen,
so nehmen sie ihn bei sich auf.

Stets sah er die Gefahr,
er war immer auf der Hut,
doch eiskalt in der Tat
und voller Edelmut,
er zeigte dem Feind die Zähne,
Angst kannte er nicht,
bereit, alles zu geben,
den Rückzug gab's für ihn nicht.
Lo-lolo-lo-o . . .

A Warrior

A warrior of olden times
Sat proudly on his horse.
To the struggle he was pledged.
It was not hard for him to fight,
For the poor and the weak
He fought with all his might,
With his faithful all around
And his belief that he has
Lo-lolo-lo-o . . .

Before his gods there he swore
'I never will give up!'
If he ever meets defeat
They'll take him up to their home.

He always saw the danger,
He was always on his guard,
But ice-cold in the deed
And full of noble thought
He showed the foe his teeth,
And fear he never knew,
Ready to give his all,
Retreat was not for him.
Lo-lolo-lo-o . . .

What is explicitly highlighted here is not only the reference to the past ('aus alter Zeit' – of olden times), itself presented as a positive thing in terms of the latently transmitted values, but also courage, fearlessness and self-sacrifice. The willingness to engage in battle is explicitly formulated, as is the belief in the (Germanic) gods, which gives the motive for the noble and heroic behaviour of the warrior. To this extent, even these few lines reflect a large part of the ideological canon of the far-right interpretation of Germanic culture.

In general, an emphasis on superiority, violence, and strength – in keeping with the Social Darwinist influenced agenda of the far right – dominates the whole

adaptation of Germanic history, leaving out anything that does not fit the ideology. This is shown in the materials listed above, for example, by the use of components of names for groups or as pseudonyms, such as *Krieger* [warrior], *Kämpfer* [fighter], *Horde* [horde], *Legion, Berserker*, etc. What is thereby made clear is that violence is a specific characteristic of one's own group. Names such as *Donars Groll* [Donar's (rumbling) rage], *Der Donnerer* [the thunderer], *Donnertyrann* [thunder tyrant], *Thors Rache* [Thor's revenge], or *Soldat.Thor* [soldier.Thor] also clearly indicate the aggressive attitude, readily recognised as the characteristic attributed to the gods (in this case Donar/Thor).

Similarly, symbolic objects frequently represent violence. Examples of these are the various Germanic weapons and armaments – and also elements from mythology such as Thor's hammer, *Mjöllnir*, and *Gungnir*, Wotan's spear. Further emphasising the claim to power and superiority of one's own group are references to *Sleipnir*, the particularly speedy eight-legged horse, and to the wise ravens, *Huginn* and *Muninn*. Finally, the mention of the werewolf fundamentally serves the purpose of glorifying violence, as werewolves are generally regarded as the very embodiment of the dangerous, the unpredictable and the violent, and the danger they embody is intensified by the fact that their activity takes place in the dark and under cover, and is therefore all the more unpredictable.

Germanic tribes such as the Vandals, the Teutons, or the Cheruscans, are apparently adopted not only on account of their widespread familiarity, but above all as they have a warlike image, such as is also connoted in the popular references to the Vikings. Mention of groups such as the Berserker and the *Ulfheðnar*, that are also on the fringes of the mythological, fit into this view of Germanic culture focused on violence, battle, and war. A similar point may be made about the use of the Norse-Germanic gods: The far right particularly adopts Wodan/Odin and Donar/Thor, while other gods play only a subordinate role in the self-presentation and identity construction of far-right groups. Both gods are, namely, not only portrayed in particular detail in the mythological tradition: They are associated with notions of power and violent force, as well as with ingenuity, audacity, and daring. They are thus 'very compatible with the ideology of hegemonic masculinity that prevails on the scene' (Huene 2007: 25). In addition, violent force, strength, and masculinity are associated in far-right groups with 'the revolutionary' in the extreme right-wing sense. Donar/Thor and Wodan/Odin thus become symbols for the strength of the *Volk* – that sees itself as a 'Germanic' *Volk* – as well as for a *Führer* ideology and the defeat of the democratic, supposedly soft, and weak system.

The small number of references to Loki, who is, similarly to Wodan/Odin and Donar/Thor, presented in mythological tradition as both cunning and violent, results, on the other hand, from three factors:

Firstly, Loki is originally a giant, and thus does not represent a 'thoroughbred' god. Secondly, Loki is the embodiment, in Germanic mythology, mostly of falseness and deceit; the basis of his success rather goes against the grain of the notions of honour and loyalty which is especially widespread on the far right. Finally, it is Loki who leads to the fall of the gods.

Little attention is paid to divinities such as Heimdall, associated in mythology with special wisdom, or to Balder, who appears rather as a god of a more delicate, sensitive, and artistic nature. The characteristics of these gods do not fit so well into the rather basic ideological principle of Social Darwinism that the strongest prevail.

Declaring a commitment to virtues such as honour, loyalty, courage, fearlessness, and self-sacrifice serves members of the far right as a way of clearly **differentiating themselves from contemporary culture and contemporary society**, where these qualities are (either actually or at least in the opinion of the far right) not prioritised. The Germanic tribes and figures from Norse-Germanic mythology adopted by the far-right are made to stand, according to their interpretation, for those virtues they see as essentially German, and thus represent appropriate reference points. Germanic history, accordingly, offers a suitable contextual framework here for the qualities concerned as the supposedly-unique distinguishing features of members of the far right.

A whole experiential world of the far right – in which the use of Germanic history and culture is a fundamental and attractive component – is contrasted with the democratic society of the majority. The numerous online retailers offer a wide range of goods for almost all areas of everyday life. The sale of all kinds of – more or less fanciful – goods thereby also contributes not least to the financing of far-right structures. Appropriately printed fashion items, stickers, jewellery, devotional objects such as statues of Germanic gods, publications on Germanic history, culture, and especially mythology are all available in far-right shops and, above all, through far-right mail-order companies (Christiansen/Fromm/Zinser 2006: 149). The range of items on offer points to a corresponding demand. The need for ways to make things meaningful is thus manifested in a material fashion. At the same time, this range of goods is facilitating the development of a particular lifestyle that defines and distinguishes the scene. Another aspect one should mention is, of course, the commercial exploitation of these needs (Miller-Idriss 2017: 94ff.).

The products and the naming of bands, pubs, and fashion labels with references to Germanic history, culture, and especially mythology also serve the purpose of **distinguishing and separating the scene from everyday life**. Identifying with a historical Germanic tribe or putting oneself under the name of a Germanic god therefore involves not only a gesture separating oneself off from mainstream society, but at the same time serves to present oneself as something special. Particularly the vision and representation of Germanic history as a supposedly magnificent and glorious past creates the sense that there is a clear difference between this and an unspectacular, average everyday. It is precisely this aspect that means a certain attractiveness of dealing with Germanic history and mythology and can thus also arouse interest among potential sympathisers, but also among non-political young people (Meier-Schuegraf 2005: 47).

Even if it is the case that in the last few decades the topic of Germanic history and culture has been addressed many times in popular history magazines (e.g. *GEO Epoche* 34/2008 – Die Germanen) as well as in news magazines with a wide

readership, such as *Der Spiegel*, one may say that there is widespread ignorance of this subject area in society as a whole. This is also true with regard to Norse-Germanic mythology, despite some recent popular treatments and adaptations of mythical materials, such as in film (*Thor*, *Beowulf*, etc.). One can hardly speak of a 'turn to Germanic mythology in the "middle of society",' as Raabe (2010: 119) claims on the basis of a few individual examples. The same holds for Germanic history as a whole. Engagement with Germanic history, culture and especially mythology is, rather, still a niche subject, about which there is to a large degree little knowledge in the 'middle of society.' By precisely adopting this subject area, members of the far right manage not only to interpret history according to their ideology, but also to present themselves as **bearers of elite knowledge**. This motive is clear in the various names and labels they use, such as in the title of the fanzine *Mimir's Born*, that can be interpreted as meaning 'source of wisdom.' Presentation of themselves as an elite is presumably a way of increasing the group's internal cohesion, the identity of the group and especially the self-esteem of those who possess this exclusive knowledge.

Further, members of the far right can use jargon taken from Germanic history and also from mythology almost as a secret language to communicate with each other. One may just mention the example of a municipality[1] where for years there was a shop selling far-right propaganda material unbeknownst to anyone around. When political leaders in the area were asked what the shop's name – *Ragnarök* – meant, they had to admit they did not know.

The use of historical and mythological Germanic jargon as a means of maintaining secrecy from the outside world and at the same time as a programmatic badge of internal recognition on the scene is also reflected on the internet, where names taken from Germanic history, names of gods and other names referring to Germanic cultural history are among the most popular pseudonyms on far-right forums. In this regard the following may be noted:

> Those familiar with the scene understand the code; without this knowledge, decoding and the correct assignment of meanings is barely possible. This exclusive ability to decode offers young people a further means of distinguishing themselves and separating themselves off from others and can give a sense of belonging to a – possibly only virtual – peer group.
>
> (Wörner-Schappert 2017: 125)

The reference to the Germanic past and to Norse-Germanic mythology in addition reveals latent wishes and desires that result from actual or at least perceived deficits in contemporary society: the selective representation of the Germanic past and the romanticisation of the same (e.g. Raabe 2010:108) reflects namely a supposedly ordered world with clear structures and clear polar opposites that is easy to understand – in contrast precisely with what is on offer from pluralist society and a globalised world. Germanic references are thus at the same time an **alternative to the values and the complexity of modernity** (Banghard 2015: 74). Precisely the attempt to establish a religious tradition associated with Germanic

mythology is especially to be seen as an expression 'of the desire for continuity and rootedness beyond modern society' (Hoyningen-Huene 2010: 73). The reference back to history is thus also a sign of the cultural pessimism that permeates the far right generally (Hagtvet 1994: 242).

In contrast with the values of mainstream society in the German-speaking world, the far right emphasises precisely characteristics of particular virility, such as strength, force, power, and dominance, but also the primeval purity and authenticity of the Germanic tribes, all of which should supposedly be granted to the individual group members through their identification with Germanic culture. In the context of a Social Darwinist ideology, this is seen as positive and necessary to achieve success.

Explicitly formulated convictions of far-right neopagan organisations such as the *Artgemeinschaft* [Racial community] confirm this. In the third article of their declaration of beliefs, for example, one may read: 'We believe that the battle [*Kampf*] around the shaping of this Earth is part of the eternal fight [*Kampf*]' (Siewert 2002: 183).

The 'eternal fight' is already emphasised in the first article, and other communities similarly focus on violence and battle in their view of the Germanic peoples (Siewert 2002).

Reference to Norse-Germanic mythology further enables one to portray one's own actions as fulfilling the will of the gods. A band name such as *Voice of Odin* is a clear example of this, as the band thus becomes almost the mouthpiece of the principal Germanic god. Far-right statements and actions presented in this context acquire a higher, transcendental form of legitimacy. The groups concerned can elevate themselves above others, especially above political opponents, who lack the corresponding higher legitimacy. This is also expressed in references to *Odins Law*, frequently to be found on propaganda material, but also on items of clothing.

Invoking traditions that stretch back much further than all those that other political tendencies and groups refer to enables one to claim a much higher degree of historical **legitimacy** and authority. By then further invoking mythology, one can then claim that legitimacy is not only historical, but also backed by higher powers.

As engagement with the Germanic tradition remained tainted after the Second World War by the National Socialist exploitation of that tradition during the Third Reich, for a long time these topics received only marginal attention or were even repressed. However, that also meant that they were – at least partially and latently – left to be appropriated and interpreted by the far right, as is shown by the founding of the *Artgemeinschaft* [Racial community] or also the *Wiking-Jugend* [Viking youth] already in the 1950s.

Apart from gaining legitimacy through invoking Germanic history and tradition, the far right also thereby **appropriates a legacy**: As a result of the lack of attention paid by mainstream society to Germanic history and culture, members of the far right can thus act like the guardians of the historical legacy. Identifying themselves as *Germanen*, or, in mythological terms, as *Wotans/Odins Volk* [Wotan's/Odin's People], *Odins Erben* [heirs], *Söhne Wotans* [sons of Wotan] clearly indicates a desire to position themselves as the descendants of Germanic

history and culture as a whole. Even the historically questionable construction of the Germanic peoples as the ancestors of the Germans and the selective view of history typical on the far right do not hinder them from being able to portray themselves as the guardians of an actual or supposed tradition and of the cultural and historical legacy. Close examination reveals such argumentation based on the past, referring to the Germanic peoples and Germanic mythology, in many places on the far right, especially in song lyrics. In view of the open gaps in the historical interest of mainstream society, this appropriation of the legacy can be effective not only internally within the scene, but also externally.

A further function of the use of Germanic history and culture on the far right is that the Germanic peoples can be used as a cover for implied references to the Third Reich and to the ideology of National Socialism, but without, as a rule, involving legal problems. Open references to National Socialism and to the Third Reich are still punishable offences in Germany and Austria (as well as at least partially in Switzerland). History, cultural history, and mythology can, however, be seen as cultural material that cannot be forbidden. As suggested earlier, the interpretation of Germanic history and culture and especially of Norse-Germanic mythology along Social Darwinist lines can be used to emphasise a fundamental element of National Socialist ideology. At the same time, National Socialist doctrines on race can be circulated once again through the revival of the line of tradition stretching back to the Germanic tribes. The idea of an (Aryan) Germanic master race was a central component of National Socialist ideology. Combined references to the Aryans and the Germanic peoples are evident in many places on the contemporary far right, whether that be in the fashion label *Ansgar Aryan* (*Ansgar* = god's spear in relation to the Æsir gods), or in pseudonyms used on social networks of internet forums, such as, for example, *Freya Aria*, as one contributor on a far-right internet forum (feenwald.tk) named herself.

The implicit reference to National Socialism also arises from the fact that Germanic history and culture was appropriated and exploited according to the National Socialist ideology on a large scale in the Third Reich especially by the SS and above all through the *Ahnenerbe* [Ancestral Heritage] institution. Externally, the use of runes in many areas, e.g. the double *sig rune* as the insignia of the SS, is the most obvious example of this kind of appropriation.

References to National Socialism can thus be encrypted in the form of agreement in the appropriation of Germanic history. Thus, what is actually intended as a reference to National Socialism can be concealed or at least become less clear (Heller 2002: 203). Examples of this can be found on the far-right music scene:

> Following more stringent repression of openly National Socialist statements, numerous right-wing rockers came up with even older heroes that were legally more difficult to challenge and discovered the old Germanic myths as a substitute religion to replace the stigmatised Nazi cult. In contrast to the glorification of the Third Reich, the Odin cult offers an apparently untainted cover for acting out fantasies of masculinity [. . .].
>
> (Farin/Flad 2001: 55)

A connection to the Third Reich is even established for far-right groups through reference to the myth of the Werewolf – a myth that is derived rather from scholarly tradition and can only to a limited extent be classified as Germanic cultural history. The supposedly heroic battle codenamed *Werwolf* in the last phase of the Second World War is viewed as a model for the contemporary battle of right-wing groups against the democratic *system*, to which they latently consider themselves superior.

One aspect of Germanic cultural history – Norse-Germanic mythology – is particularly used as code for the declared political **objective of abolishing democracy and pluralist society** and at the same time to give this objective a religious aura and legitimacy. This occurs, for example, when the far right makes a connection, as one knows, between the battle against the democrats and Ragnarök. In mythology, Ragnarök (the demise of the gods) represents the battle of the gods against the enemies of the world – a battle leading to the end of both sides. Out of the total destruction of everything that exists arises a new world with a new dynasty of gods. On the far right, Ragnarök is used and re-interpreted as an image of the planned violent **overthrow and end of democracy and pluralism** (the so-called 'National Revolution') and for the aim of setting up a new order along far right lines. Adherence to this agenda was, for example, made explicit by a far-right shop in Reichenbach in the Vogtland that not only called itself *Ragnarök*, but added the phrase '*und eine neue Zeit beginnt*' ['and a new time begins'].

The far-right lawyer Horst Mahler similarly made an implicit reference to *Ragnarök* when he spoke of a 'twilight of the idol' of Jewish capital (Fromm/Kernbach 2001: 77). He was here, however, punning on the Wagnerian translation of the word *Ragnarök* as 'Twilight of the gods.'

In *Ragnarök*, the Germanic gods (the 'good guys,' in the far-right reading) are supported in their battle against the enemies of the world (the 'baddies') by the *Einherjar* from Valhalla. Thus, when members of the far right refer to themselves as *Einherier/Einherjer* [*Einherjar*] in the names of bands, for example, or in pseudonyms on the internet, this is a statement with an agenda (Sünner 1999: 186; Musik – Mode – Markenzeichen 2006: 62), expressing in this manner a willingness to be deployed in the violent battle against democracy (= the enemies of the world). For far-right women, the popular identification of oneself as a Valkyrie is also a way of signalling support for these objectives. Such references to apocalyptic times are similarly clear in songs such as *Wenn Walküren reiten* [When Valkyries ride] by the band *Absurd*.

The frequent use of the *Ragnarök* motif in relation to current political disputes is intended further to suggest the imminence of apocalypse as well as an escalating crisis in democracy that is about to lead to its demise. Such convictions are expressed – as mentioned earlier – in numerous compound names that include the component *Endzeit-* [end time], such as *Endzeitversand* [end time mail order], or indirectly in titles of songs, such as *Dämmerung* [Twilight] (1996) by the group *Chaoskrieger* [chaos warriors], the CD title *Auf nach Walhalla* [Let's go to Valhalla] (1996) of the group *Patriotic Bois* or *Walhalla ruft!* [Valhalla is calling!] (1995) by the group *Nordwind* [north wind] (Farin/Flad 2001: 58f.; Archiv der Jugendkulturen 2001: 201).

It is, however, not only *Ragnarök* that is used as a metaphor borrowing from Norse-Germanic mythology to convey the central objective of the anti-constitutional political agenda that seeks the destruction of contemporary democracy: other elements from Norse-Germanic mythology are also exploited for the same purpose.

When, for example, Hendrik Möbus, one of the most prominent neo-Nazis from Thuringia, gave himself the pseudonym *Nidhøggr* – the name of the dragon who, according to Germanic mythology, gnaws from below at Yggdrasil, the tree of the world, and damages it – the subversive, destructive meaning intended could not have been clearer. A similar motive obviously lay behind the magazine title *Ratatösk*: a circular from Eisenach named itself thus after the squirrel that runs up and down the trunk of Yggdrasil carrying messages that are the cause of trouble and strife. In addition to indicating the messenger role of the circular, the name also conveys its mission of spreading subversion. Finally, the not so rare reference to the *Funkenflug* [flight of sparks] (either as the sparks that ignite the global conflagration or as the first signs of the beginning of the world) is also intended as latently subversive and revolutionary with regard to the existing order.

In general, mythology is thus used to promote, in coded form, the objective of creating a new form of society, replacing hitherto existing arrangements, and preferably connected to a supposedly glorious past, which on the far right is clearly understood to be the Third Reich. In addition, the proclaimed turn to Germanic culture sets up an opposition between contemporary pluralistic society and a supposedly ethnically pure, primeval, and thus quasi natural society. The Germanic peoples and their culture can thus be held up as an alternative to a complex, multicultural, and pluralistic contemporary society.

Reference to Norse-Germanic mythology can also function as a counterpoint to contemporary society insofar as it can be intended as a declaration of belief. The *Artgemeinschaft – Germanische Glaubensgemeinschaft* [Racial community – Germanic Faith Community], the *Deutsche Heidnische Front* [German heathen/pagan front], the *Armanen-Orden* [Armanen order] and the *Bund für Gotteserkenntnis* [association for the knowledge of God] are all far-right organisations that promote a corresponding form of neo-paganism (e.g. Pfahl-Traughber 2019: 190f.).

The religious aspects become clear, for example, in far-right music. A band name such as *Asatru* ('Æsir belief') may well in itself not constitute convincing evidence of an actual orientation of belief towards the Germanic gods. However, in the song *Wir rufen euch* [We are calling you] the band does explicitly declare: 'Wir beten euch an ...' ['we pray to you ...'], 'you' clearly meaning the Germanic gods. In the song *Religion* by the band *Division Germania* one may find the following confession of belief: 'Wir haben nur einen Gott, Odin, unseren Herrn' ['We only have one god, Odin, our lord']. The song *Gott unserer Horden* [God of our legions] by the same band also pays homage to Odin.

The following excerpt from the song *Thule* by the band of the same name similarly shows a clear appeal to Odin as protector: 'Odin/die Asen werden uns behüten' ['Odin/the Æsir will protect us']. In the song *Thors Hammer* by the band *Volksaufstand* [people's uprising], the statement 'Thor, er beschützt wahre Krieger, und die verehren ihn sehr' ['Thor, he protects true warriors, and they

revere him very much'] can similarly be interpreted as a religious declaration of devotion, especially when one understands the label 'wahre Krieger' [true warriors] to refer to oneself.

The following verses from the lyrics of another far-right song are evidence of the expectations of salvation associated with the Germanic gods:

> 'Odin, jetzt heißt es siegen oder sterben,
> Odin, rette uns aus dem Verderben!'
> [Odin, now is the time for victory or death,
> Odin, save us from doom!]
>
> (Standpunkte 2002)

Generally speaking, very many lyrics of far-right songs have the form and content of professions of belief (Raabe 2010: 110).

The use of sacred language is also an indication of a religious component in the far-right engagement with Norse-Germanic mythology. One example of this is the poem *Der suchende Gott* [the searching god], a poem with the character of a prayer, contributed by the author Marcel N. from the Zeithain prison to the far-right periodical *Freier Rundbrief Dresden* (3/2004). Just two stanzas are cited below, where reference to Germanic mythology is connected with racial ideology and with the glorification of war and battle as sacrifice. At the same time, Germanic mythology is proposed as the key to elitist knowledge:

> Komm Odin, du Weißer [sic!]
> Bewahrer der Gedanken und der Erinnerung
> Sucher des Schattens, Sucher der Wahrheit
> Ich biete Dir meinen Durst nach Leben
>
> Komm Odin, einäugiger Odin
> Herr des Kampfes und der Aufopferung
> Verwundeter König inspiriere mich
> Deine Führung werde mein Sieg
>
> Come, Odin, oh white one [sic!]
> Keeper of ideas and memory
> Searcher of the shadow, searcher of truth
> I offer you my thirst for life.
>
> Come, Odin, one-eyed Odin,
> Lord of the battle and of sacrifice,
> Wounded king, inspire me,
> May your leadership be my victory.

Expressions of greeting such as *Odin mit uns*, *Mögen die Asen euch beschützen* or *Heil den Göttern!* [Odin with us; May the Æsir protect you; or Hail the gods!]

used on social networks or on far-right internet forums can be understood as professions of belief. The same can be said of users who give their religion on their profile as *Asatru* 'Æsir belief.'

It is, however, not just prayers, poems, or song lyrics as well as identification with individual divinities that demonstrate the adoption of neo-pagan belief on the part of members of the far right. In the same way, individual dogmatic terms or names given in the far-right subculture may convey a religious, transcendental meaning:

When, for example, a magazine appears under the title *Bifröst*, thus referring to the name of the bridge from the human world to the world of the gods, from Midgard to Asgard, this may be interpreted as declaring a mission of making a connection with the divine, in the sense of fulfilling a higher purpose behind far-right ideology. The same is true of cover names used on the internet such as *Asentreu* [loyal to the Æsir] or similar.

Despite all the ideological instrumentalization, one therefore also recognises the religious function that is inherent in the reference to mythology. Elements taken from Norse-Germanic mythology may thereby certainly be deployed to establish a 'race-specific' – to use National Socialist terminology – religion. This is necessarily associated with the rejection of Christianity.[2] Germanic neo-paganism thus represents an alternative in both religious and (when interpreted in a specific far-right sense) ideological terms to the Christianity that continues to be dominant in society.

Even if one may question whether every far-right reference to the Germanic gods constitutes a profession of belief, they are in any case at least expressions of an attitude of opposition, namely a rejection of Christianity and of its values and ideals as well as of its Jewish roots.

The anti-Semitic motive of the rejection is, among other things, especially clear in the song *Walvater Wotan* by the group *Landser* [colloquial for soldier], where the lyrics include the lines:

> Wir wollen Euren Jesus nicht, das alte Judenschwein. Denn zu Kreuze kriechen kann nichts für Arier sein. (. . .). Odins Raben wachen und sehen eure Taten. Ein Blitz aus Donars Hammer schlägt in die Kirche ein. Nun fleh zu deinem Judengott, er hört dich nicht, du Christenschwein.
>
> [We don't want your Jesus, the old Jewish swine. Creeping up to crosses will never be for Aryans. (. . .) Odin's ravens are keeping watch and see your deeds. A bolt of lightning from Donar's hammer strikes the church. Now implore your Jew god. He does not hear you, you Christian swine.]

Similarly warlike lyrics with anti-Christian contents can be seen in songs by other far-right bands (e.g. Huene 2007: 23). Thus, the world of the Germanic gods is to prevail with force over Christianity, as the group *Kroizfoier* [Kreuzfeuer = crossfire] puts it dramatically in the song *Den Göttern nah* [close to the gods] (CD *Blut für Blut* [blood for blood], 1999), when they pay homage to Donar/Thor: 'Herr über Donner, Blitz und Regen. Dein Hammer soll das Kreuz

zerschlagen.' [Lord over thunder, lightning and rain. Your hammer must break the cross to pieces.] Just as graphic fantasies of the violent battle against Christianity are to be found also in the song *Wikinger* [Vikings] (on the CD *Abschaum der Nation* [scum of the nation], 1997) by the group *Division Wiking* [Viking Division], where these are associated with a programmatic declaration of the underlying worldview: 'Odin-Wotan opfern wir nur das Christenblut. Nur der Starke lebt, und der Schwache fällt.' [We only sacrifice the Christian blood to Odin-Wotan. Only the strong one lives and the weak one falls.]

It becomes clear here that for this biologistic, Social Darwinist, Neo-Nazi worldview, according to which only the strongest prevails, fundamental principles of Christianity are alien – principles such as love of one's enemies, divine grace, or forgiveness, but also moments of so-called *caritas*, of care for the weak and sick, including the disabled and the marginalised in society. The 'race-appropriate' belief (see *Odins Law*) can only be, from the far-right perspective, a religion of strength. That is a religion for which fundamental components of mythological tradition concerned, according to the far-right reading, with the triumph of violence and power – i.e., with the success of the stronger and the glorification of the hero and of battle – may offer an appropriate template.

The rejection of Christianity in favour of Germanic mythology becomes manifest in linguistic conventions of communication within the scene, such as when common phrases are translated into equivalents referring to Germanic mythology. One example of this is the substitution of *Gott sei Dank* [Thank God] by *Odin sei Dank* [Thank Odin]. The battle cry *Gott mit uns* [May God be with us] becomes *Wodan mit uns* [May Wodan be with us] on the leaflet accompanying the CD *Asgardsrei* by the band *Absurd*.

Stickers or T-shirts with anti-Christian symbols or with legends such as *Odin statt Jesus* [Odin, not Jesus] signal the rejection of Christianity to the outside world (Ramelsberger 2005: 6). Even if there is no evidence of active neo-pagan convictions, the opposition to a mainstream society deeply influenced by Christianity is clear. This is manifest also in the substitution of actual or supposed traditional Germanic festivals for Christian feast-days, particularly Easter and Christmas.

Reference to historical Norse-Germanic mythology and the opposition to Christianity function moreover as code for positions in relation to contemporary society. The forceful Christianisation and imposition of what the far right views as a false and effete belief-system among the Germanic peoples in the early Middle Ages is thus compared to the 'repressive actions of the democrats and their system' (www.nsfkn.info) and the suppression of the 'truth' of far-right ideology. The appropriation of the Germanic legacy is thus also to be seen as affirmation of a Germanic culture supposedly characterised by the rule of brute force, ethnic purity and particular 'virtues' – in contrast to contemporary societal reality.

Overall, the references to Germanic history and Germanic mythology can be considered as a kind of **ideological cement or filler** that is used to cover over differences in terms of agenda and content within the far-right spectrum (here e.g. Heller/Maegerle 2007: 162ff.). The mention of a glorious past – even if stylised and constructed – unites conflicting positions in the present. Precisely for

this reason, the historical foundations laid down over centuries make the use of Germanic references attractive: 'Vast stretches of time thereby promise eternal truths' (Banghard 2015: 74). Mythology, in particular, also has an effect above and beyond this, especially if it is actually interpreted – and lived – in a cult/religious fashion. The effect is emotionally stabilising in a manner that far exceeds the result of rational agreement with individual parts of far-right ideology (Huene 2007: 28).

The reference back to the past makes it possible to transmit values – however vague – as well as to evoke an ancient, venerable common origin and thus create a sense of community.

It should be mentioned, in conclusion, that the adoption of the Germanic peoples and their history as well as Norse-Germanic mythology with the broad spectrum of functions described is in no way restricted to the German or German-speaking far right. There are references to the Germanic tribes in far-right movements in other European countries too. It is well known that in Scandinavia, for example, members of the far right also refer to the myths, which is hardly surprising, given that familiarity with Norse-Germanic mythology is generally much more widespread. This is even true of Finland, as is shown by the previously mentioned example of the *Soldiers of Odin*.[3] Similar applies to Great Britain.[4]

What is even more noteworthy is, however, the fact that Germanic references can also be found in places with little or no evidence of a historical connection with the Germanic peoples, their culture and mythology or even language, such as namely on the Czech and Slovak far right.

There was thus, for example, in Pilsen in Bohemia a shop selling a range of far-right fashion items run by a company named *Irminsul*. The contact information on the associated internet site (www.original-store.cz/kontakt) indicates that the said company is connected with the fashion label *Thor Steinar*, which not least explains the mythological company name. *Thor Steinar* is generally popular in both the Czech Republic and in Slovakia as a far-right fashion label. One far-right Slovakian internet retailer goes by the name *Thor Shop* (www.thor-shop.sk). Shops with names of this kind are generally speaking not rare in Slovakian towns. Particularly popular in the neo-Nazi portion of the Slovakian skinhead movement are references to the Germanic gods, sometimes in the form of a religious profession of faith in Germanic neo-paganism (*odinizmus* in Slovak) (Milo 2005: 28).

References to the Germanic peoples and to Norse-Germanic mythology on the Czech and Slovak far right have functions similar to those on the far right in the German-speaking world, if with other emphases and a different frequency. Precisely knowledge of Norse-Germanic mythology represents an exclusive specialist area permitting more or less coded anti-democratic or neo-Nazi content to be communicated. This involves extracting ideologically suitable contents and messages from Norse-Germanic mythology – or projecting such content into it – and using this material for one's own ends. Furthermore, the recourse to the past also stands for the desire for a romanticised 'golden age,' above all, however, for a time when there was a supposedly genetic *Volksgemeinschaft* [community of the *Volk*] (at least as suggested by Milo 2005: 34).

This romanticised interpretation is, however, only one aspect behind the references to the Germanic peoples. Much more significantly – and this is indicated by the concrete references in far-right song lyrics – with the 'right' interpretation, models may be found for the forceful assertion of one's own interests. Thus, violence is legitimated, idealised, and, furthermore, bestowed with a transcendental justification through reference to mythology (Schuppener 2017: 216ff.).

One finds various similarly motivated references in other Slavic countries such as Russia and the Ukraine too. This applies, for example, to organisations such as *Wotan Jugend* [Wotan youth], the use of runes, or to events with names (e.g. *Asgard Reich Festival*) making some connection with Norse-Germanic mythology (Holzer/Laryš/Mareš 2019).

These kinds of reference outside the German-speaking world and specifically in Slavic regions clearly demonstrate that the focus on Germanic culture is not automatically to be seen as an attempt to create an historically correct tradition. The Germanic peoples and their history and mythology serve rather as a notional means of transmitting ideological content that is also relevant on the far-right scene of other countries – such as particularly the Social Darwinist order they aim to establish as well as the rejection of democracy, pluralism and the fundamental values of a society deeply influenced by Christianity.

4.2 Summary and societal consequences

In summing up, one notes that there is a very wide range of reasons why the far-right scene makes use of the Germanic tribes and their history. In order to explain this recourse to the distant past combining ideological adaptation and instrumentalization, it is not enough to point to the earlier National Socialist interpretation of the Germanic past and the associated appropriation of mythology. The contemporary far-right appropriation possesses rather in part clearly different characteristics, and the references to the individual Germanic tribes and to Norse-Germanic mythology are more intensive and much more strongly related to the present and politically instrumentalised than was the case with the utilisation of Germanic history during the Nazi period.

Essential in this context are four components that were far less significant for the National Socialist exploitation of the Germanic tribes, their history and Norse-Germanic culture for reasons related to the historical context:

The first concerns the explicit affirmation of violent force – supposedly associated with the Germanic peoples and based on mythology – as a means of achieving one's aims, in particular as a violent means of disposing of the free democratic social order. In the first half of the twentieth century, the use of violence was, however, far less in need of justification, as the political opponents (e.g. Communist groups) also actively employed violence as a means of achieving their political objectives.

Secondly, invoking the Germanic tribes serves to differentiate these groups from mainstream society and construct an identity based on the appropriation of the legacy interpreted according to their ideology. Thus, Germanic history and

mythology represent a basis for the cultural outlook of the far right (Gugenberger/Schweidlenka 1993: 179ff.; Woods 2004: 95ff.). At least part of the intention here is to render it more difficult for mainstream society to decipher the coded references. In the first decades of the twentieth century, on the other hand, knowledge of Germanic culture and of Norse-Germanic mythology was part of the general education of large circles of the population, especially of the educated bourgeoisie; nowadays knowledge of this kind is often limited, even in this milieu.

A third point, connected to the latter, is that the cultivation of references to ancient Germanic culture can be attractive for groups outside of the original far-right target group (e.g. Pfahl-Traughber 2019: 184). Thus, interest in the lesser-known subject areas related to the Germanic tribes, Germanic history and Norse-Germanic mythology can be used as a way of addressing people outside the scene, and possibly also to win them over for the political, ideological aims of the far right.

The fourth component, finally, is that reference to the Germanic peoples and to their history and mythology functions almost as a code for establishing a connection with National Socialist *völkisch*, racist traditions. That this constitutes a difference between the contemporary far-right interest in Germanic culture and that of the National Socialists is obvious.

It is clear from the examples listed above – only a small if significant selection of far-right references to Germanic culture – that the focus for the recent far right is not on historically documented facts relating to Germanic history, culture and mythology, but rather on an appropriate (re-)interpretation of some ideologically usable elements.

The example of the far-right perspective on the Germanic gods shows very clearly that the focus here is limited to a few aspects that suit the extreme right-wing ideology: hardly any attention is paid on the far-right scene, for example, to Odin's status as a god of poetry, a highly significant aspect of this figure in mythological tradition.[5] The same is true of many other aspects too, such as his role as a healing god, of central importance in the second Merseburg incantation. The god is rather to a large extent seen as a god of war and violence, or – as the group *Landser* (2000) called him – as the *Lenker der Schlachten* [director/ruler of battles]. His greatness, importance, and indeed his omnipotence are similarly highlighted, for example in references to his sobriquet *Allvater* [Father of all]. The result is therefore a one-sided, targeted, and limited interpretation rather than a nuanced view based on historical sources. The same approach can be identified in relation to all aspects of the far-right interpretation of Germanic culture.

The fact that the Germanic peoples are not only used by members of the far right in the German-speaking area, but also far beyond, as a means of constructing an identity, specifically also with regard to Norse-Germanic mythology, shows how the Germanic tribes have become a supranational symbolic bond uniting the far-right scene. However, this only becomes possible through the fact that components of cultural history and the creation of a *völkisch*-based line of tradition are less important for this approach, than the ideological, political messages that can be conveyed through invoking them and their culture. Thus, associating

themselves with Germanic culture, and especially with mythology, is 'a central ideological field of operation' for the far right that is above all available because for the wider public 'the subject of the "Germanic peoples" appears at first sight not to be politically controversial' (Banghard 2015: 62).

Finally, the question that remains to be discussed is which particular perspectives are possessed by the far-right appropriation of the Germanic peoples and their culture. Closely associated with this is the question of whether and how the far-right appropriation of the Germanic past and of Norse-Germanic mythology can and should be countered by society. What most determines the success of the far-right approach appears to be the extent to which such an appropriation can be (largely) exclusive. Building an identity on the basis of the ancient Germanic peoples, the individual Germanic tribes, or of Norse-Germanic mythology in any case only works as long as these are not also being used, or at least focused on, to a greater extent by other societal groups. It is only under such conditions that members of the far right can claim their (supposed) interpretative authority in the public sphere, selectively evaluate the topic in terms of their own ideology and thus at the same time instrumentalise it for their own purposes.

There have recently been some signs of attempts to bring Germanic history and culture much more to the attention of a wider public again (e.g. *Spiegel Geschichte* [History issue of *Der Spiegel*] 2/2013 – *Die Germanen*). However, apart from shining some individual spotlights on the topic, these did not result in any notable broader effect. In the last few years there have also been other mainstream approaches to the topic, such as to Norse-Germanic mythology (in Thor-films and -comics etc.), but these emphasise precisely those aspects (battle, war, violence) focused on by the far right and thus also provide a similarly selective picture. Any treatment popularising or at least making people aware of the numerous other components of the historical and literary tradition is yet to be seen. Knowledge of the topic has not yet found its way into the broader education system (schools, universities). The integration of such knowledge in wider historical and cultural-historical contexts could serve to relativise the far-right concentration on aspects such as violent force and the imposition of the will of the stronger, filling in the background of the historical circumstances in which they arose. Greater attention to the working out of parallels and connections with other (historical) cultures could show the far-right selective emphasis on particular aspects as something going beyond any individual culture. The emphasis on strength, power and violence is not something specific to the Germanic tribes, but also a characteristic of many early cultures and to be explained to a large extent as a result of the precarious circumstances of life at the time.

Only wider societal engagement with the topic could cause the far right to lose its supposed monopoly over interpretations of the subject and thus also the ability to use it as a means of claiming historical legitimacy and constructing a sense of identity. The appropriation and misuse of Germanic (cultural) history on the far right thus lives from the fact that the public is still hardly conscious of this subject area at all – or even considers it taboo. It is for this very reason that the (continued) effective taboo treatment, e.g., through omission from curricula, is not an

appropriate counterstrategy and is not a sufficient way of dealing with the problem (e.g. Langebach/Sturm 2015: 8).

Apart from a few exceptions, the subject does not play any significant role in schools and universities in the German-speaking world. Mentions in curricula are de facto purely there for the sake of appearances. The appropriation of Germanic history, culture, and specifically mythology by the National Socialists is not as a rule treated as a topic in the training of new teachers for schools offering a general education. The same is true of further training opportunities. The topic of the utilisation of Germanic culture and Norse-Germanic mythology is even largely ignored in the pedagogical literature dealing with prevention – specifically in relation to the education of young people – and offering definite suggestions for heightening awareness of the far right in various thematic areas. This also applies, for example, to the publication by Glaser/Pfeiffer (2017) that focuses on the whole experiential world and the fascination of the far right, without even broaching the topic of the Germanic references in any significant way.

As a result, teachers often to a large extent lack knowledge and are thus helpless in the face of the far-right exploitation of Germanic history and culture. This starts with legends written on items of clothing and applies also to publications and to music listened to by pupils. A discussion with young people that can counter the selective interpretations, re-interpretations, and appropriations here with knowledge and evidence is not possible on such a basis.

The lack of knowledge and the fear of dealing with the subject at all resulting from the societal disregard of it are also reasons why there is no clearly focused and politically aware treatment of the Germanic past providing a contrast to the far-right version even outside the education system, e.g., in youth work or in political debate with the far right. This circumstance makes it easier for members of the far right to appropriate the subject, as they are thus in a position to promote selectively chosen contents, interpreted according to their own objectives, without any contradiction worth mentioning. An active counterstrategy, not solely based on repression and taboo, would require, however, precisely an intensive and informed engagement with the topic. That means that knowledge of the history and culture of the Germanic peoples, including their mythology, would have to be transmitted to a much greater degree in schools and other educational institutions. Precisely the misuse of the subject by the National Socialists could offer an opportunity to examine the backgrounds, without giving the occupation with the Germanic people and culture per se a negative moral connotation.

What seems rather to make sense is to represent the Germanic tribes and their culture as one component of German (early) history, viewing them as just one cultural root among many other (Celtic, Slavic, Graeco-Roman, Judaeo-Christian) influencing factors.

With such a background of more evidence-based knowledge it could then be very easily proven that the far-right appropriation of the Germanic peoples and their culture, and especially of Norse-Germanic mythology too, is a case of misuse that deliberately suppresses fundamental aspects (Scholz 2010: 23f.). It would

also be possible on this basis to expose numerous inherent contradictions in the ideological conglomerate of the extreme right.

A focused examination of the contemporary far-right appropriation of tradition would further offer an opportunity to think about the reception/treatment of the historical legacy in general as well as about the construction of history in the past and in the present, especially in politics. This would allow for a more critical and more competent look at such phenomena, also in terms of a more enlightened view of politics and ideologies in general.

The recent far right has opened up in Germanic history a subject area that is ideal for them in almost every way – at least as long as the conditions outlined above do not fundamentally change. The appropriation and reinterpretation of this subject – Germanic history – permits them to convey the central messages of far-right ideology without having to fear immediate legal consequences.

Notes

1 Reichenbach in the Vogtland. This piece of information came from a presentation at a conference of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Leipzig in 2005.
2 On the individual groupings and the lines of their arguments against Christianity, see Christiansen/Fromm/Zinser (2006: 169ff.), Jennerjahn (2006: 59ff.).
3 See Rechtsextreme (2016: 9).
4 On adaptations on the American far right, e.g. Goodrick-Clarke (2009: 503ff.).
5 One of the rare exceptions to this is a song by the group, *Agnar*, that does deal with the role of Odin as a poet (Raabe 2010: 112).

5 Far-right symbols referring to Germanic cultural history

5.1 Introduction

Every political movement has at its disposal a certain repertoire of symbols that can be used in the construction of identity. Symbols help to create and to signal the identity of a community both internally and to the external world. Symbols can also serve thereby particularly to differentiate a group, by making clear to others that they do not belong to the group if they cannot identify with the symbols concerned (Versteckspiel 2017: 6). Above all, symbols offer a means of recognition for the group members on the one hand, and for those outside the group on the other. Finally, they also make it possible to substitute meaning and contents (Heller/Maegerle 2007: 166) and can thus serve as a formal casing or shell, even if this is not at all or insufficiently filled. Just as companies have a corporate identity, the same applies to parties and political groupings, especially for right-wing extremists.

The particular significance of symbolism precisely for *völkisch*-nationalist oriented groupings is highlighted by Heller/Maegerle – even if the generalisation is certainly exaggerated:

'The Right is inclined to invoke the power of symbols more than that of arguments' (Heller/Maegerle 2007: 14).

National Socialists already fused elements from different cultures and religions that could be inserted into or used for their ideology (Sünner 1999: 9). Similarly, contemporary right-wing extremists have an eclectic repertoire of symbols at their disposal, of which at least that part relating more or less closely to Germanic cultural history will be looked at. The symbolic repertoire of the far right is naturally much broader, but it cannot all be covered comprehensively here.

5.2 Symbols related to mythology

The National Socialists – in whose ideological and political tradition a large part of the contemporary far right, at least in the German-speaking world, sees itself – transformed the symbol referred to in Sanskrit as the swastika into a leading symbol. It was originally an old symbol of the sun and of good fortune that came from Indian culture. Forms of the swastika are to be found in other cultures too, including among the Germanic tribes.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003206309-5

As the use of the swastika is forbidden these days in Germany and in Austria, it is, as the central symbol of National Socialism, represented either in distorted fashion or replaced by graphic elements resembling it, at least thereby to enable the association with the swastika. As the following illustrations show, swastikas are therefore embedded in ornamental elements or appear in different form.

The symbols substituted for the swastika include the triskele, an ornamental motif consisting of three radial, spiral lines that was also attributed with magical significance. Indeed, this symbol originally was derived from Celtic art, but it was also to be found in the Germanic area.

The triskele is also used to signal allegiance to the far-right scene and is to be found in numerous variations, e.g., on T-shirts, accessories or on jewellery. The stud earrings in the photograph below are just an example of the rich repertoire on offer from mail order companies on the far-right.

Figure 5.1 Swastika as a detail on a hooded sweatshirt with the inscription *Wotans Heer* [Wotan's army]

Figure 5.2 Stylised swastika

Figure 5.3 Triskele

Source: *Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triskelion; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triskelion#/media/File:AWB_777_Triskele.svg)*

The name of the symbol is also used, for example for a right-wing extremist magazine, about which Meier-Schuegraf (2005: 47) states: 'The most ambitious online publication of right-wing extremist women appears under the title *Triskele*.'

There is indeed evidence of the use of both swastika and triskele in Germanic iconography; they are however rather historically peripheral phenomena there. On the other hand, the use of symbols taken from the context of Germanic mythology

Figure 5.4 Triskele earring pendants

Figure 5.5 T-shirts displaying Thor's hammer

is much more clearly and unambiguously connected with the Germanic past. This includes specifically the previously mentioned attributes of the gods, such as Thor's hammer or Odin's ravens, and further also depictions of the world tree Yggdrasil and of the old Saxon pillar shrine, the *Irminsul*.

Thor's hammer *Mjölnir* is the attribute and power symbol of the god Thor/Donar. There is much archaeological evidence of amulets from the early Middle Ages decorated with Thor's hammer (Henning/Hultgård 1999: 483ff.). Thor's hammer is extremely popular as a symbol on the far-right scene. Thus, one may find it not only on various utensils or jewellery, but also commonly on T-shirts and other clothing (e.g. Versteckspiel 2017: 9, 20). Far-right mail order companies display Thor's hammers on a broad range of products for almost every aspect of everyday life.

Figure 5.6 Ring with Thor's hammer
Source: *Recherche Nord*

Figure 5.7 Silver Thor's hammer pendant

Figure 5.8 Odin's ravens as ear studs

Figure 5.9 Odin's ravens on embroidered purse with central image of triskele

Even if the Thor's hammer is similarly used by neo-pagans not belonging to the far right, its use among members of the far right is especially prominent. This is related not least to the fact that the Thor's hammer symbol, in addition to ostensibly referring to Germanic culture and mythology, perfectly fits into the self-image, identity and ideological agenda of the far right as a symbol of warlike masculinity, the willingness to use violence and thus an expression of the affirmation of the use of violence as a means to achieve one's own objectives, not least understood as engagement in a Social Darwinist battle for the survival of the fittest.

Going back to the description in what has been recorded of Norse-Germanic mythology, Odin's ravens *Huginn* and *Muginn* represent particular wisdom, translated then also as a form of higher knowledge. Members of the far right also claim this for themselves, seeing themselves as an elite striving for the creation of a new world order.

The depiction of Odin's two ravens on clothing, stickers and other products may accordingly to be interpreted as a sign of allegiance to the far-right scene understood as involving the fulfilment of a higher mission.

On the purse pictured above, for example, membership of far-right groups is signalled not just through the depiction of Odin's ravens, but is further underlined through the triple appearance of the triskele.

Figure 5.10 Sleipnir T-shirt
Source: *Recherche Nord*

Figure 5.11 Sleipnir sticker

In the case of these images, such as the two in the photographs above (of the ear studs and purse), recognition of the birds as representations of Odin's ravens is conditional. The symbolism is however made clear at least for the purchasers through the corresponding description of the product or of the sale. This is thus primarily about consumers being conscious of purchasing and using products with images of Odin's ravens. The intended message of group allegiance is

Figure 5.12 Emblem of the *Forschungsgemeinschaft Deutsches Ahnenerbe* [German Ancestral Heritage Research Institute]

Source: *Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahnenerbe; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahnenerbe#/media/File:Emblem_SS_Ahnenerbe.png)*

Figure 5.13 Heading/banner of the far-right portal *thiazi.net*

therefore recognisable only for those who are already familiar with the symbolic codes concerned.

One of the attributes of the gods is also Odin's eight-legged horse *Sleipnir*. The latter is also to be found illustrated on numerous products sold by online shops on the far-right scene.

In particular, stickers available as part of the online offering of the far-right music group *Sleipnir* naturally display an image of the mythic eight-legged horse along with the corresponding script. The stickers with this clear and simple combination of text and image serve first and foremost, of course, as a way of attracting attention for the band concerned and for its music.

However, Odin's horse *Sleipnir* is also a symbol of the superiority of the world of the gods and thus similarly represents the (supposed) elevated status of the members of the far right who invoke the mythology.

Figure 5.14 Wooden wall decoration depicting the *Irminsul*

Figure 5.15 Gravestone with *Irminsul*
Source: *Recherche Nord*

A further symbol from Germanic mythology frequently found on the far-right scene in the German-speaking world represents the *Irminsul*, that is generally related to Yggdrasil, the tree of the world.

It is indeed not known what the historical *Irminsul* looked like. There were for this reason various, very different 'reconstructions' of the Old Saxon cult shrine in the early modern period. In 1929, the esoteric thinker Wilhelm Teudt (1860–1942) conjectured that the descent from the cross relief on the *Externsteine* in the Teutoburg forest depicted a bent *Irminsul*. The corresponding reconstruction of the appearance of the *Irminsul* later became the emblem of the *Forschungsgemeinschaft Deutsches Ahnenerbe* [German Ancestral Heritage Research Institute] in the Third Reich (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irminsul).

It is in this form that the *Irminsul* is taken up on the contemporary far right, not least with the intention, of course, of thereby establishing a link also with National Socialism. It is a prominent symbol on far-right internet sites. On the far-right scene there is further a broad repertoire of jewellery, stickers, T-shirts and other accessories depicting an *Irminsul* shaped in this manner.

The *Irminsul* is also particularly used as a symbol for the neo-pagan (Germanic) belief and for Norse-Germanic mythology. This is the case, for example, with the neo-pagan *Artgemeinschaft – Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft wesensgemäßer Lebensgestaltung* [Racial community – Germanic Faith Community of a race-appropriate way of life], a group already founded in 1951 that promotes *völkisch*-racist ideas and whose symbol is the *Irminsul* (Thüringer Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales 2019: 59).

Figure 5.16 *Irminsul* sticker

Veneration of the *Irminsul* almost as the centre of life is reflected in the illustration (sticker) above that is very popular on the far-right scene and thus appears in many different contexts.

Even if the image of the *Irminsul* appears on the far-right scene much more frequently than that of Yggdrasil, the tree of the world, one may certainly also find some products on offer from far-right retailers that explicitly refer to Yggdrasil, such as in the following case of a purse.

Another very popular symbol on the right-wing extremist scene and one which is seen as probably of Germanic origin is the *Valknut*:

> Valknut-like signs are occasionally found on picture/rune stones [Bildsteine] of the Viking period. Their significance (insofar as it exists) in the early Middle Ages is utterly unclear. In Germany, the symbol is usually given the artificial name 'Wotan's knot.' The symbol became really well-known [. . .] from 1995 through the US right-wing terrorist David Lane. The Wotan's knot played a central role in the initiation rite of his organisation 'Heidenvolk' [heathen folk]. As part of their initiation, new members, dressed as Vikings and understood to be Aryan racial warriors, were to wear this symbol. It was seen as a sign of Odin's power to bind and to release the human soul – and as an injunction to sacrifice life for the Aryan idea.
>
> (Banghard 2016: 50)

These days, in different fractions of neo-paganism, but above all on the far right, the symbol is assigned numerous meanings associated with Odin/Wodan and with a metaphysical component in each case. Such references to mythology are however not convincingly provable.

Figure 5.17 Embroidered purse with Yggdrasil, triskele, and Odin's ravens *Huginn* and *Muginn* as well as Odin's horse *Sleipnir*

Figure 5.18 Valknut symbol

Source: *Wikipedia, Public Doman (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Valknut-Symbol-triquetra.svg)*

Figure 5.19 T-shirt with Wotan's knot

Source: *Recherche Nord*

Figure 5.20 Valknut symbol on van
Source: *Recherche Nord*

Figure 5.21 Wodan's eye on a badge with the legend *Töten für Wotan!* [Killing for Wotan!]

A new development that also refers to mythology is the so-called Wodan's eye (Wotan's eye). This is a revival of the tradition of the eye of God, an image that is widespread in Christian iconography. The Christian symbol, also called the eye of providence, was already adapted by the freemasons, and served them as a symbol of truth and wisdom. In accordance with the anti-Christian bias of neo-pagan portions of the far right, the symbol is being reinterpreted in the context of Norse-Germanic mythology and apparently with an analogous meaning as a sign of the power and omniscience of Odin/Wodan.

Other pictorial symbols that refer directly to Norse-Germanic mythology do not play any significant role in the far-right canon.

5.3 Runes

The runes can be considered as a further very important variety of graphic symbols that is frequently used on the contemporary far right in the German-speaking world: 'Runes have always belonged among the trademarks of far-right groups' (Huene 2007: 23).

The runes were the written characters/letters of the Germanic peoples. The term *runes* is understood as alphabet rows differing in parts that are referred to according to the sound values of the first characters as *Futhark*. Fundamental distinctions are made between the Elder and the Younger Futhark (recorded since the time of the *Völkerwanderung* [migration of peoples], or rather the seventh/eighth centuries), as well as the Anglo-Saxon Futhork.

Geographically, the historical use of the runes was largely restricted to Northern Europe and England. Most of the runic inscriptions known today are derived from the time of the Vikings (i.e. from the period from around 800 to 1050). The runes were above all used as carved characters for inscriptions; they were hardly employed for longer texts. In some regions, such as Norway, they were in use up to the late Middle Ages. In many cases they possessed a double character, namely as written characters on the one hand and as magic signs on the other. Frequently runes were used for inscriptions of magic spells or consecrations, thus indicating there was a clear relation with the supernatural involved.

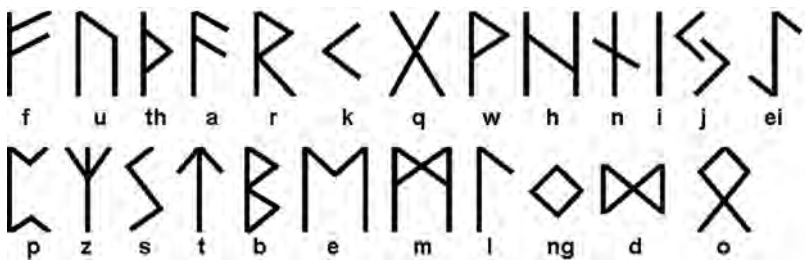

Figure 5.22 Elder Futhark

Source: *Wikipedia, CC BY 3.0 (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elder_futhark.png)*

The etymology of the word *Rune* reflects the magical character of the signs (basic meaning: 'secret'). The history of how the runes came about and where they came from has even today not been fully explained (e.g. Barnes 2012; Düwel 2008; Klingenberg 1995).

In Norse-Germanic mythology the runes are particularly attributed with a divine origin. Odin's rune song in the 'Havamal' of the Edda depicts Odin's self-sacrifice in hanging for nine days from a tree and through pain achieving knowledge of the runes.

To this extent, the use of runes on the recent far right not only represents merely an adoption of graphic signs from Germanic cultural history, but simultaneously a reference to Norse-Germanic mythology. In this tradition, the runes can further be understood as a secret sign and as symbols of higher knowledge.

References to the runes on the far right are not restricted to their use as graphic symbols: The names of the runes are employed in many different contexts. As pseudonyms on the internet, the names of the runes are especially popular (Schuppener 2011b: 49). Frequently, the contemporary far right refers to the notion that in tradition, and particularly in the esoteric writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, every rune was attributed a broader symbolic meaning along with its sound value.

Runes were already employed by the National Socialists as part of their adoption of the historical legacy, and they were also interpreted ideologically then (e.g. Hunger 1984). The one example of these adaptations that is generally known these days is above all the double Sig rune in the insignia of the SS. The single Sig rune was used by the *Deutsches Jungvolk*, a subdivision of the *Hitler-Jugend* [Hitler youth].

Figure 5.23 Sig runes

Source: *Wikipedia, Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sig_runes.svg)*

There was also a magazine in the Third Reich issued under the title *Die Sigrune*, subtitled *Zeitschrift für nordisches Wesen und Gewissen* [Magazine for Nordic being and consciousness] (Hunger 1984: 462).

These days the Sig rune is seen on the far right in this context. Its use is thus very popular, for example on covers of CDs of far-right music groups, as reminiscent of the SS (e.g. Guerlain 2010: 102). The fashion label *Thor Steinar* also originally referred to the Sig rune, in combination with the Tyr rune (see below). Such combinations of runes are also called bind runes.

Looking at it sideways, it is possible to make out double Sig runes, or also a horizontal *Wolfsangel* (see below). The symbolism in question was very often the subject of legal disputes and was changed in 2004. The label itself continues to exist and has since 2013 been using the original logo again in a slightly altered form.

The Sig rune was not just used by the National Socialists in double form as the insignia of the SS. It also appeared in the emblem of the SA [Sturmabteilung – storm troopers].

As a result of a certain similarity between this insignia and the logo of the fashion label *Alpha Industries*, clothing of this brand with the clearly recognisable emblem are popular in far-right circles.

Apart from these more or less unambiguous references to uses of the Sig rune already common under the National Socialist regime, the Sig rune is only used in isolated cases on the far-right scene on account of the risk of criminal prosecution. The use of the name Sigrun is a different matter. The fact, for example, that Frank Rennicke, lead singer-songwriter of the far-right movement, named one of his daughters *Sigrun* is certainly to be understood as part of an agenda.[1]

The National Socialist appropriation of the runes was not limited to the Sig rune but included both historically derived runes as well as inventions of 'new runes.'

Figure 5.24 The Thor Steinar logo from 2013

Figure 5.25 Insignia of the SA

Source: *Wikipedia, Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SA-Logo_(no_white_background).svg)*

Figure 5.26 Logo of the Alpha Industries brand

Source: *Wikipedia, Public Domain, Trade Mark (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alpha_Industries_logo.svg)*

Following in the tradition of the earlier appropriation through racist and esoteric currents of the early twentieth century that interpreted and 'further developed' the runes for their own purposes, the National Socialist movement displayed a particular interest in all actual or supposed Germanic signs and symbols. A book that was highly influential in terms of the esoteric interpretation of the runes was Guido von List's *Das Geheimnis der Runen* [The secret of the runes], published in 1907 (Sünner 1999: 89). There was accordingly a broad spectrum of interest in the runes that ranged from the academic to the esoteric: 'Two university institutes, lay researchers as well as occultists occupied themselves with them [. . .]' (Sünner 1999: 87).

As well as using the already mentioned Sig rune, the National Socialists frequently made use also of the Algiz rune (also *Algis* or *Elhaz*). It was also used with an esoteric meaning in the Third Reich: Referred to as Man rune or Yr rune, it was interpreted as a life rune, or, in inverted form, as a death rune (Hunger 1984: 100; Stuhl 2001: 123f.). Birth and death could thus be symbolised with these forms. This interpretation of the Algiz rune originated in 1902 with the esoteric figure Guido von List, who influenced at least parts of the National Socialist movement significantly from the beginning (Banghard 2016: 44).

The interpretation of this rune as a life rune is, of course, the reason why it was worn by the *NS-Frauenschaft* [National Socialist Women's league] in their insignia, as the National Socialist image of women was so much associated with the mother role.

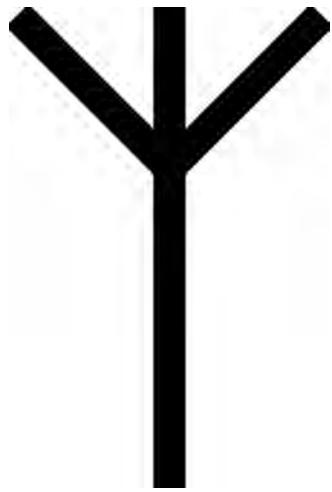

Figure 5.27 Algiz rune

Source: *Wikipedia, Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Runic_letter_algiz.svg)*

Figure 5.28 Insignia of the *NS-Frauenschaft* displaying the Algiz rune

Figure 5.29 Insignia of the *Nordland Sanitätsdienst*
Source: *VS-Niedersachsen*

Figure 5.30 Logo of the far-right association *Bürgerbündnis Havelland*
Source: *VS-Brandenburg*

There are also constant references on the far right to the (originally esoteric) interpretation of the Algiz rune as a life rune, such as may be seen below on the insignia of the Neo-Nazi self-help organisation *Nordland-Sanitätsdienst* [Northern Land Medical Service]:

The far-right association *Bürgerbündnis Havelland* [Association of citizens of the Havelland] also uses the Algiz rune in its logo. The connection with the National Socialist usage as life rune may be gathered from the agenda of the association (Ministerium des Innern und für Kommunales des Landes Brandenburg 2019: 89).

In every case, the Algiz rune is used on the scene as a means of recognition. Further examples are also evidence of this:

> [. . .] in the telephone book of the small town of Anklam a roofer named Mirko Gudath uses a life rune to advertise his services – immediately recognisable for every Neo-Nazi as a mark of his own scene. Gudath is one of the leaders of the far-right *Kameradschaft Anklam* [Anklam brotherhood/comrades] [. . .].
>
> (Ramelsberger 2005: 5)

The inverted rune/reverse of the Algiz rune is also used on the far right with the same meaning as that common in the Third Reich: It is to be found, for example, on death notices and other advertisements in far-right periodicals in the giving of the dates of a person's life (Versteckspiel 2005: 15). An inverted Algiz rune (inverted rune = death rune) on the side of the road marks the place of the accidental death of a member of the far right (Versteckspiel 2017: 51).

A corresponding instrumentalization of the runes was already widespread in death notices of the SS as a way of avoiding the Christian symbol of the cross. The example given below of a death notice in a circular of the far right follows this tradition. The reference to Germanic culture is made explicit not only through the runes, but additionally through the use of the old German names for the months.

Figure 5.31 Use of the Algiz rune and its inverted form (reverse rune) in a death notice

Beyond such usage however, the Algiz rune is also depicted on clothing and accessories as well as being applied in tattoos (Versteckspiel 2017: 27).

Combined in one graphic sign, the life and death runes become the so-called Hagal rune (*Hagalaz*) that is interpreted in esoteric thought as a sign of the all-encompassing, the universal. In this graphic form it is found in Younger Futhark and has the sound value [h].

This rune forms part of the far-right spectrum not least because it was also used by the SS under the National Socialist regime – as the troop insignia of the 6th SS mountain division 'North' (Versteckspiel 2005: 15, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/6._SS-Gebirgs-Division_%E2%80%9ENord%E2%80%9C).

The name *Hagal* was accordingly chosen for ideological reasons as the title of a far-right oriented Dresden magazine, a title that moreover establishes a link with

Figure 5.32 Algiz rune badge

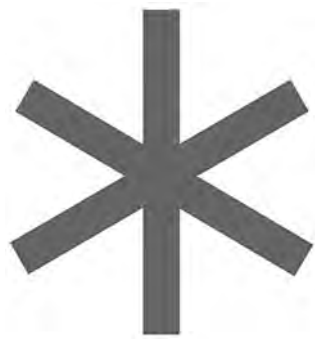

Figure 5.33 Hagal rune

Source: *Wikipedia, Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hagal_2-3dim.jpg)*

Figure 5.34 Logo of the far-right magazine *N.S. Heute* [NS today]

a periodical of the same name in the Third Reich, issued by the Munich *Edda-Gesellschaft* [Edda society] (e.g. Hunger 1984: 461).

The Hagal rune is found in various far-right contexts, such as in the logo pictured above.

The Tyr rune (Tiwaz rune) was used during the National Socialist regime as the insignia of the *Reichsführerschulen* (Reich leadership schools) of the NSDAP [Nazi party] (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyr-Rune_(Orden)). It can also serve on the far right, along with the inverted rune of the Algiz rune, as a death sign: Thus members of the far right in the past sometimes placed a Tyr rune at the side of the road to mark the spot where a comrade had lost his life in a car accident (e.g. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 26 September 2003). In some areas Tyr runes are far-right signs that are commonly seen in the public areas, almost as marking of territory and a constant reminder of the presence of the scene:

> Strange crosses are seen on the streets of Vorpommern. The crossbeams point downward at an angle, and they come to a point at the top like arrows. The crosses commemorate the dead, those who smashed their cars into the trees at the side of the road – the very special dead: members of the far right who rejected everything Christian, and now also in death do not want to be troubled by a Christian symbol. On the trees of Vorpommern one sees such wooden runes more and more frequently.
>
> (Ramelsberger 2005: 5)

Named after Tyr, the god of war, the rune can evoke associations with war and violence. Use of the Tyr rune to mark the death of members of the far right is a way of suggesting symbolically that they met their death in war and battle. At the same time, the rune, just like the Algiz rune and its inverse, is a substitute for the traditional Christian symbolism.

Only recently has the so-called Naudiz rune also been increasingly adapted visually on the far right. It is the tenth rune of the Older Futhark and the eighth

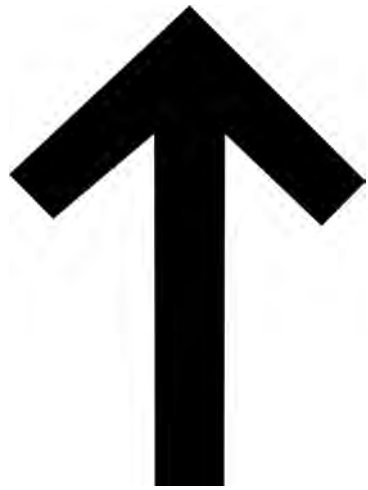

Figure 5.35 Tyr rune

Source: *Wikipedia, Public Domain (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tiwaz_rune.svg)*

rune of the old Norse rune alphabet. The Germanic rune name means 'need' or 'distress' (Düwel 2008: 7). While the rune was still understood in the Middle Ages as an ale rune and a protective rune against betrayal by women in the Old Norse sagas, it was first used recently on textiles of the fashion label *Erik and Sons* from König Wusterhausen, a company founded in 2007 known in connection with the far right (e.g. Banghard 2016: 45). The rune is, however, now also used more widely.

The increased usage of the rune probably derives not from its meaning, but rather from its sound value [n], whereby it can, of course, stand as an abbreviation for several terms seen as central on the far right, such as Nation, national, *Nationalsozialismus*, etc.

A further rune that is used on the far right and that was employed earlier by the National Socialists is the Odal rune. The interpretation of this rune as a sign of blood and soil can be traced back to Guido von List (Banghard 2016: 45).

In the Third Reich it was used for instance on the insignia of the *Gebirgsdivision Prinz Eugen* [mountain division Prince Eugen] of the Waffen-SS (e.g. Hunger 1984: 99ff.). During the Third Reich a magazine also appeared with the title *Odal* and the subtitle *Monatsschrift für Blut und Boden* [Monthly paper for blood and soil] (Hunger 1984: 462).

After the Second World War, the Odal rune was the insignia of the *Wiking-Jugend* [Viking youth], a group banned in 1994 (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiking-Jugend). The Odal rune also featured on the logo of the far-right *Bund Nationaler Studenten* [Federation of National Students], founded in 1956 and banned in 1961. The *Bund Heimattreuer Jugend* [Federation of patriotic youth]

Figure 5.36 Naudiz rune
Source: *Wikipedia, Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Runic_letter_naudiz.svg)*

Figure 5.37 Erik and Sons banner displaying the Naudiz rune

(banned in Austria in 1961, active in Germany from 1990 only under the name *Freibund*) similarly used the Odal rune as hallmark (Stuhl 2001: 123).

There is also evidence of reference to the name of the rune on the far-right scene: a pub used for gatherings was named the *Odal-Klause* [Odal retreat] (Hundseder 1998: 46). A far-right music group also goes under the name *Odal*.

Figure 5.38 Odal rune

Source: *Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odal_(rune); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odal_(rune)#/media/File:Odal-2.svg)*

Figure 5.39 Odal rune tattoo

Source: *Recherche Nord*

Illustrations of the rune are certainly found on the scene too. Graphic use of the Odal rune is legally not unproblematic since the banning of the *Wiking-Jugend*. It is precisely for this reason that the use of the name of the rune is a convenient means of expressing the reference.

As was already the case with the National Socialists, the contemporary far right do not limit their references to the rune alphabets of the Older or the Younger Futhark. Characters of the so-called Armanen-Futhark, based on the theories of the esoteric thinker Guido von List, are also used as symbols in addition to other characters supposedly attributed to the runes, such as the so-called *Wolfsangel*, named after an iron hunting implement, (allegedly or actually) used for trapping wolves (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfsangel).

Once again, a connection is being made here with the Third Reich through this pseudo rune primarily derived from the right-wing esoteric theories of the nineteenth century. It was to be found, among other places, on the arms of 2nd SS tank division *Das Reich*:

In the esoteric tradition according to Guido von List, the Wolfsangel is also referred to as the Gibor rune. This name is as common on the far-right scene as the graphic representation (Versteckspiel 2017: 50). Thus, for example, one group that also published a song book with pertinent lyrics, called itself *Gibor-Jugend* [Gibor youth].

Finally, a form of typeface intended to remind one of runes is used on the far right. Certainly, it consists only to a small degree of historically-recorded rune characters, while the majority of the letters merely imitate the angular formal peculiarities of the runes. This supposed runic script is really a typeface of capital letters whose form is inspired by the runes. Among the letters that actually correspond to individual runes is, for example, the 'T' that matches the Tyr rune.

The motive for the use of such a script is very easily recognised.

Graphematics permit a reference to the runes to be established and thus also to the Germanic tribes, seen by the far right as the ancestors of the Germans. In addition, the runes and then also the pseudo runic script are associated with Norse-Germanic mythology and thus with Norse-Germanic paganism. In this way, the pseudo runic script – through establishing a (supposed) line of tradition extending

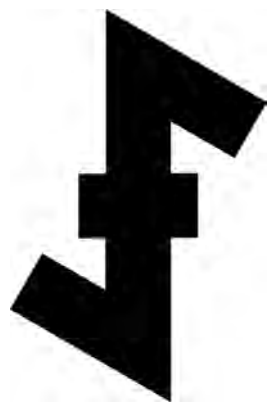

Figure 5.40 Wolfsangel

Source: *Wikipedia, Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wolfsangel_1.svg)*

Figure 5.41 Arms of the 2nd SS tank division *Das Reich*

Source: *Wikipedia, Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SS-Panzer-Division_symbol.svg)*

Figure 5.42 T-shirt displaying the Wolfsangel, a wolf (Fenris wolf), and stylised swastikas

Figure 5.43 Tattoo Wolfsangel
Source: *Recherche Nord*

back to the Germanic peoples and their culture – not only has an archaicising function, but also an ideological and identity-building function. Compared to the historical runes, the pseudo-runic script has the advantage that it ensures general legibility.

Both during the National Socialist regime and on the contemporary far right, runes functioned and continue to function as symbols of identification (Korgel/Borstel 2002: 218). The National Socialists frequently reinterpreted the runes to suit their own purposes. It was not without reason, for example, that the double Sig rune was used as the insignia of the SS: As well as the connection with the Germanic tradition, there was the significance attributed to the rune and that already is clear from its name [Sieg = victory]. The duplication makes this even stronger. The graphic, aesthetic level also appears to have been not insignificant here, as the shape of the rune is reminiscent of a bolt of lightning, an image that is generally understood – and especially in mythology – as a sign of violent force and power.

On the basis of their magical components, the runes served the National Socialists not only as a sign of mere allegiance: They conferred, through the identity they generated, a cult-like, spiritual component. The same can be said for their use on the far right today.

Figure 5.44 Title page of the far-right newsletter *Declaration of War* displaying pseudo-runic script

Figure 5.45 Home page of the *Heimdall-Versand* [mail order company] using pseudo-runic script

Figure 5.46 Runic writing on a sling
Source: *Recherche Nord*

Apart from referring to individual, concrete runes, the far right in the German-speaking world also invokes the entirety of the runes, especially by forming descriptive names with the component *Rune(n)*:

Thus, for example, a far-right magazine with the striking title, *Runenblut* [Rune blood], shows how the runes are interpreted almost as insignia of battle.

Pseudonyms used on the internet, especially on social networks, often have the function of a declaration of belief, and are thus to be seen as indications of an agenda. Cover names such as *Runahilta* (a combination of the Old High German *runa* 'secret' and *hiltja* 'battle'), *RunenKrieger* [rune warriors], and *Runa Wolfstochter* [wolf's daughter], have all been verified. Such names can all be traced

back to an association of runes with battle and war, whether that be through the stereotypical image of the Germanic peoples promoted on the scene, or on the basis of the references to the Third Reich. Pseudonyms such as *Runenweber* [rune weaver], *Runa*, *Rune*, *nordruna* [North runa], *Runenleser* [rune reader], on the other hand, are evidence of the fascination of the runes as the essence of the mysterious/secretive.

If, in conclusion, one compares the appropriation of the runes on the contemporary far right with that of the National Socialists, specifically in the Third Reich, one may observe significant overlapping. Precisely the same runes are employed intensively on the contemporary far right as those that were used as insignia by the National Socialists (Fahr 2004: 130f.). They are especially used to convey a declaration to the outside world: 'Sig and Tyr runes are the first rune characters that teachers usually find themselves faced with, when pupils substitute these for the corresponding letters' (Fahr 2005: 47).

Indeed, it is evident that the adoption of the runes by the far right is clearly broader and more intensive than was the case under National Socialism. This applies especially with regard to the multitude of products distributed via right-wing extremist retailers and that are used for identity-building on the scene.

In addition, the National Socialist use of the runes was very much aesthetically/formally motivated: 'In practice their purely ornamental usefulness as an indication of rank or area of activity was central; concern with the content was largely done without' (Hunger 1984: 99).

5.4 The Black Sun

Along with the legacy of historical runes and the esoteric new rune characters deriving from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one innovation in the general context of the runes that is especially significant for the far right in the German-speaking world deserves particular mention. This is the so-called Black Sun, a wheel consisting of twelve Sig runes.

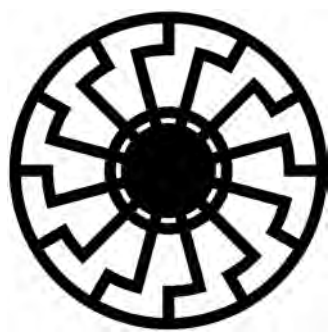

Figure 5.47 Black Sun

Source: *Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sun_(symbol); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sun_(symbol)#/media/File:BlackSun.svg)*

The Black Sun can, according to Heller/Maegerle (2007: 114), be regarded as the 'central symbol of the contemporary German far right.' The symbol is derived from the similarly shaped mosaic on the floor of the *Obergruppenführer* hall in the crypt of the north tower of the Wewelsburg (south of Paderborn). The fascination of the symbol results on the one hand from the place in which it is found: The Wewelsburg was, in the Nazi period, the home first of a staff of scientists that were part of the SS folklore research programme. It subsequently became the aim of Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsführer of the SS, to convert the castle into a prestigious meeting place for senior SS leaders (Schlegelmilch/Raabe 2015: 80ff.). The castle is thus a site of commemoration of the SS par excellence. On the other hand, the symbol can, in a broader sense, serve as a reminder of the swastika. A dynamic sense of rotation is conveyed by both symbols.

It should be noted here that the symbolism of numbers plays a certain role in the number of the runes that form the Black Sun, as the number twelve represents completeness and power in the Germanic tradition (Schuppener 1998: 21ff.). The sign itself, however, never played any role as a symbol for the National Socialists.

> It is clear that in the case of the so-called 'Black Sun' one may only speak of a 'National Socialist symbol' in the sense of its historical origin/location, not however in the sense of a bearer of meaning for the National Socialist ideology. For contemporary viewers, the composition was purely an ornament for a prestigious round room.
>
> (Schlegelmilch/Raabe 2015: 81)

It is only since the 1990s that the sign has been interpreted ideologically as a symbol in the far-right sense and supplied with the name *Black Sun*. The symbol functioned there first in its relatively short interpretative history primarily as a literary motif (Schlegelmilch/Raabe 2015: 88ff.). It was subsequently however loaded among other things with esoteric significance and interpreted as a supposed sign of Nordic primordial power (Versteckspiel 2017: 24).

One could interpret in this sense the combination of images on the cutting board pictured below, distributed by a mail order company on the far-right scene: Out of the base of the Black Sun grows, with the Irminsul, the existence of the world, the Irminsul representing here Yggdrasil, the tree of the world. Where the 'Tradition' referred to derives its sustenance is clear from the tanks pictured in the background, namely in battle.

Over the last few decades, use of this symbol has become a solid, foundational and almost omnipresent component of the symbolic repertoire of the far right, and the Black Sun is now, as a substitute for the swastika, a fundamental symbol of far-right identity. This is clear from the numerous instances of its use.

Already in the 1990s the Black Sun was prominently displayed in a central position on the internet site of the far-right Thule network (pictured in Pfeiffer 2015: 175). There is a company called *Schwarze-Sonne-Versand* [Black Sun mail order] based in Rain am Lech offering goods targeted at the far-right scene (Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Innern, für Sport und Integration 2020: 140).

Figure 5.48 Cutting board displaying Black Sun and Irminsul (detail)

The Black Sun appears everywhere in publications, on CD covers and on internet sites on the far-right scene as a badge of recognition. The range of T-shirts, jackets, even underwear available with the Black Sun is immense (e.g. Pfeiffer 2015: 177f.). Apart from these, there are various accessories, devotional objects and utensils emblazoned with the Black Sun: 'The range [. . .] enables purchasers to wear their commitment to extreme right-wing views in a way that is visible to the outside world' (Schlegelmilch/Raabe 2015: 92).

Not infrequently, the Black Sun is incorporated into a more complex image that requires some further interpretation. It was prominently displayed, for example, on the internet site of the far-right *Mädelring Thüringen* [circle of girls of Thuringia], encircled by the Midgard serpent. As the Midgard serpent surrounding the human world is one of the enemies of the world, this combination can be interpreted as indicating the continuing confrontation of the far right with the enemies of the world (= democrats).

In summary, the Black Sun (in contrast with the symbolic repertoire of National Socialism) has therefore become an innovative symbol of the contemporary far right that additionally marks allegiance to the scene and a commitment to extreme right-wing ideology in an exclusive and unambiguous fashion.

Figure 5.49 Advertising banner of the *Ostfront-Versand* with Black Sun in the background

Figure 5.50 T-shirt with typical image of the Black Sun [Slogan reads: 'The victory of light is the salvation of life']

5.5 Combinations of symbols

Generally speaking, on the far right – just as in other places – several symbols are often combined together, as has already become clear in some of the examples mentioned above. What results then is a complex image code that is frequently further extended through the use of language to become a multimodal text. Three examples will be given and examined in closer detail below:

The flag of the *Deutsche Heidnische Front*[2] [German pagan front] displays both the Algiz rune and its inverse (Rechtsextremismus im Internet 2004). As these

stand especially as signs for life and death on the far right, they may indeed be interpreted here as intended to symbolise the all-embracing claims of paganism. In the centre of the flag is the so-called *Wodan's eye*, indicating the central role of the Norse-Germanic gods for this group. The Wodan's eye also symbolises the almighty power of the divinity. The background features the colour combination black-white-red, referring to the *Reichskriegsflagge* [Imperial War Flag] so popular on the far right, and the layout with the centrally placed round Wodan's eye can call to mind the pictorial structure of the swastika flag.

While the flag of the *Deutsche Heidnische Front* does not include any linguistic elements, the following insignia with the inscription *Odins Volk Sachsen* [Odin's people of Saxony] does represent a combination of language and image, and is therefore a multimodal text:

Figure 5.51 Flag of the *Deutsche Heidnische Front*

Source: *Wikipedia, Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Algiz_runes_on_flag_-_Algiz-Rune_auf_Flagge.jpg)*

Figure 5.52 Insignia with the legend *Odins Volk Sachsen*

The linguistic message forms a harmonious triad: The reference to Odin, and thus to Norse-Germanic mythology, stands for a rejection of contemporary society and for establishing a line of tradition leading back to Germanic culture. The word *Volk*, of high value for the far right, in turn clarifies the breadth of the membership, while also conveying the genetic, racial aspect of the National Socialist concept of the *Volk*. In addition, the wearers of the insignia are positioning themselves as members of a community that further demonstrates its might, influence, etc., through declaring its allegiance to Odin. The third element *Sachsen* [Saxony] finally gives the specific regional location and thus the group's relationship to the *Heimat*/homeplace.

The pictorial code may be interpreted as follows: In central position is a stylised skull out of which the Algiz rune grows as the rune of life. From death therefore, and for the far right specifically sacrificial death, comes life again. At the lower edge of the picture is a Celtic cross – seen particularly on the American far right as a symbol of the superiority of the white race. The letters M and F on the two side edges of the insignia are the initials of Matthias Förster, a member of the far right who was fatally wounded by a Vietnamese man during a stabbing incident at the Christmas market in Bernsdorf (Saxony) in 2000 and was thus promoted to the position of blood witness for the far-right movement in Saxony. This person at the same time represents paradigmatically the transcendental perspective contained in the pictorial code.

The following case of a sew-on badge from a mail order company on the far right also clearly shows the combination of symbols producing an overall picture:

The badge not only displays Odin's horse Sleipnir as a symbol of superiority, but also a centrally placed stylised swastika that through its position clearly shows ideologically how the badge is to be interpreted. Further, the depiction of Odin's ravens, Huginn and Muninn, symbolises higher knowledge and the elitist claims of the far

Figure 5.53 Odin riding Sleipnir

right. Finally, the addition of the Valknut over Odin gives the picture as a whole a metaphysical or transcendent dimension. All these qualities relate to the centrally placed swastika as a symbol of political ideology. Overall, the mythological content of the picture is thus closely connected with far-right and National Socialist ideology.

The symbols presented all serve either individually or in combination as a means of creating a sense of identity and of marking allegiance to the group. At the same time, they function as political propaganda. This is particularly the case where they establish a connection with National Socialism. In addition, they serve – as they relate to Germanic history and culture – as a means of appropriating the historical legacy and of creating a legitimating line of tradition.

Finally, many of the symbols are clearly intended to be understood as anti-Christian: the inverse of the Algiz rune and the Tyr rune are substituted for the Christian cross as symbols of death; Wodan's eye, a neo-pagan invention, replaces the eye of God of traditional Christian iconography; and in place of the cross as a symbol of salvation, renewal, and re-birth, one finds the Black Sun as a sign of a new world order after Ragnarök, the downfall of the current system (Scholz 2010: 22f.). Certainly, both linguistically and symbolically, in general 'structures and contents of the Christian religion are taken and translated into the "new" religion' (Huene 2007: 27). They are, in other words, integrated into the linguistic and symbolic patterns of the far right.

5.6 The symbolism of numbers

It is well recognised that numerical codes are some of the most especially widespread and richly varied forms of communication and self-representation of extreme right-wing groups in the German-speaking world (e.g. Versteckspiel 2017: passim; Korgel/Borstel 2002: 220f.; Kohlstruck 2002: 113f.; Miller-Idriss 2017: 51ff.). Far-right messages can easily be deciphered with some knowledge of these numerical codes that occasionally also appear in combination with individual letters. Well known examples are: 18 = *Adolf Hitler*, *88 = Heil Hitler*, *28 = Blood and Honour*,[3] 14 = *fourteen words*,[4] or = *N* (for *national, National Socialism, NSDAP*), H8 = *Heil Hitler*, or *hate* in English etc.

As explicit propaganda for National Socialism and the glorification of the Third Reich or the Nazi party, etc., are criminal offences in the German-speaking world, numerical codes represent an effective and at the same time legitimate means of getting around these provisions of the criminal law. For numbers are an omnipresent part of everyday life and thus cannot be prohibited. Moreover, interpretations of numbers – such as that 88 stands for *Heil Hitler* – can easily be denied and replaced by other innocuous interpretations.

Most numerical codes, however, have no connection with Germanic history, culture, or mythology. This suggests that they serve mostly to encrypt references to National Socialism or similar.

One exception is certainly the far-right use of the number 12. This number had a function in Germanic culture in the widest sense, especially however also in Norse-Germanic mythology as a prominent symbolic number standing in

particular for totality and completeness (Schuppener 1998). This symbolism of the number 12 is being openly adopted again on the contemporary far right, as the following examples show:

The Black Sun, today a central graphic symbol and badge of recognition of the far-right scene in the German-speaking world, contains twelve radial Sig runes. The symbol already came about in the National Socialist period, and the number of the Sig runes is in all probability not coincidental, but rather inspired by the Germanic tradition of numerical symbolism.

The number 12 is an explicit element of the name of the *Kameradschaft* [association of comrades] called *Nordic 12*:

> One of the few relevant groupings that has a base capable of action is the 'Bruderschaft Nordic 12,' in existence since 2014. Its structures and organisational focal points are found in Bremen and North Rhine-Westphalia, among other places. In appearance and habitus, the 'Bruderschaft' is influenced by so-called 'Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs' [. . .].
>
> (www.belltower.news/jahresrueckblick-2019-bremen-aktive-kameradschaftsszene-kampfsport-rechtsrock-94445/)

Here too the number twelve stands for totality and completeness, and refers at the same time to the Black Sun as well as the worldview associated with it, as is evident in the photograph below:

Figure 5.54 Nordic 12 members carrying a banner – the Black Sun is recognisable

Source: *Recherche Nord*

All in all, even in the numerical symbolism popular on the far right one may find references to the Germanic tradition, if indeed the majority of the numbers used as codes serve to encrypt contemporary far-right messages or potentially criminal references to National Socialism.

5.7 Summary

According to German, Austrian, and to some extent also Swiss law, the display of much of the symbolism associated with National Socialism – and, later, with banned right-wing extremist organisations – is a punishable offence (Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen 2019a: 7ff.). However:

> The use of a symbol of a forbidden organisation is not in principle a criminal offence when this symbol has been altered in some minor way to become a sign used by a legal grouping or institution and is regarded as such by a neutral observer.
>
> (Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen 2019a: 21)

This applies, for example, to the Odal rune, commonly used by the Federal army and by scouts.

One cannot impose a blanket ban on cultural material and everyday symbols. It is for this reason that the runes and other signs as well as (combinations of) numbers cannot in principle be prohibited by law and are thus predestined for use by members of the far right. Any potential criminal prosecution for such use can be countered by invoking the cultural heritage and cultural history. In the case of numbers there is also the fact that it is impossible to prove conclusively that they have been used symbolically and different interpretations are of course always possible. Even a hypothetical prohibition of particular combinations of numbers could also be easily circumvented, such as by substituting 2 x 44 for 88.

Attempts to prohibit symbols by legislation quickly reach their limits, as is illustrated by the example of the most important symbol of the contemporary far-right scene in the German-speaking world: The Black Sun is not a symbol of any banned organisation and its use is therefore not punishable by law (Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Sachsen 2019a: 22).

One can see from this example that repression through the banning of symbols is hardly effective. Even in the case of very concrete prohibitions, the symbols in question can be replaced with distorted versions or similar symbolic codes.

The functions of symbols of various kinds used on the far right are the same as the functions of the symbols of other political groups. They serve to declare a position to the outside world, to establish an identity and to facilitate recognition and the constitution of group allegiance (both internally and externally).

However, along with the explicit or implicit functions of symbols mentioned above, such as establishing identity or declaration to the outside world, in the case of the far right there is also a function that is not typical of other democratic political groups, namely the use of symbols as a secret code or sign language. Symbols that

are little known among the general public can be used as a way of separating a group off from mainstream society as well as at least superficially concealing mostly criminal contents and objectives. That reference is made here specifically to the runes is not least the result of the very limited knowledge of this subject in society at large.

Notes

1 The author is grateful to Ellen Esen (Karlsruhe) for drawing his attention to this.
2 The *Deutsche Heidnische Front* is to be understood as part of the internationally organised *Allgermanische Heidnische Front* [total/general Germanic ...] on whose logo the Algiz rune also appears (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heathen_Front).
3 The name of an international far-right network.
4 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children' – the words of the American right-wing extremist David Eden Lane.

6 Violent messages on far-right stickers and T-shirts with references to the Germanic tribes

6.1 Background

The use and the positive evaluation of violence as a political instrument play a central role on the far right – a role that is fundamentally based on the Social Darwinist ideology of this movement. The language used in far-right utterances is also frequently characterised by an aggressive tone. Occasionally such forms of expression are described in the literature as part of a 'language of hate' (Heller/Maegerle 2001; Schafer 2002). Germanic history and culture, and particularly mythology are accordingly interpreted on the far right with a focus on battle and violence.

In the context of these already known facts, what follows now is a more detailed examination of two aspects of the public image of the far right that are significant in terms of the self-portrayal and identity building of extreme right-wing groups, namely T-shirts and stickers from the far-right scene. The propaganda function of these products has so far been largely ignored.[1] Yet, in addition to their propaganda dimension, precisely stickers and T-shirts – especially when they are consciously selected with an inscription or an image printed on them – also have the function of declaring the convictions and orientations of the wearer or user. They may thus differentiate the users and agitate other people as well as establish identity or community within the group (e.g. Kumięga 2013; Meier-Schuegraf 2005: 44).

Specifically, what is to be examined in relation to these promotional items are the linguistic and visual devices and especially the combinations of text and image that are used to promote and legitimate violence.

6.2 Methodology and material evidence

This examination is based first of all on the assembly of suitable corpora. In order to gather material from the scene in the broadest and most authentic fashion, it makes sense to focus on the range of goods on offer from far-right distributors. It is first necessary, therefore, to get an overview of the market.

In view of the diversity of the groups on the recent far-right scene as well as of the fluctuation of suppliers/distributors on the internet, acquiring a methodically verifiable material basis is not, indeed, without its problems. The starting point chosen, for this reason, was a search using the key word '*Versand*' ['distributors/

DOI: 10.4324/9781003206309-6

mail order'] in the internet encyclopaedia *Metapedia* (https://de.metapedia.org), the far-right alternative to Wikipedia. In its German version, this portal includes over 70,000 articles (73,055, as of 16 September 2020, to be precise) on generally ideologically relevant and accordingly interpreted topics. The internet sites of the distributors found through this search were looked at – insofar as they still existed – and evaluated in terms of the range of stickers and T-shirts on offer. For pragmatic reasons, the evaluation was restricted to German language sites. All the mail order firms can be clearly categorised as belonging to the far-right scene – either on the basis of having been named in reports of the authorities [Office for the Protection of the Constitution], or because they have been linked and recommended by other extreme right-wing sites, or as they are operated by groups on the far right. The virtual marketplaces eBay and Amazon were, however, not included, although one may purchase numerous far-right materials on these sites. It is not possible here to clearly set limits to the far-right scene. Otherwise, all larger publicly-accessible distribution channels for and from the German-speaking world on the internet are included here.

The mail order firms in question are part of the high-grade commercialisation of the far-right scene that also serves to finance its own activities. Concerts, the sale of recordings, of propaganda and advertising material, of clothing or of accessories – all are means by which extreme right-wing ideas are disseminated in ways that are also economically successful. The expression and self-reinforcement of neo-Nazi convictions play an important role in this. Products of the everyday life of members of the far-right that are supplied by various providers as a rule serve primarily the group identity and generally carry ideological messages (Pfeiffer 2017). While almost all distributors sell clothing and especially T-shirts, only a portion of the outlets include stickers as part of their range.

Textiles constitute mostly a very large, and often the largest part of the product range of the distributors. The strong focus on clothing in the product range of far-right companies is not just to be explained as resulting from the identity-building function of clothing and the high demand presumably arising from this, but it is also a consequence of the not inconsiderable profit margins in this area. Some simple research on the internet very quickly shows that printed T-shirts can be produced even in small quantities at under five euros apiece. The sales prices of printed T-shirts from these suppliers, on the other hand, lie (insofar as they are not reduced) between 15 and 30 euro. Comparable figures apply to other kinds of textiles.

The variety of T-shirts in particular that is on offer from these companies is large. Thus, for example, there were over 200 various models available from the *Deutsches Warenhaus*, the mail order company of the NPD [National Democratic Party] publisher *Deutsche Stimme*.

The range of textile products available from these distributors is not limited to T-shirts, but includes everything from textile fashion accessories, underwear, and baby clothing, to jackets and caps. However, the T-shirts (referred to as *T-Hemden* on the German-speaking far-right scene [avoiding use of the usual English loan word]) can be considered the leading textiles in terms of propaganda. Words and

images printed on T-shirts are directed at a broader public than similarly decorated baby clothing or underwear. Moreover, many of the messages on T-shirts are to be found (often abbreviated) also on jackets, sweatshirts, and caps, etc. Despite the sales prices mentioned, T-shirts are relatively cheap when compared to jackets, for example, and are thus particularly suitable for the dissemination of propaganda messages, political declarations, and provocative slogans.

What has been said here about T-shirts also applies in an analogous fashion to stickers. Stickers are generally pieces of printed plastic film with a layer of adhesive on the back so that they can be fixed to smooth surfaces. On account of their small size and material composition, they can be particularly quickly and simply applied in place. Moreover, at least in terms of their material composition, they are distinctly long-lasting. Placing stickers on cars or on free-standing objects in public places – such as streetlamps, cable junction boxes, etc. – is particularly popular. As these uses clearly indicate, stickers are generally aimed at a wider public.

In the political context, stickers are especially popular with smaller political parties and groupings (Gmeiner 2005: 180). For a long time, stickers were generally a frequently-used advertising medium; these days this is becoming less common in the commercial sector. The decisive advantage of this advertising medium are the low costs, particularly when compared to posters:

> They are small, colourful and very noticeable, and therefore represent a perfect alternative to posters. One can stick these mini posters everywhere; there are no costs, as long as one does not cause damages to anything [. . .] They can be placed for an extended period on surfaces that could not be reached by normal advertising (schoolbags, bicycles, cars etc.).
>
> (Gmeiner 2005: 180)

Statistical surveys of the use of stickers in various places show that they are in fact mostly deployed for political purposes. Commercially motivated stickers are less frequent (Roth 2006: 246). In every case, stickers are aimed primarily at the public sphere that is so especially important for the intended visibility of extreme right-wing activities. The public sphere has a constitutive function for far-right rituals and for the image the far right presents, particularly on account of the specifics of the organisational structure of the far-right scene, characterised by a predominance of sparsely institutionalised regional or local groups of activists (Dücker 2015: 49ff.). Stickers can help to achieve a relatively broad degree of visibility without requiring much organisational effort, and can, at the same time, serve as signs indicating presence as well as marking out ‘far-right territories’ (similarly in Roth 2006: 252).

Along with stickers, this popular kind of advertising also includes (and one is not claiming this is a complete list) such items as: badges/pins/buttons, sewn-on badges, posters, and flags. All these propaganda items are sold against payment on the far-right scene. And considerable profits can be made in this: While a sticker costs just a couple of cents to produce, they are sold in online shops for a multiple of that cost (mostly in packets of ten, fifty, or a hundred).

Stickers target young people and young adults as both users and audience; they are 'a means of expression especially of young people and are typical symbols of identification within youth cultures' (Roth 2006: 245). Right from the beginning, 'the sticker served as a sign of a particular lifestyle and was aimed at establishing social distinction' (Roth 2006: 247).

Both stickers and printed T-shirts are very popular in the far-right subculture and contribute significantly to the dissemination and public presence of political messages. The lifestyle associated with this, at any rate, together with diverse symbolic repertoires, represents a central form of integration for adherence to extreme right-wing groups (Brodkorb 2002: 10f.). The far-right subculture has been consciously associating itself in this way with successful elements of wider popular culture for quite a long time (Schröder 2001: 65ff.; Staud 2006: 156ff.).

Stickers and T-shirts are thus both expressions in different forms of a lifestyle. At the same time, they are instruments of propaganda. With stickers, the 'advertising' function is primary; with T-shirts it is secondary, if also intended. Very often there is a combination of text and image. One speaks in such cases of so-called multimodal texts.[2] It is precisely through the combination of text and image that contexts, associations and more complex messages may be conveyed. With regard to the political propaganda content, the image aspect also often serves as an eye-catcher, thus attracting attention for the intended messages.

Linguistically, both kinds of text (stickers and printed matter on T-shirts) are characterised by condensed messages and further by the frequent combination of text and image as well as, in pragmatic-stylistic terms, by emotive, persuasive language. As a result of the latter pragmatic orientation in particular, both kinds of texts can be described as primarily persuasive (Bülow 2006: 25); they certainly also frequently exhibit declarative elements (in terms of their function of declaring political beliefs).

Considering particularly those products available from clearly far-right distributors guarantees that the material does in fact belong to the far-right context. This is very important given the issue of obfuscation, pointed out by Glaser/Pfeiffer (2017), for what frequently applies is this: 'The extreme right-wing character of [. . .] texts is not always apparent at first sight' (Glaser/Pfeiffer 2017: 15). The same is often also true of symbols and other pictorial codes.

With regard to the interpretation, adaptation and instrumentalization of Germanic history and culture, the location of materials in a far-right context is decisive for the interpretation of the references, as more or less apolitical or at least non-far-right groups of esoteric thinkers, neo-pagans or those just interested in history also occupy themselves with Germanic culture or even identify themselves with it.

On account of the very diverse range on offer in the two product categories being examined here, only a very small portion of the relevant material can be presented below. This insight into a sample of that material can, however, clearly demonstrate the form and significance of the recourse to the Germanic past and particularly to Norse-Germanic mythology in terms of the transmission of violent messages.

6.3 Colours and text

In terms of colour composition, T-shirts and stickers have much in common. Black and white dominate in both products: either black with an image or slogan in white or the reverse, with black printed on a white (or a transparent) background). More than three-quarters of the cases surveyed were in this format. If a third colour is used, it is generally red. It is seldom that one finds colourful T-shirts and stickers on offer from far-right distributors. The most prominent colour here in any case is red.

This may seem at first just an interesting point worth noting in passing when looking at individual examples. Assembling them together more systematically, however, reveals that these colour preferences (black-white-red) are in accord with the generally standard conventions of the far right (e.g. www.dasversteckspiel.de). A connection is being made thus with the colours of the swastika flag or the Reichs(kriegs)flagge [Imperial (war) flag]. It is therefore clear that the choice of colours is in no way coincidental, but rather utterly ideologically determined and functionalised. A political message, namely a reference back to the Third Reich, is already to be conveyed through the colours.

The choice of colours is not affected by any hypothetical cost factors, as one can easily verify by comparing the sales prices of the few products in different colours with those in black and white (and red). The supply thus clearly mirrors the corresponding demand. The reference to National Socialism implicitly invokes the *völkisch*-racist and above all Social Darwinist ideology of the

Figure 6.1 Reichskriegsflagge [Imperial war flag]

Source: *Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:German_reichskriegsflagge.jpg)*

same, and thus subliminally establishes a context in which violence is viewed positively.

The typography used on the T-shirts and stickers that were examined also requires some consideration. Similar to the images, the typography is a component of the overall style of the multimodal text of the T-shirts and stickers. The lettering refers to patterns that have been internalised by the reader and thus already contribute to the interpretation of the text as a whole.

The choice and the composition of the typeface have several pragmatic functions: the structuring of visual space, the composition of images, the allusion to the pragmatic function of the linguistic utterance as well as the creation and reproduction of cultural and media conventions (Stöckl 2004a). Precisely this last aspect is especially significant with regard to the far-right specifics of the stickers. The typography namely already enables the sticker to be situated in a cultural context. As various forms of Roman type are commonly used today in almost all areas of everyday life and are thus politically and culturally neutral (unmarked), all other not so common typefaces stand out (as marked).

Such a marked departure from the typographical norms of mainstream society may be verified in relation to both the T-shirts and the stickers looked at: on the one hand through the use of Gothic script; on the other, through the use of runes and pseudo runic script.

The Gothic lettering popular on the far-right scene is understood and deployed as a reference to the Third Reich (Dücker 2015: 57.; Ueding/Kalivoda 2012: 1196). Although Gothic script was in fact replaced by Roman type from 1941, i.e. precisely during the Third Reich, and there is no evidence of a widespread use of Gothic lettering during the National Socialist period (Wehde 2000: 278, 280), the case for regarding the far-right preference for Gothic type as establishing a connection with National Socialism within ideological traditions appears compelling, insofar as this typeface was stylised in the first three decades of the twentieth century 'to become a symbol of linguistic-cultural, national political and racial Germanness' (Wehde 2000: 217).

Equally, the use of runes and pseudo runic script does not only have an aesthetic or attention-grabbing function, but an ideological component too. This kind of script invokes Germanic history and culture in the manner in which these – and especially Norse Germanic mythology – are interpreted on the far right in ideologically simplified and suitably adapted form (as discussed in detail above). As the runes were often understood – in the esoteric re-interpretations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example – as magic signs, their use today stands for access to some kind of higher knowledge and serves as an indication of allegiance to an elite group. Similar can be said of the stylised runic script (pseudo runes). For a pseudo runic script has, through the similarity with the runes, a similarly archaising effect, specifically referring to the culture of the ancient Germanic peoples. It too can be associated with paganism and thus establish connections (if purely artificial ones) with Norse-Germanic mythology.

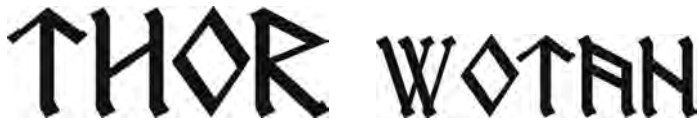

Figure 6.2 Thor and *Wotan* stickers

The use of stylised runic script is a phenomenon that can frequently be observed on the contemporary far-right scene, not least in print publications or on the internet (e.g. Schuppener 2010: Illustration appendix, Figure 3). The use of such an adaptation of runic script characters has the advantage – over 'genuine' runic script – of being generally readable and understandable. At the same time the reference to Germanic culture is maintained, thanks to the resemblance to the runes. Utilising this script is thus another way of establishing a line of tradition going back to the Germanic past.

Both runic and pseudo runic script are generally employed on T-shirts and stickers in contexts where there is some relation to mythology. The interpretation of mythology on the far right is, as one knows, selective and ideologically loaded. For this reason, stickers – such as the ones illustrated above that merely cite the names of the Germanic gods Wotan and Thor – are entirely proclamatory, evoking the widespread far-right view of these two gods as the embodiments of power and violent force.

6.4 Norse-Germanic mythology as a religion of violence

In the context of mythology, there are on T-shirts and stickers many forms of the affirmation of violence that are far more explicit than the mere mention of the names of the Norse-Germanic gods. This is essentially a matter of the confrontation of neo-paganism and Norse-Germanic mythology with Christianity – a confrontation that is entirely depicted as violent.

Christianity is rejected by the contemporary far right, on the one hand, with an anti-Semitic motive, as it is viewed as a supposedly 'Jewish' religion (Jennerjahn 2006: 87ff.), and, on the other, with historical arguments referring to it as a religion that was imposed on the Germanic peoples and one that is alien and a 'religion of the weak' (thus e.g. Dornbusch/Killguss 2005: 112; Jennerjahn 2006: 59ff.).[3] In the *völkisch* Social Darwinist oriented ideology of National Socialism and of the contemporary far right (Staud 2006: 98f.), an accordingly-interpreted religion based on Norse-Germanic mythology appears in comparison as an obvious alternative, not only because it is derived from the Germanic tradition, but also because in it (at least in the selective reading of the far right) the mightier is shown to prevail.

Stickers and also T-shirts often display, for example, one of the numerous variations of the following battle scenes, in which Norse-Germanic mythology is represented as clearly superior to Christianity:

Figure 6.3 Stickers showing ravens attacking a fish and an eagle snatching a fish

Figure 6.4 Eagle snatching fish motif on a T-shirt

The band *Sleipnir* sells a comparable sticker with pseudo runic legend, a black-white-red colour combination, and the subtitle *Heil den Göttern* [Hail the gods] evoking the Heil Hitler greeting:

The images in question are clearly intended in an aggressive, combative manner. The aggressive message in each case is: Christianity is weak and should be annihilated.

The image symbolism is easy to decipher: The stylised fish is a common Christian symbol[4] used in various forms, e.g. on Christian stickers. The far-right motifs

Figure 6.5 Heil den Göttern sticker

refer to this and assign the fish and thus Christianity a subordinate role below that of the other symbolic animals: the ravens (Huginn and Muninn), as the attributes of the Germanic supreme god Odin/Wodan, stand for Norse-Germanic mythology as the eagle further symbolises Germanness. The eagle is to be found in many forms in Norse-Germanic mythology. Thus, in mythology, giants and gods, such as the supreme god Odin, can take on the appearance of an eagle (Krause 2010: 12). In addition, Völuspa 59 describes how an eagle that has survived Ragnarök catches fish. The eagle thus here also stands for the Germanic gods and Germanic mythology. All this is presented through the image composition as directed against Christianity.

With regard to the motif of the eagle catching the fish, one should point out that the symbolic portrayal illustrated here also functions as the logo of the neo-pagan *Artgemeinschaft* [racial community] that describes itself as *Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft wesensgemäßer Lebensgestaltung* [Germanic Faith Community of a race-appropriate way of life] and is clearly on the far right. In the years from 1989 to 2009, it was led by the well-known right-wing extremist Jürgen Rieger. Rieger even had the symbol given protected status as a trademark for the 'community' in 2002 (Speit 2010c: 31).

The battle lines between Norse-Germanic mythology and Christianity are also drawn up linguistically in the widespread antithetical slogan *Odin statt Jesus* [Odin instead of Jesus]. In virtue of the confessional function, the speech act of the text is declarative-commissive: What is formulated is not merely a statement or a demand, but at the same time a confession or declaration of belief.

The message conveyed is indeed not simply an extremely provocatively formulated declaration of neo-pagan belief clearly separating itself off from a mainstream

Figure 6.6 Odin statt Jesus [Odin instead of Jesus] sticker

Figure 6.7 Odin statt Jesus [Odin instead of Jesus] sticker

society that is still predominantly shaped by Christianity, but a declaration of war. The alternative favoured (neo-paganism based on Norse-Germanic mythology) is thereby emphatically interpreted as a religion of violence, as is shown on one of the stickers illustrated where the slogan is juxtaposed with an image of the Germanic supreme god Odin as a warrior.

Evidence that the references to Norse-Germanic mythology not only affirm violence, but that this is specifically directed against all that is Christian, is found in the wall sticker illustrated below – *Walhalla – Zutritt für Christen verboten* [Valhalla – access forbidden for Christians]. The sticker is indeed intended as a sign on a door and to confer a mythical aura on a room. That Valhalla is thereby mainly being interpreted as the place of (fallen) warriors is shown by the warrior figure visible beside the slogan. To this extent the sticker is a declaration of readiness for sacrifice and violence – that Valhalla as 'the hereafter' [*Jenseitsort*] stands for in Norse-Germanic mythology – and at the same time a threat of violence against others (Christians) as the martial image demonstrates.

Similar threats of violence are conveyed in the two visual realisations of the declaration *Wir bleiben Heiden* [We remain pagans] below:

The sticker pictured below employs pseudo runic script and thus establishes a relationship with the Germanic past. The statement *Wir bleiben Heiden* represents both a defiant response to a mainstream society shaped by Christianity and also linguistically constructs (with *bleiben* [*remain*]) a supposedly unbroken line of tradition going back to Germanic culture and Germanic beliefs. The visual code of the centrally positioned sword underlines a willingness to forcefully defend one's own belief and sets up a contrast with non-pagan mainstream society. The slogan emphasises a polar opposition between *Wir* [*we*] (the far right) and *Sie* (the '*they*' only implied by the *Wir* as a differently characterised mainstream society). This is a polar opposition that is otherwise also a central, identity-building, traditional core component of the far right (Dücker 2015: 47). Altogether, the message of the combination of text and image is a declaration of war against Christianity, and thus also against mainstream society as such.

Figure 6.8 *Walhalla* wall sticker

Figure 6.9 *Wir bleiben Heiden* sticker

The statement is even more explicitly clear on a T-shirt where the phrase *Wir bleiben Heiden* is juxtaposed with images of a warrior's helmet and battle axes. The unconditional willingness to engage in battle is made clear through the legend *Sieg oder Tod* [Victory or death] at the top. Further underlining the unconditional declaration is the fact that the slogan *Wir bleiben Heiden* is not only found in Gothic script but is repeated again in runic script in the background. There is thus clear reference to the Germanic tribes in both the images and the typography.

The sticker with the slogan *Mein Leben für Odin* [my life for Odin] is similarly conceived: Here, the equally centrally placed, stylised executioner's axe signals, in warlike fashion, the affirmation of violence and the readiness for sacrifice of the user. This corresponds to the warlike glorification of warriors as heroes typical of the far-right ideology and portrayal of itself. The sticker is focused on text, yet the added value of the image consists not only in specifying and making the linguistic message (readiness for sacrifice and battle to the death) explicit, but the illustration of the axe is equally intended to attract attention.

The same phrase *Mein Leben für Odin* [my life for Odin] is also embedded in a larger context in the T-shirt pictured below. The front already emphasises the reference to battle and violence in the slogan and presumed self-identification of the wearer as *Krieger Odins* [Odin's warrior], as well as the image beside that of a Viking's helmeted head crowned with the slogan *Walhalla ruft!* [Valhalla

Figure 6.10 *Sieg oder Tod. Wir bleiben Heiden* [Victory or death. We remain pagans] T-shirt

Figure 6.11 Mein Leben für Odin [My life for Odin] sticker

Figure 6.12 Krieger Odins [Odin's warrior] T-shirt (front and back)

is calling!]. The back displays the same image and slogan, adding, as a form of climax, the commissive three-lined legend *Mein Schwert für Tyr – mein Blut für Thor – mein Leben für Odin!* [my sword for Tyr – my blood for Thor – my life for Odin!]. One thus finds here – and indeed with repeated emphasis – the declaration of commitment to violence and battle to the death, and that for the Germanic gods.

The latent violent character of Norse-Germanic mythology is also found, even if with an ironic twist, on the child's T-shirt pictured here: The alternatives familiar from [cartoon] crime scenes *Geld oder Leben* [Your money or your life!] have here been given an ironic twist and replaced in the legend on the T-shirt with *Kekse oder Walhalla* [biscuits or Valhalla]. Despite the witty tone of the expression, a violent message is still implied, as Valhalla stands for the consequence of death.

The T-shirt with the legend *Sleipnir* is a fan merchandising item of the band of the same name that is popular on the far-right scene. With its combination of text and image, it conveys, along with the declaration of a liking for the music group,

Figure 6.13 T-shirt with the legend *Kekse oder Walhalla* [Biscuits or Valhalla]

Figure 6.14 Sleipnir T-shirt (detail)

also a violent message. The slogan, almost the title above the heads of two guitars, contains a classic triad (*Alte Götter – Alte Schule – Alte Garde*) [Old gods – old school – old guard] that makes a statement about the band and its fans, and thus also about the wearer of the T-shirt. Alongside the belief in the Germanic gods (= old gods), also referred to in the name of the band itself, and the commitment to traditional values and actions (= old school), is an indication of allegiance to an elite military unit (old guard). The reference to violence is made explicit through the images of the two skulls in the foreground. Skulls are generally seen as signs of violence and readiness for the ultimate self-sacrifice, and were used under the National Socialist regime, for example by the SS-*Totenkopfbrigade* [skull

Figure 6.15 *Wotans Heer* [Wotan's army] T-shirt (front and back)

brigade], a historical reference that is perhaps even being played on here. The crossed guitars correspond either to the crossed bones on skull and crossbones flags or to the crossed swords or battle axes on other T-shirts referring to the Germanic peoples. In any case, the imagery on this T-shirt has an intimidating, warlike effect. Through the combination of text and image the 'old guard' at the end of the triad is thus in particular interpreted as a unit that is ready for violence.

The T-shirt with the slogan *Wotans Heer* [Wotan's army] in pseudo runic script on the front also celebrates violence. The legend on the back reads namely:

> *Äxte hoch!*
> *Auf dass unsere Feinde uns fürchten lernen!*
> *Mein Blut ist Deins*
> *Oh Hrungnirs Bezwinger!*
> *Mein Schwert ist Deins!*
> *Wotans Heer*
>
> Raise your axes!
> So that our enemies learn to fear us!
> My blood is yours
> Oh Hrungnir's conqueror!
> My blood is yours
> Wotan's army

The last line is written in runes, while the rest of the text is in Gothic script. Both kinds of script have a clear relation to the past. The Gothic font serves to make the

text appear archaic and, among other things, indirectly invoke National Socialism; the runes establish a connection with the Germanic past.

Especially worth noting in relation to this T-shirt is the multimodality, i.e. the combination of text and image. The front uses the colours black-white-red. This colour combination also enjoys great popularity in other places on the far right, as it mirrors the colours of both the Reichs(kriegs)flagge [imperial war flag] and the Hakenkreuzflagge [swastika flag] of the Third Reich. The typography of the front is modelled on the pseudo runic script that is popular on the far-right scene. The legend, *Wotans Heer* [Wotan's army], highlights two things: On the one hand, the warlike intention; and on the other the dedication to the supreme god of the Germanic tribes Odin/Wotan, regarded in the interpretation of the far right often as the 'Lenker der Schlachten' [director of battles]. All in all, a willingness to engage in violence is signalled linguistically both by the identification of the group as a *Heer* [army], and through the invocation of Wotan. The emphasis on violence is further underlined through the illustrations flanking the text of the heads of two fabulous animals (wolves?) with open mouths baring their teeth.

While the front presents the title and the theme, the back then illustrates the violent message in more detail. Violence and willingness to engage in battle are here in the text explicitly connected with the turn to Wotan. The turn to Wotan, the warlike affirmation of violence, and the emphasis on one's own readiness for sacrifice may be formulated individually (in the first-person singular), but the individual does not stand alone: He is, rather, part of a collective, as is signalled by the use of the pronoun *unsere* [our], but also already by the title *Wotans Heer* [Wotan's army]. This establishes a group identity that is the basis for the use of violence.

The linguistic message of the last line is supplemented by a central ornament – indeed placed in between the words *Wotans* and *Heer*. By virtue of its positioning this symbol represents a *conclusio* that is clearly deliberately placed for political reasons, as it enables the association with the swastika. *Wotans Heer* can thus be interpreted as a National Socialist battle unit that further apparently considers itself to be carrying out divine orders.

The *Waffenträger Wotans* T-shirt clearly shows a willingness to engage in violence that is similarly connected with the fulfilment of a higher command, apparent in the reference to Wotan. Even as the front is decorated with the alliterative title *Waffenträger Wotans* as well as with a so-called Wodan's eye symbolising the divinity in image form, the back displays the weapons concerned, namely the sword and the battle axe. The wearer of the T-shirt can make explicit his readiness for sacrifice in a battle to the end through the introductory sentence *Wir müssen ja doch sterben* [We must indeed die]. [The rest of the sentence reads: – nobody will take our knightly/chivalric weapons from us.] The fact that the weapons are characterised as *ritterlich* [knightly] both promotes a positive self-image and legitimates the possession (and deployment) of weapons. At the same time, the typography, the use of Gothic script, underlines the relation to the past.

Another T-shirt bears on the front the warlike legend *Schwerttag ist Bluttag* [sword day is blood day], written in Gothic script and repeated in the background in runic script. Positioned beside this is the head of a fabulous creature with a

Figure 6.16 *Waffenträger Wotans* [Wotan's weapons bearer(s)] T-shirt (front and back)

Figure 6.17 Schwerttag ist Bluttag [Sword day is blood day] T-shirt (front and back)

wide-open mouth in an aggressive pose. Even if the terms *Schwerttag* [sword day] and *Bluttag* [blood day] are not in common use,[5] the intended meanings of both are clear and they are thus immediately understandable. The lines of the argument are also clear: When weapons are used, blood will flow.

The text on the back makes this more specific, indicating that the bloody confrontation will occur *ehe die Sonne steigt* [before the sun rises]. This may be interpreted as suggesting that the battle will take place under cover, in darkness. It may also be connected with Ragnarök, the final battle of the gods against the enemies of the world that is followed by the beginning of a new world. The symbol used on the far right for the thus mythologically-coded return of a new National Socialist regime is the so-called Black Sun.

Emblazoned above the text on the back of the T-shirt is 'Wodan's eye.' Under the text in Gothic script – in which the name *Wotan* stands out already due to the size of the lettering – one again reads the name *Wotan*, this time in runes. The supreme Germanic god thus frames, and almost witnesses, the content of the text both in name and in image.

A point worth noting – and one that shows the adaptability of the modern far right – is the fact that text on the back of the T-shirt is an adaptation of the text of a scene from the second part of the film, *Lord of the Rings*. However, the line 'Arise, Riders of Théoden,' has been replaced here with 'Arise, arise, you warriors of Wotan.'

Figure 6.18 Thor's hammer sticker

Figure 6.19 Heidnischer Krieger [Pagan warrior] T-shirt

Every far-right declaration in favour in Norse-Germanic mythology either explicitly or implicitly contains at the same time a de facto declaration in favour of violence. This, finally, applies also to the very numerous variants of illustrations of Thor's hammer (Mjölnir), a symbol that conveys an aggressive coded message, as Mjölnir stands for the violent enforcement of divine will and as a sign of superiority imposed by violence and thus represents invincibility.[6]

The unambiguous reading of Thor's hammer as a symbol of violence becomes explicit on T-shirts, such as the one pictured above, with slogans such as *Heidnischer Krieger* [pagan warrior]. T-shirts such as this are to be found in numerous variations in the product ranges of the distributors that were investigated. The willingness to engage in violence is already expressed here through the lexeme, *Krieger* [warrior], that can certainly be interpreted as how the wearer of the T-shirt would like to describe himself. The declaration of 'belief' in Norse-Germanic mythology is clear through the use of the adjective *heidnisch* [heathen/pagan], and the image of Thor's hammer.

6.5 The Germanic tribes as warriors

Along with the image of Norse-Germanic mythology as a religion of violence, printed material on stickers or T-shirts conveys the popular far-right image of the Germanic tribes as warriors. Members of the far right are able to identify with this stereotype as it fits in well with their image of themselves. In addition, many see themselves as successors of the Germanic peoples. This violence-centred reading of Germanic history and culture will be illustrated with a few examples in the following:

The T-shirt pictured below '*Stolzer Germane'* [proud Germanic man] with its symbolism of Thor's hammer in front of a Black Sun contains a subliminal violent message. In particular, the legend on the back, reading 'Wir haben nicht laufen gelernt[,] um heute zu kriechen – wir bleiben Germanen' ['We didn't learn to walk in order to crawl today – we are still Germanic men'], expresses resistance against supposed oppression and implicitly associates the Germanic tribes with freedom.

Figure 6.20 Stolzer Germane [proud Germanic man] T-shirt

The sticker with the rousing slogan, *Klagt nicht, kämpft!* [Do not complain! Fight!], revives a motto of the German paratroopers in the Second World War, yet this call to arms is also reinterpreted as related to the heroic principle of the ancient Germanic tradition through the illustration of a Germanic warrior with a sword and a shield. Invoking the presumably brave and battle-ready warriors of the past serves to represent the warring tradition of the ancient Germanic peoples as a model to be imitated.

The same slogan, *Klagt nicht, kämpft!*, is also found on the T-shirt *Germanensturm* [storm of the Germanic warriors]. The affirmation of violence is apparent here through the combination of text and image. The readiness for battle and war is made clear not only linguistically – through the aforementioned slogan and the legend *Germanensturm* (a word that is analogous to *Volkssturm*, the National Socialist people's army in the last phase of the Second World War) – but also through the selection of images that includes a warrior helmet on the front of the T-shirt and a helmet, shield, and two swords on the back. The two birds' heads, presumably Odin's ravens, may also symbolise a higher legitimation of the use of violent force.

The agenda in terms of text and images on the T-shirts referring to the Germanic tribes is mostly very similar. This also applies in the case of the T-shirt below that displays images of a helmet, battle axes, and a shield (encircled by runic script) under the heading *Germanen*, and thereby already conveys a violent message that is then further emphasised through the lower lines *Met für die Freunde – Äxte für die Feinde* [mead for the friends – axes for the enemies]. The emblem with battle axes, helmet, and crown of runes also appears on the two sleeves of the T-shirt

Figure 6.21 Klagt nicht, kämpft! [Don't complain! Fight!] sticker

Figure 6.22 Germanensturm [Storm of the Germanic warriors] T-shirt

Figure 6.23 Germanen T-shirt

rather in a position similar to where one would see military insignia, and this can be interpreted as further intensifying the aggressive visual message.

It is not always possible to draw a clear line between references to Norse-Germanic mythology and to the Germanic past. This applies, for example, to mentions of the Berserker, who can be understood to function both as a mythological and as a cultural-literary motif. Whatever way one classifies these references, the violent message on the T-shirt pictured above is clear.

On the front of the *Berserker* T-shirt is the legend *Berserker*, written in runic script under crossed swords and a centrally placed helmet. The image motif thus resembles the previous one discussed above. The back then displays the same text *Berserker* in Gothic script. Under this, one finds the adjective *unbesiegbar* [invincible], again in runic script. Here, too, a violent message is clearly recognisable. War and fighting are established as a theme already through the image on the front. The Berserker known from north Germanic tradition are regarded in the German-speaking world as the embodiment of unrestrained, raw violence – not least through the phrase *wüten wie ein Berserker* [to rage like a Berserker]. The clear declaration of belief in violence is further underlined through the addition of the adjective *unbesiegbar* [invincible] on the back of the T-shirt. The red colour of both text and image evokes associations with blood. This T-shirt is – just as the previous examples shown – evidently aimed at attributing the wearer with qualities such as manliness and a willingness to engage in violence.

Figure 6.24 Berserker T-shirt (front and back)

6.6 Summary/conclusion

Pfeiffer (2017) points out that the messages of the far-right world generally have two kinds of aims, namely constructing images of enemies on the one hand, and providing models for identification on the other. Precisely this is what one finds by looking closely at the content of the T-shirts and stickers in the sample, that after all form part of the far-right lifestyle.

In general, the programmatic political messages of the T-shirts and stickers presented here display a clear acceptance of violence. The latter is well known as a constitutive part of the far-right worldview as well as of its strategy and propaganda (e.g. Grumke 2017: 30ff.). Indeed, on the one hand, it is a means of aggressively isolating and provoking the political opponent, i.e. democratic mainstream society, and, on the other, it is also a means of contributing to the integration and establishing the identity of the group.

A survey of the examined sample evidence (T-shirts and stickers) shows that violent messages are being conveyed by means of the use of Norse-Germanic mythology. This confirms what Langebach (2015: 74), for example, postulates, namely the thoroughgoing 'presence of mythology in the everyday life of the scene.' For a considerable portion of all T-shirts supplied by the shippers – including those not mentioned here – display references of various kinds to Norse-Germanic mythology. This even applies to the numerous T-shirts available by mail order that carry English-language slogans.

It is not always really clear in the references to Norse-Germanic mythology on T-shirts and stickers whether they actually come from a position of belief, or rather – as Jennerjahn (2006) already claims – there is a purely political, ideological intention behind the reference to Norse-Germanic mythology, insofar as this cultural-historical element is used to convey the declaration of belief in and the incitement of violence. This applies, for example, to the numerous images of Thor's hammers in different variations, and to the inscriptions of the names *Odin* or *Thor*, as well as above all to the descriptions of groups (and of individuals of themselves) in which battle is emphasised rather more than the religious element, as in the labels *Heidnischer Krieger* [pagan warrior] or *Wotans Heer* [Wotan's army]. Nevertheless, the references to the world of the gods are not unimportant, as the references to the Norse-Germanic divinities legitimate violence, placing the wearer of the T-shirt at the same time under their protection, bestowing him with a divine aura and making him part of a superior community.

It has already been demonstrated several times that the widespread references to Norse-Germanic mythology do not only serve as an exclusively interpreted feature of the identity-building and heritage-appropriation of far-right groups (Jennerjahn 2006: 79), but also as code for the ideological agenda of *völkisch*-oriented Social Darwinism and thus also for a connection with National Socialism. The findings in relation to the T-shirts and stickers examined fit into this general picture. The fundamental anti-Christian tendency of the recent far right (Staud 2006: 96f.) is thereby clearly expressed. A 'religion of violence' is being opposed to the 'religion of weakness' (= Christianity).

Yet, quite apart from the religious-mythological elements, T-shirts and stickers with references to the Germanic tribes have an open or at least latent aggressive tendency. This can be interpreted as having several functions: In addition to contributing to the self-assurance of the wearers of the T-shirts and users of the stickers as well as the members of the far-right scene they address, they serve to incite the use of violence by the same individuals. At the same time, these messages can intimidate political opponents. Finally, referring to the Germanic peoples and to the Germanic gods functions as an ideal form of code for references to National Socialism or National Socialist ideology. It is not least for this reason that references to the Germanic peoples have taken hold so much in far-right youth culture (Staud 2006: 171), as the T-shirts and stickers so impressively demonstrate.

Even if the mere existence of the products available on the internet looked at here did not permit one to say anything persuasive about the frequency of their use and their distribution, the thematic specifics of the repertoire of texts, images, and combinations of text and image is in accord with other previous findings in relation to the diverse forms of action and the self-styled public images of the far-right scene (e.g. Glaser/Pfeiffer 2017; Sünner 1999). Many of the examples of messages of violence looked at here are not restricted to the genre of T-shirts or of stickers, but are also to be found on other items of clothing, jewellery, or utensils, such as purses and wallets, bottle openers, cutting boards, etc. All of this makes all the more plausible the conclusion that the cases presented here are not coincidental but are rather utterly representative of the self-image and the behaviour of the contemporary far right and, at the same time, mirror the ideologically overloaded and functionalised product-world of the far-right everyday environment. To this extent, the violent messages on the T-shirts and stickers are not coincidental but for the far-right scene are an absolutely existential expression of their own conviction – that invokes supposed models from history.

Notes

1 Among the exceptions are Korgel/Borstel (2002) as well as Kumięga (2013), the latter rather more focused on theory and with a different emphasis.
2 See Stöckl (2004) or Lemke (2009) for the theoretical background of multimodality.
3 In this context one could refer to the specific interpretation of Christianity in the Old Saxon *Heliand*.
4 The Greek acronym Ichtys = *Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter* ('Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Saviour') means 'fish.'
5 *Schwerttag* is not found in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* [German Dictionary] at all. *Bluttag* appears only in a single line (Grimm/Grimm 1991: II 195).
6 It is also true that the Thor's hammer is equally a symbol of fertility. Reference to this is not to be excluded, though such a meaning is not very probable in the context of recent far-right ideology.

Afterword

References to the ancient Germanic peoples constitute a fundamental aspect of the self-presentation and identity-building of the far right in the German-speaking world. It has been possible to present ample evidence of this here with numerous examples from the scene, in which especially certain products that serve to constitute a far-right lifestyle also play an essential role. Along with the references to the Germanic people in general, or to individual Germanic tribes, the re-interpretation and adaptation of Norse-Germanic mythology is a central feature in this. It became clear that the focus for the far right is not on careful historical engagement with the Germanic peoples and their culture, but rather on the construction of supposed lines of tradition and narratives to legitimate their own ideology, their political objectives, and their actions. Germanic history and culture are thereby being reshaped and instrumentalised to suit the worldview and the purposes of the far right. One can therefore justifiably speak of the abuse of history and culture. This can only be actively countered, however, if there is more widespread knowledge of these long-neglected subject areas, and if society does not shy away from going on the offensive in discussing and deconstructing this abuse.

Germanic history, culture, and mythology are, one must remember, part of the historical and cultural heritage of the whole of society in the German-speaking world and not just putty in the hands of the far right to be shaped according to their wishes.

Irrespective of future developments, the phenomenon of the far right will continue to remain a part of the political landscape of central Europe. In view of the dynamics of the external and internal – i.e. the ideological – constitution of the far right, it remains to be seen whether references to the history and culture of the Germanic peoples will in the future be of a greater or lesser significance. This will not least depend on how and whether mainstream society will position itself with regard to Germanic history and culture.

Despite the wealth of detail that it has been possible to present in this book, it must be said that the examples illustrated here represent only a small sample of the broad spectrum of the material expression of the far-right lifestyle and world. There is therefore plenty of scope for future research in this area. Many aspects remain to be investigated more closely, and many questions remain to be answered, in relation to this important subject.

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