

Fostering and constructing intersectional antifascist solidarity

The use of comics for intersectional interventions and perspectives – two comics by Zerocalcare

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Antifascism – in historical development

Working against the far right can follow the terminology of antifascism. However, this term is not without history. A major base for its history is the fight in Italy against the fascism of Benito Mussolini, partly under arms, partly via underground press or sabotage. From early on different attempts of international antifascism were instrumentalized by the Soviet Union, soon making the label difficult for many forces and actors. On the other hand, there were always antifascist actors and forces outside this instrumentalization that tried to fight fascism in Italy or Nazi-Germany and made antifascism a broader movement of the political left. In different regions and countries again, the question was debated in these circles and in the context of what fascism was and how to distinguish it from other phenomena, leading to multiple forms of antifascism (Schneider & Cardoen, 2015). In the years prior to 1945 many organizations and collectives were founded that had relevance later on, so too in Germany with the “Antifaschistische Aktion,” founded in 1932; but also songs or chants developed with a major influence post-1945, as for instance “No pasaran” or “Alerta, Alerta, Antifascista” (Langer, 2015).

Though many European countries started after 1945 with a kind of basic or uniting antifascist idea and an ideal of ‘no more wars’ and ‘no more fascism,’ soon the so called competition of systems made antifascism less a uniting idea but a field of conflict, being linked by politically right or conservative forces to the political left or even simply the danger linked to the USSR. The new uniting idea of the so constructed ‘West’ was not antifascism anymore but anti-communism (Doerry, 1980). On the other hand, under the influence of the USSR even though officially antifascism remained and was propagated as a uniting idea and concept, antifascist groups were not allowed by ruling parties outside of official party organizations. And the idea of fascism was reduced and detached from central elements such as racism and

antisemitism. It was a limited idea of fascism that states such as the German Democratic Republic – the GDR – positioned themselves against (Leo & Reif-Spirek, 1999). Instead, antifascism in a not instrumentalized understanding moved more towards subculture and politically to very far leftwing actors, in Germany or Italy, but many other countries, too, and embraced militant action (Schöppner, 2015). Even after the political changes in Europe from 1989 onwards antifascism did not become a uniting idea again. And to this day many fighting the far right do not position themselves as antifascists, even distance themselves from this term. Considering this antifascist solidarity is a kind of limited call respectively a call many distance themselves from automatically. Framing something as antifascist is a limiting factor – to unite, but also to include intersectionality in perspective and analysis.

Antifascism, the far left and intersectional solidarity

It has been and is debated time and again if there is a necessary link between the far left and antifascism, and if all propagating antifascism are to be considered part of the constructed far left or not. Here again different national contexts play a role, each with a different understanding of antifascism. While antifascism has roots in Italy and Germany, in Germany politically center-left are often reluctant to frame themselves as antifascists, not the least not to be in danger of being connected to the GDR (Schneider, 2014). On the other hand, in Italy antifascism has for many years been a more uniting theme reaching the center. However, this did not include the political right, and for sure not the governing far right still reluctant to distance themselves clearly from fascism (Harrison-Gaze, 2025). Still, the term antifascism is less pushed to the margins in Italy as it is in Germany.

This led to the development of a variety and diversity in terminology not to be taken to be too far-left, not only in Germany. And as there are multiple concepts of fascism – logically antifascism can be a more narrow or broad terminology. And not all these concepts or followed and uniting ideas necessarily lead to solidarity in a broader or inclusive understanding. Here the idea of intersectional antifascist solidarity is followed. But depending on the understanding of antifascism there is more critique on the term and concept of intersectionality than support for them. Especially in neo-Marxist thinking there is fierce critique regarding intersectionality (Bohrer, 2019). This will not be discussed here in detail, but it entails at least in parts a limited understanding of intersectionality, but often a more limited focus, too. Following the idea of intersectional solidarity acting gets more complicated, as outlined earlier in this book. But if there is one major ‘enemy’ constructed to be fought – capitalism – (and all else will follow), then this complication can be seen as distraction. This is not the position here, and neither in the concrete cases looked at. Modern society is complex, diverse and unjust in multiple ways. For this an intersectional

understanding of solidarity is key. And such an understanding can be found in parts of antifascism, too, no matter the neo-Marxist critique on intersectionality (see for the link of antifascism and intersectionality for example Braskén, 2024).

Next to debates about the limits of intersectionality or terminologies like antifascism there is a rise in new forms of fascism and debates about what to call fascism and what not. Is the Italian party *Fratelli d'Italia* a fascist party and resistance against it antifascism or is there 'just' a fascist heritage (Tarchi, 2024)? And what about Donald Trump and Trumpism, is this a new fascism (as discussed by Cox & O'Connor, 2025)? The same is and can be debated for the German 'Alternative für Deutschland' – AfD, at least recognized officially as 'right-wing-extremist' – but is it a fascist party (as discussed by Klikauer, 2020)? There are certainly different positions on these questions, depending highly on the specific understanding of fascism. But resistance against these actors of the far right is time and again framed as antifascist. In a sense new modes of fascism need a new antifascism, and may follow intersectional ideas to better include a diversity of challenges, methods, but modes of fascism, too. Further, fighting different forms of fascism, without necessarily agreeing always on what to call fascist and what not to, but rather to enlarge the idea of solidaric antifascist action to intersectional solidarity against the far right, allows for a more inclusive understanding of antifascism. But this is still future-thinking, however a potential guiding principle to allow more working against the far right to assemble under the term antifascism. Up till today, intersectional antifascist solidarity is still more limited, yet transnational none the less.

Transnational intersectional antifascist solidarity

Here the focus will be a transnational intersectional antifascist solidarity with special attention given to Germany and Italy, but going beyond these two countries, especially since the comics focus on developments in Hungary, and Europe is major framework in them. Additionally larger texts within one of the comics address more international developments. Not only today, but historically such lines are well established. Roots of antifascism and solidaric action can be linked to Spain, Italy and Germany, inter alia. But there is a French or a British tradition of antifascism, too (Balhorn, 2017). Putting aside the mainly instrumentalized approach to antifascism, making it more label and claim than action and policy, of so called socialist Eastern Europe, there have been antifascist activities in many states of Western Europe, with radical approaches in Italy or Germany, or major state limitations as in fascist Spain. However, links are and have been different over time and depending on the country looked at, as from Germany going North and to the United Kingdom and the USA, including revitalizing antifascism in Spain (Antifaschistisches Infoblatt, 2024a). In

Italy instead more links are drawn to the Americas, next to other countries (Rete Dei Comunisti, 2024). But it is important to note that the historical antifascism, in all its variety, is not the same as the antifascism post-1960s roughly. Germany, Italy, and Spain, too, can be considered as roots of modern antifascism, but this is not to be confused with antifascism today. Different developments led to antifascism in autonomist movements, as in Germany; linked to a constructed working class and used as a uniting label, as in Italy. So, there are differences in today's traditions and uses of the term antifascism to be considered (Balhorn, 2017). But taking into account the rise of the far right in the last decades, with increased dynamics in the last years, more meetings to connect more local groups took place and links were established or re-established, not only, but also between Italian and German groups. Nonetheless, this link is not the strongest for both movements in their loose condition and composition (Koch, 2018). That Italy and Germany are in focus as examples of transnational intersectional antifascist solidarity here has a different reason – a concrete case bringing both closer together.

The comics - context and case

The concrete case are protests against the far-right meeting for the so called 'Day of Honor' in Budapest, Hungary. This infamous day is described in a question to the European Parliament this way:

“Each year, hundreds of right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis from across Europe gather in Budapest to commemorate the failed attempt by Nazi German and Hungarian troops to break through the Soviet army's siege of the city in 1945. The event, known as the 'Day of Honor,' is a shameful display of Nazi banners, slogans and uniforms. The Hungarian Government has failed to impose an effective ban on the demonstration, even though it clearly violates Hungarian law and threatens the security of Hungarian citizens.” (European Parliament, 2024b)

Furthermore, this request outlines that the Hungarian government is directly involved in them, as for example by giving grants for the organizers. This event as such is looked at in different ways, from describing it as an outrageous celebration of Nazi pride to 'just' a 'patriotic meeting' allowing to public showing of NS-uniforms (Szijarto & Schwartzburg, 2020). But most often it is framed as a highly problematic meeting that should be banned or at least better controlled, also in more mainstream international media (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, 2025). But this event is only a framework and background of the comics. Instead, the focus is on protests against this event – and the reactions to these protests by the state of Hungary.

These protests have taken various forms over the years. Specifically two lines are in focus in the comics. One is the case of Ilaria Salis. Ilaria Salis was a teacher from Northern Italy who was arrested in early 2023 in connection with the protest against the 'Day of Honor' and charged with attempted assault and membership in a far-left organization. About 11 years in prison could have been or still can be the sentence. It took nearly a year for her to be taken to court, an event that raised protest not only in Italy when Ilaria Salis was presented in chains. Until then Ilaria Salis was kept in custody under very harsh conditions, rated by many as inhumane, as for example not being allowed to wash or get medical care. Only after 15 months was Ilaria released to house arrest. All the time Ilaria Salis was pictured as an 'enemy' by the far right while solidarity campaigns took place, not only in Italy, but in Germany for example, too. Many saw Ilaria Salis as a political prisoner of the Hungarian government to put pressure on Italy. In June 2024 Ilaria Salis was elected to the European Parliament and granted immunity (Tondo, 2024).

The other line is the so-called 'Hammerbande,' the 'hammer gang,' the idea of a kind of far-left 'storm troop' working with hammers to severely hurt those taking part, for example, in the 'Day of Honor.' This term and the existence of such a gang is controversial. While many media keep the term in brackets and leave open, if such a 'gang' exists (tagesschau.de, 2024), especially conservative and right-wing news channels take and report this as a fact (Blick, 2024). This especially holds true for the media in Hungary. There are reports problematizing the attack only based on clothes or rating someone as far-right, while mentioning most protesters and attackers were foreigners, mainly from Germany (Hungary today, 2023). But there are also reports – from the political right – that go much further. In these reports antifascism is described as a radical and violent movement as such, with no roots in Hungary. Instead: "Most Hungarian commentators highlighted that the attackers were foreigners who have come to disturb the peace in Hungary." (Szalai, 2023) No matter the framing or the position on the actual existence of the 'hammer gang,' the Attorney General of Germany issued an arrest warrant against 'members' of the gang (Der Generalbundesanwalt beim Bundesgerichtshof, 2025). Those arrested were delivered to Hungary to face trial there. An act highly controversial, often with reference to the treatment of Ilaria Salis and the lack of legal protection in Hungary. With the extradition of Maja T. the German authorities even went against the rule of the highest German court (European Parliament, 2024a).

The second line is the background and framework of the comics again. Topic-wise the case of Ilaria Salis is in focus. But these cases and developments led to closer ties of German and Italian antifascist movements, a newly fostered antifascist solidarity, to free Ilaria Salis, but also the others prosecuted by Hungary, but Germany and others, too. And the two comics now in focus are part of this new established or newly strengthened solidarity and connectedness of the two loose movements, in different ways and reach. Even though these connections are not the strongest in

recent history, the developments around the events in Hungary and the rise of the far right behind and connected, made the ties stronger (again).

Zerocalcare

The author of both comics is Zerocalcare, born Michele Rech, an Italian cartoonist with great commercial success. Part of his work has been adapted to other media, even Netflix series.¹ In the beginning his work were mainly cartoons for periodicals, but then moved to a kind of political reportage, covering the G8 summit in Genova, and autobiographical comics. Even though always doing commercial work, too, the work of Zerocalcare was always political, as with the comic “Kobane Calling,” about the conflict of the Kurds against the Islamic state, or a short comic about neo-fascism in Italy in 2018. In the following years more comics on international and intersectional conflicts were published, but Netflix adaptations and commercial comics, too (Wikipedia, 2025; Zerocalcare, 2025). Political comics about Italy and the far right were first published predominantly in the journal “Internazionale,” as the two comics in focus here. This weekly news magazine publishes translated articles and comics on a regular basis. Self-framed, the magazine is politically ‘progressive’ (Progressive International, 2025). Zerocalcare is based in Rome, using a Roman dialect in writing at times, as in the comics here in focus, being autobiographical comics in part, too (Wikipedia, 2025; Zerocalcare, 2025). Beyond Italy Zerocalcare is known, especially for the comic “Kobane Calling,” however in the German antifascist movements newer reference all go to the two comics in focus here, especially the more zine-like (Antifaschistisches Infoblatt, 2024b).

“Unten im Loch” – the political zine-like publication

The first comic in focus here is a self-published zine-like comic with the German title “Unten im Loch. Eine Geschichte über Nazis, Knast und Verantwortung” – ‘Down the hole. A story about Nazis, prison and responsibility (Zerocalcare, 2024b). It is published in German by SoliZero in cooperation with other antifascist groups. Next to the printed version there is a digital one on Indymedia, where also the Italian original can be found online. Originally the comic was published in “Internazionale.” The German comic is not sold but given for free with the request of a donation. And before the first page initiatives are introduced that work specifically to Eastern Europe, the trials in Budapest or the prosecution in Germany in relation to the cases in Budapest. Language-wise the black-and-white comic is mainly in German, with some scenes rated as not translatable, especially swearing that remains in the Italian original. And while the original follows in parts a Roman dialect this translation follows

only in parts, making some translations a mixture of Berlin dialect with standard German, as only putting the Berlin dialect ‘wa’ at the end of a sentence (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 03 [own numbers]). The comic is divided into parts, to allow for understanding the ‘complicated history’ that affects Hungarians, Germans and Italians, “but also the hundred other nationalities, communities, orientations.”¹ Because this is “a story about violence. About perpetrators and victims and how they see themselves. About ethics and morality. About real court cases. About media monsters. Reduced to the essentials. (...) This is a story about Nazis, prison, and responsibility.”² (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 01)

The first part is about the Nazis. Framework here is the author being in Budapest himself, getting first accounts on an international meeting of the far right, in ‘these days,’ the days around the ‘Day of Honor.’ Organized is the comic in part like an educational comic, giving accounts, such as what happened in Budapest in 1945, and drawings of the author himself commenting on it. These are the panels with untranslated bubbles at times, as in “Mo’, mannaggia al clero oviparo paludoso di pomezia...” (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 05). Different far-right groups are shown and international links, including politicians explaining away the Nazis as patriots. In the comic these sections are framed as “I-am-getting-on-your-nerve”³-comments, in more vulgar language in the German translation (Internazionale, 2024, p. 45; Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 06). The comic further stresses that these events are not only some neglectable events of some not important groups, especially due to the links of these groups to political power and state funding for Nazi concerts etc. But further, even if votes for the most radical far right may remain limited, violence is on the rise. The comic concludes with: “What appears to be a problem that can be ignored in a democracy... / ... can be devastating for individuals’ lives.”⁴ (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 08) This is the reason why the Italian exchange student talking to Zerocalcare at the table of the comic event in Budapest – all the educational and informational in this part could be talk between them – asked the Syrian friend ‘Ben’ to stay at home (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 03). This makes the author think back to ‘these days’ the year before – to 2023. In these days something happened, and that is the content of part 2 of the comic.

This is in general about ‘fear changing the side,’ as introduced on a black page. Part 2 then is in concrete about ‘the prison.’ We zoom in to the high-security prison,

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- 1 Aber auch die hundert andere Nationalitäten, Gemeinschaften, Orientierungen.
 - 2 eine Geschichte über Gewalt. Über Täter und Opfer und wie sie sich selbst sehen. Über Ethik und Moral. Über reale Gerichtsverfahren. Über Medienmonster. Aufs Wesentliche reduziert. (...) Dies ist eine Geschichte über Nazis, Knast und Verantwortung.
 - 3 Ich-geh-dir-auf-den-Sack / Seconda ondata dei rompicao
 - 4 Das, was wie ein zu ignorierendes Problem für die Demokratie erscheint... / ... kann für das Leben einzelner zerstörend sein

to a female-read person – to Ilaria, being arrested on the ‘Day of Honor,’ the 11th of February 2023. “Pulled out of a taxi together with Tobi, a German antifascist. He had also been at the counter-protests. / They are accused of participating in two attacks on neo-Nazis. / The injuries they caused would have healed in 5–8 days, according to medical prognosis. / Since that moment, the two have been swallowed up by the black hole of the Hungarian prison system.”⁵ (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 12) But the focus is not on both in the following, but rather Ilaria and her conditions and charges. The conditions are described as some most only know by reports of Amnesty. And in this situation, and in a language Ilaria does not understand, a deal is offered if she pleads guilty – eleven years in prison. Without the deal it would be 16 years according to the comic. Now the focus of the comic is more educational again, asking why this charge is a political one and not just, framed as a dialogue with ‘uncle fatty’ / ‘uncle crust’ (“Onkel Fetti” / “Zio Crosta”) (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 14; Internazionale, 2024, p. 53). One reason is that the accusation of life-threatening injuries and the healing prognosis of eight days do not fit together according to Zerocalcare. The other is more complicated. Here parts of the text are in red, as an apology to the readers that the next three pages will be complicated, but also the framing of the accusation, that the crime took place ‘in context’ (highlighted in red) with a criminal organization. It is explained that the organization – with the purpose to beat up Nazis – is said to consist of 14 Germans, and all that Ilaria did was only ‘in context’ with their activities, whatever this means as the comic asks. Here the author in the comic directly asks: “At this point, one asks oneself: What kind of association is this? / Who are they supposed to be? / The spirits of the Inglorious Basterds? / So for the prosecution, it’s somehow another manifestation of the ... / HAMMERBANDE.”⁶ (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 16) In the Italian original there is a different text. On the one hand-side it is not ‘Inglorious Basterds’ but “Sgobbanazistis” and after HAMMERBANDE follows “La Banda del Martello” (Internazionale, 2024, p. 55.). Zerocalcare clearly outlines that in fact there is no such gang – the name has been an ‘invention of the German press’ – and the organization is a juridical construction only to punish the accused harder. But beside this, the comments on Germany remain limited and more on the surface, even though Zerocalcare clearly positions himself: it is outlined that this group has nothing to do with the events in Budapest. Because: “The

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- 5 Zusammen mit Tobi, einem deutschen Antifaschisten, aus einem Taxi gezogen. Auch er war bei den Gegenprotesten gewesen. / Sie werden beschuldigt, an zwei Angriffen auf Neonazis teilgenommen zu haben. / Die Verletzungen verursacht hätten, welche nach ärztlicher Prognose in 5–8 Tagen verheilt wären. / Seit diesem Moment wurden die zwei vom Schwarzen Loch des Ungarischen Haftsystems verschluckt.
- 6 An diesem Punkt stellt man sich die Frage: Was ist das für eine Vereinigung? / Wer soll das sein? / Die Geister der Inglorious Basterds? / Also für die Staatsanwaltschaft ist es irgendwie eine weitere Erscheinung der ... / HAMMERBANDE.

trial of the Hammer Gang concerns actions that took place almost five years ago.”⁷ (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 17) This allows Zerocalcare to conclude that the connection is only ‘topic-wise.’ That is the climate in which the trials began, blaming the accused to be a ‘monster’ and letting them disappear in the deep hole.

This leads to part 3 about ‘responsibility.’ This in a sense is even more educational, for sure more philosophical. It starts with the clear statement: “I agree that everyone should take responsibility for what they have done. / (...) / But there should be some standards.”⁸ This is shown with the author pointing at a scale from “lecture” to “Ride Mailand-Rom with Guiseppe Cruciani”, marked worse than “gallows”⁹ (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 19). Interestingly this ‘Ride’-reference is directly from the Italian original, where it is “in Bla Bla Car” (Internazionale, 2024, p. 58). Reference in the following is an ‘empirical experience’ of the author being severely hurt by some eight Nazis, one being too slow to flee, but only getting six month – nothing compared to the 16 years Ilaria faces. From this simpler question the comic moves to the more philosophical one of violence or non-violence: “Many [a robot speaking] say the following: / Violence is always wrong! / If you use violence, you’re on the wrong side. / For heaven’s sake, you can go along with that.”¹⁰ (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 21) And the author shows himself interfering in acts of violence. Following, there is a ‘but’ on the next page: “Nevertheless, when people—full of arrogance and conceit—say: / The only right answer is nonviolence. / (...) / It makes my blood run cold. / They are abusing something important.”¹¹ (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 22) Because, even though non-violence matters and it is brave and noble to answer violence with non-violence, it is something different if others are attacked and you remain passive. Following, the key for Zerocalcare is responsibility. “Those who decided a year ago to take action against the Nazis in Budapest made a decision. / Everyone made their own decision. That’s something we can talk about. / We feel connected to some people more than others. / But for me, they are all my brothers and sisters. / They took responsibility. / Those who shout from their sofas at home, lecturing others about morality and good manners, what responsibility have they taken? / (...) / What do they say to Ben from Syria? / Or to the hundreds of other people who have been attacked, threatened, or frightened? / “Sorry, folks, stay at home.” / “We’ll tell you how it was.” / “We... with the right skin

7 Im Prozess um die Hammerbande geht es um Aktionen die fast 5 Jahre zurück liegen.

8 Ich bin damit einverstanden, dass jeder dafür Verantwortung übernimmt, was er getan hat. / (...) / Aber es sollte doch irgendwelche Maßstäbe geben.

9 Standpauke / Mitfahrgelegenheit Mailand-Rom mit Guiseppe Cruciani / Galgen.

10 Viele sagen folgendes: / Gewalt ist immer was falsches! / Wenn du Gewalt ausübst, stellst du dich damit auf die falsche Seite. / Um Himmels Willen, grob kann man da mitgehen.

11 Trotzdem, wenn Leute – voller Arroganz und Überheblichkeit – sagen: / Die einzige richtige Antwort ist die Gewaltfreiheit. / (...) / Das lässt mir das Blut in den Adern gefrieren. / Sie missbrauchen was wichtiges.

color.” / “With the right partners.” / “With the right passport.”¹² (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 23)

Condensed this is the baseline of intersectional antifascist solidarity – it is about taking responsibility and accepting differences, as differences in power, as of the ‘Ben’s’ having less power in fighting the racist far right, leading to another responsibility of the others. And this has an intersectional character, even though in writing all is kept in masculine terms in the German translation, not as in the Italian original (Internazionale, 2024, 62), because other intersectional dimensions, and especially power differences are clearly addressed. The opposite to violence along these lines is not non-violence but taking responsibility in solidarity, which may include even violence at times, at least for some. But Zerocalcare makes clear to not know the solution, being sure that violence is not the only way to react to Nazis, but that there are other measures, too, as elections, being afraid, taking other paths or not having the chance of violence – addressing ableism with a wheelchair in the panel. But what is certain for the author is: “Those who feel this responsibility and act on it, regardless of the means they use, deserve respect. // [zooming in on the insects and rats on the next page] Respect is due to the doubts and uncertainties of all those who, / in the face of injustice, / are searching for their way [zooming in on Ilaria] / to remain on the right side of history.”¹³ (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 24–25) On the last page we see some standing in ‘the hole,’ looking up to faces appearing, calling to take responsibility for those ‘buried alive’ instead of requesting to be left in peace. This all is dedicated to Ilaria, to Tobi, to Maja, to Gabriele, to all ‘down in the dark hole’ but also all still running.

Clearly this zine-like comic is no neutral report, no neutral educational approach. Instead, it clearly takes position, allows readers to follow thoughts and doubts. But it is obviously not the aim of the comic to pick up those doubting, those showing understanding for the ‘Day of Honor,’ instead it is to bring those doubting about the means of the accused and the trial to position themselves, to leave the track of passive observation, but move on to solidarity. Again differences

12 Wer sich vor einem Jahr dazu entschieden hat Gegen die Nazis in Budapest vorzugehen, hat eine Entscheidung getroffen. / Jeder hat seine eigene getroffen. Darüber kann man reden. / Mit manchen fühlt man sich verbunden, mit anderen weniger. / Aber für mich sind es alles meine Brüder und Schwestern. / Sie haben Verantwortung übernommen. / Wer von zuhause aus von seinem Sofa rumbrüllt, Unterricht über Moral und gute Manieren gibt, was für eine Verantwortung hat der dann übernommen? / (...) / Was antwortet er dem syrischen Ben? / Oder den anderen hunderten angegriffenen, bedrohten oder verängstigten Leuten? / “Sorry Leute, Stay at home”. / “Wir erzählen euch wie’s war”. / “Wir... mit der richtigen Hautfarbe”. / “Mit den richtigen Partnern”. / “Mit dem richtigen Pass”.

13 Wer diese Verantwortung fühlt und was macht, egal mit welchen Mitteln, verdient Respekt. // Respekt verdienen die Zweifel und die Unsicherheiten all derer, / die angesichts der Ungerechtigkeiten / ihren Weg suchen / um auf der richtigen Seite der Geschichte zu bleiben.

in vulnerability are considered, it is no solidarity that asks all to do the same, but an intersectional solidarity, and one clearly with one direction, against the far right, using actively the label antifascism as uniting bond. This taking of position is strengthened by the author being presented himself once and again in the comic, his thoughts and considerations, and his experiences, too. The author is narrator but also moderator in this comic, a comic clearly moving beyond Italy or Hungary, repeatedly taking a more general stance, as in the third, more philosophical part. It is a guidebook at times of how to react to common replies and objections, but overall a call for action, meaning active solidarity, along the own decisions and considerations, not propagating only one line. And part of this solidarity is the comic itself, in its publication in a journal in Italy to raise awareness, but in its spread as zine-like comic for donation in Germany, too. This clearly follows a tradition of political zines not produced for profit in the first place, of a zine culture in antifascist action, often with an educational approach at least in parts of them (royalhistsoc, 2024), or zines even produced together in activist and empowering manner (see e.g. Gray et al., 2021, p. 887ff.). The comic is not a produced zine, in the first line it is a comic drawn for a journal. But it is used as a kind of zine, and in this as a medium of and for solidarity, concretely for intersectional antifascist solidarity. This is a bit different for the second comic by the same author, not being handed out for a voluntary donation, but sold and produced more professionally.

“Diese Nacht wir keine kurze sein” – “Questa notte non sarà breve”

This much longer comic – in comparison – was published in Italy in ‘spring’ 2014 by “Momo edizioni,” containing pieces that before were published in “Internazionale” between January and June 2024. In Germany the comic was published in late 2024. It now officially is translated from Roman Italian to Berlin dialect, following the wording of the German singer Nico Seyfrid of the political left band K.I.Z., but being translated as such by Alessia Radomsko and Caterina Namuth. The German edition has a preface and an afterword, while the Italian original only contains the afterword. Since afterword and preface give meaning and context to the comic, they will be looked at in more detail here but analyzed separately from the comic-content.

Preface and afterword – transnational framing and call for intersectional antifascist solidarity

The preface is by German antifascists, in gender-inclusive language – “Antifaschist*innen aus Deutschland.” The afterword instead by “Antifaschist*innen aus Italien” – Italian antifascists. The first is from December 2024, the later from

‘spring’ 2024. The preface starts with references to Hanau, the racist murder there, to the meeting about ‘remigration’ in Potsdam, to successes by the fascist AfD, hatred spread by press publications and underground fascist movements acting more and more open. All these references are to Germany. “This is Germany. Not the gloomy Germany of the 1930s and 40s under Hitler, but the Germany of the 21st century.”¹⁴ (Antifaschist*innen aus Deutschland, 2024, p. 05) From there the text moves to the incarceration of Lina and the police group investigating left-wing activities labelled as ‘terror,’ firming under the name “Linx.” This is put in context with the orchestration of bringing Lina to a helicopter, widely used in conservative and right-wing media, in contrast to humanizing right-wing terrorists as Beate Zschäpe in their appearance in court. And from this conclusion a link is drawn to experiences in Italy, and by this to the comic as such, with Ilaria Salis brought to court in Budapest. However, the reactions to the pictures differ between Italy and Germany: “In contrast to Lina’s image in Germany, Ilaria’s appearance in Italy is causing quite a stir – not because society is being terrorized by the myth of the danger of “left-wing extremism,” but because the question of proportionality is being raised loudly. An antifascist outcry is rocking Italy, the country ruled by the post-fascist party “Brothers of Italy” under Giorgia Meloni. (...) Thanks to the commitment of Ilaria’s family, friends, and the entire antifascist movement, a solidarity campaign unfolds that even revives the left in Italy, which had been believed dead. It goes so far that Ilaria Salis is elected to the European Parliament in early summer 2024 and, thanks to her newly acquired immunity, is able to leave prison and Hungary.”¹⁵ (Antifaschist*innen aus Deutschland, 2024, p. 07) This again is taken as context for the comic and the linked engagement by Zerocalcare, spreading the story about Ilaria to a wider public with his comics. But this is not the end – unfortunately: “Unfortunately, the story of the current repression against antifascists in the context of the Budapest complex did not end with Ilaria’s release. Tobi had already been sentenced to one year and ten months in prison, while Anna lives in Germany and is awaiting the end of her trial to gain clarity about her life. But that

14 Das ist Deutschland. Nicht das düstere Deutschland der 1930er und 40er Jahre unter Hitler sondern das Deutschland des 21. Jahrhunderts.

15 Im Gegensatz zu dem Bild von Lina in Deutschland, sorgt der Anblick Ilarias in Italien für großen Aufruhr – allerdings nicht, weil gesellschaftlich die Mär von der Gefahr durch “Linksextremismus” durch die Republik gejagt wird, sondern weil hier lautstark die Frage der Verhältnismäßigkeit gestellt wird. Ein antifaschistischer Aufschrei erschüttert Italien, jenem Land, das von der postfaschistischen Partei “Brüder Italiens” unter Giorgia Meloni regiert wird. (...) Durch das Engagement von Ilarias Familie, Freund*innen und der gesamten antifaschistischen Bewegung entfaltet sich eine Solidaritätskampagne, die sogar die totgeglaubte Linke in Italien wiederbelebt. Es kommt so weit, dass Ilaria Salis im Frühsommer 2024 ins Europaparlament gewählt wird und durch die neu erlangte Immunität das Gefängnis und somit Ungarn verlassen kann.

is not enough for Hungary. Many more people are on the run from European arrest warrants. In December 2023, Maja was arrested in Berlin, and in May 2024, Hanna was arrested in Nuremberg. Maja is extradited to Hungary in July 2024 in a cloak-and-dagger operation of unknown scope. There is not even a symbolic image of this, as the Saxony State Criminal Police Office and the public prosecutor's office made every effort to circumvent all legal barriers in order to deceive Maja's lawyers and family.¹⁶ (Antifaschist*innen aus Deutschland, 2024, p. 08) This clearly is not topic of the comic as such, not the least because parts of it happened after the first release in Italian. But it is part of the (re)constructed framework. The preface follows the understanding, that the fight against the far right is one of solidarity, and covering countermeasures needs solidarity, too. Ilaria is free for now, but Hungarian authorities and others, like German authorities, keep up the fight against transnational intersectional antifascist solidarity. As shown before for "Unten im Loch" the comic works in contexts and frameworks. And these greater and partly not verbalized connections are strengthened with the preface and the afterword, giving the comic a framework, also physically.

This contextualization is followed by more details and background, coming to a warning: "In Germany's nearly eighty years of post-war history, there has probably never been a worse time to turn a blind eye to the far right. (...) The far right, which was pushed back in the 2000s by antifascist work and civil society engagement, is no longer simmering in the dark corners of isolated Incel forums or in hobby basements with beer taps. It is coming to the surface openly and bluntly."¹⁷ (Antifaschist*innen aus Deutschland, 2024, p. 09) This assessment about the far right in Germany and beyond is taken as vantage point for an assessment of antifascist movements in Germany, a movement in crisis:

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- 16 Die Geschichte der aktuellen Repression gegen Antifaschist*innen im Rahmen des Budapest-Komplexes endete leider nicht mit der Freilassung Ilarias. Tobi wurde bereits zuvor zu einem Jahr und zehn Monaten Gefängnis verurteilt, während Anna in Deutschland lebt und auf das Ende ihres Prozesses wartet, um Klarheit über ihr Leben zu erhalten. Doch das reicht Ungarn nicht. Viele weitere Personen sind auf der Flucht vor europäischen Haftbefehlen. Im Dezember 2023 kam es zur Verhaftung von Maja in Berlin, und im Mai 2024 wurde Hanna in Nürnberg festgenommen. Maja wird im Juli 2024 in einer Nacht-und-Nebel-Aktion unbekanntem Ausmaßes nach Ungarn ausgeliefert. Es gibt nicht einmal ein Symbolbild davon, denn das LKA Sachsen und die Staatsanwaltschaft bemühten sich, alle rechtlichen Barrieren zu umgehen, um Anwälte und Familie von Maja hinter das Licht zu führen.
- 17 In der fast achtzigjährigen Nachkriegsgeschichte Deutschlands gibt es wohl keinen schlechteren Zeitpunkt, um auf dem rechten Auge blind zu sein. (...) Die extreme Rechte, die in den 2000er Jahren durch antifaschistische Arbeit und zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement zurückgedrängt wurde, brodelt nicht mehr nur in den dunklen Ecken von abgeschotteten Incel-Foren oder in Hobby-Kellern mit Zapfanlage. Sie tritt offen und unverblümt an die Oberfläche.

“The current situation of antifascist action in Germany could be better – in recent years, we have been hit by attacks from the state, and alliances with civil society have broken down. We have allowed ourselves to be intimidated and have become increasingly isolated. (...) Where we were successful on multiple levels, i.e., on the streets and in discourse, the right now has the upper hand. It is time for a comeback, which must also be a reinvention. Because times have changed [...]. (...) As in the Italian afterword, we see a “plural right” at work, which consists of different parts but speaks the same language. We decided to publish this comic in Germany as well because our friends and we ourselves are also affected by repression. The ongoing wave of repression is currently paralyzing large parts of our actual antifascist work because we have to collect money for those affected, organize support, and accompany legal disputes. But as the Italian antifascists write, it is important not to portray ourselves as victims in these times. It is important to take a clear and honest stand on the right side. The stories of Ilaria and Gabriele show that even small, if temporary, moments of success are possible.”¹⁸ (Antifaschist*innen aus Deutschland, 2024, p. 10)

Following this argumentation the comic itself has multiple purposes – to give hope, to organize solidarity, but to raise money for solidaric action, too, to get interlinked again, and to start anew. That there are the new and closer links between various antifascist movements, coming together in solidarity, working against a more and more far-right Hungary, is clearly marked here only as a starting point. More focus is put on the other side, the far right getting better connected and stronger in their transnational links and diversity. Because even though there is hope, still these are times of danger and repression, as the preface stresses. Even though Ilaria has been elected to the European Parliament others are on the run or prepare for prison sentences, and the publication is dedicated to them. But the preface does not want to

18 Die aktuelle Lage der Antifaschistischen Aktion in Deutschland könnte besser sein – in den letzten Jahren haben die Angriffe des Staats uns getroffen, Bündnisse mit der Zivilgesellschaft sind zerbrochen. Wir haben uns einschüchtern lassen und zunehmend isoliert. (...) Wo wir mehrdimensional erfolgreich waren, d.h. auf der Straße und im Diskurs, sind es nun die Rechten. Es ist Zeit für ein Comeback, das zugleich eine Neuerung sein muss. Denn die Zeiten sind nicht die Gleichen [...] (...) Wie im italienischen Nachwort sehen wir eine “plurale Rechte” am Werk, die zwar aus unterschiedlichen Teilen besteht, aber die gleiche Sprache spricht. Wir haben uns entschieden diesen Comic auch in Deutschland herauszubringen, weil unsere Freund*innen und wir selbst auch von Repression betroffen sind. Die anhaltende Repressionswelle lähmt aktuell große Teile unserer eigentlichen antifaschistischen Arbeit, weil wir Geld für Betroffene sammeln, Support organisieren und juristische Auseinandersetzungen begleiten müssen. Aber wie die italienischen Antifaschist*innen schreiben, gilt es, sich in diesen Zeiten nicht als Opfer zu inszenieren. Es gilt sich offen und ehrlich auf die richtige Seite zu stellen. Die Geschichten von Ilaria und Gabriele zeigen, dass auch Kleine, wenn auch temporäre, Erfolgsmomente möglich sind.

stop there, but rather with a moment of hope, giving a purpose to the comic and publication, too, providing a fragile hope: “Although the freedom we dreamed of always carries with it the risk of losing everything, we must continue.”¹⁹ (*Antifaschist*innen aus Deutschland*, 2024, p. 10) This hope can be achieved by intersectional antifascist solidarity only, and is framed as responsibility, as in the first comic by Zerocalcare looked at here. And for this it needs, according to the preface ‘unyielding’ antifascists.

Similar tones can be found in the afterword by ‘Italian antifascists.’ This follows on the other side of the comic, after its epilogue. Interestingly, first point of references in this afterword is the meeting of fascists and far-right actors in Potsdam in November 2023 in Germany, a meeting that – after reports about it – kindled the discussion about the far-right concept of a so-called ‘remigration’ into broader consciousness and led to massive protests after being made public in early 2024. From this the afterword moves to the probably most prominent participant of the meeting, the Austrian fascist Martin Sellner, main figure of the Austrian Identitarian Movement. Lines are drawn between Sellner and the assassin of Christchurch, but also to Elon Musk as an important financier of the far right. This is background to the reference on the elections to the European Parliament, in the time of writing of the afterword yet to come, and the expectation that the far right, in the text with reference to the main far-right Italian parties Fratelli d’Italia and Lega, will get more votes. Indeed, an expectation that came true (European Parliament, 2024c). But it is not about numbers primarily, but what the numbers mean content-wise, as the afterword stresses: “The notion that the ideas of the far right are merely propaganda is profoundly wrong. Anyone who has followed the trial of antifascist activist Ilaria Salis and other activists will have noticed that, after years of Orbán’s government, Hungary is indeed an authoritarian democracy in which there are essentially no procedural guarantees for members of the opposition”²⁰. (*Antifaschist*innen aus Italien*, 2024, p. 96f.) However, there are more conclusions that can be drawn from the meeting in Potsdam, next to the movement of far-right policies and rhetorics into conservative circles, it is that going out to the streets can make a difference (*Antifaschist*innen aus Italien*, 2024, p. 97).

Albeit, a conclusion is, too, that the far right today is more than a few single voices, as the Potsdam meeting shows again: “The third finding is that there is a

19 Obwohl die Freiheit, die wir uns erträumten, immer mit der Gefahr verbunden ist, alles zu verlieren, gilt es, weiterzumachen.

20 Die Vorstellung, dass die Ideen der extremen Rechten nur Propaganda sind, ist zutiefst falsch. Wer den Prozess gegen die antifaschistische Aktivistin Ilaria Salis und andere Aktivist*innen / verfolgt hat, wird das festgestellt haben: Ungarn ist nach Jahren der Orbán-Regierung tatsächlich eine autoritäre Demokratie, in der es im Wesentlichen keine prozessualen Garantien für Oppositionelle gibt

broad political spectrum that identifies with certain slogans, and this spectrum is extensive: it ranges from the institutional right to populist parties to neo-fascist extremists and the richest man in the world.”²¹ (Antifaschist*innen aus Italien, 2024, p. 97) And this clearly is a European and transnational ‘spectrum,’ as the afterwords lines out: “The 27 countries of the European Union are home to very different parties, but they are able to speak a common language: some of them have direct links to // the fascist movements defeated in 1945, such as those led by Marine Le Pen and Giorgia Meloni, while others emerged from the liberal opposition to real socialism, such as Fidesz under Orban (sic!). Still others have grown in response to immigration and have a populist or ethno-nationalist orientation, such as the Lega in Italy or the Vlaams Belang in Belgium. All these parties share a common language.”²² (Antifaschist*innen aus Italien, 2024, p. 97f.)

In summary, the text claims that ‘we’ are worse off than a few years ago. A reason for this is, according to the afterword, that calls against the far right, especially by institutional actors, often remained empty because they called for the defense of something that is not good for most. Despite these conclusions there is still hope in the afterword, as in the comic itself, but not in defending the status quo, because we live in “a present marked by injustice, racism, dramatic inequalities, suffering, and wars. Warnings about the rise of the far right, which stands for austerity, war, and Fortress Europe, can only seem hypocritical. And although things can always get worse, // it is equally true that the only antifascist movement that has a chance of success is one that carries within it the seeds of a new world.”²³ (Antifaschist*innen aus Italien, 2024, p. 98f.) And (part of) this seed is in the comic, too, that narrates a story known about by many, but in a clearly and consciously one-sided perspective, a

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- 21 Die dritte Erkenntnis ist, dass es ein breites politisches Spektrum gibt, das sich in bestimmten Parolen wiedererkennt, und dieses Spektrum ist umfangreich: es reicht von der institutionellen Rechten über populistische Parteien bis hin zu neofaschistischen Extremisten und dem reichsten Mann der Welt.
- 22 In den 27 Staaten der Europäischen Union gibt es sehr unterschiedliche Parteien, die jedoch in der Lage sind, eine gemeinsame Sprache zu sprechen: Einige von ihnen haben eine direkte Verbindung zu den im Jahr //1945 besiegten Faschismen, wie die von Marine Le Pen und Giorgia Meloni geführten, während andere aus der liberalen Opposition gegen den Realsozialismus hervorgegangen sind, wie Fidesz unter Orban (sic!). Wieder andere sind als Reaktion auf die Einwanderung gewachsen und haben eine populistische oder ethnonationalistische Ausrichtung, wie die Lega in Italien oder das Vlaams Belang in Belgien. Alle diese Parteien teilen eine gemeinsame Sprache.
- 23 Eine Gegenwart geprägt von Ungerechtigkeiten, Rassismus, dramatischen Ungleichheiten, Leid und Kriegen. Die Warnungen vor dem Vormarsch der extremen Rechten, die für Austerität, Kriege und die Festung Europa stehen, können nur heuchlerisch erscheinen. Und obwohl es immer schlimmer werden kann, // ist es ebenso wahr, dass die einzige antifaschistische Bewegung, die eine Chance auf Erfolg hat, jene ist, die den Samen einer neuen Welt in sich trägt.

worldview that follows the idea there should be no Nazis and fascists, and a perspective that moves beyond the one case of Ilaria Salis, repeatedly reminding the reader that many more are involved. To raise awareness about a chance for an antifascist voice is seen in the election of Ilaria Sali to the European Parliament. It is a hope only partially fulfilled by the time of writing with most references about Ilaria Salis still being in the context of the accusations and Hungary keeping up the accusations (The Left, 2024). What's more Hungary uses the election of Ilaria Salis as a case to discredit the Parliament as such (Morsa, 2024). But there are traces of antifascist work in the Parliament, as with questions by Ilaria Salis (European Parliament, 2024a). Contrary to this the afterword written before the election is much more hopeful and refers to the success so far, until then, to put the case into spotlight and show the injustice of the Hungarian legal system; successes claimed to be achieved by acting in solidarity and as 'collective intelligence.' However, this is framed as responsibility again, the need to secure that no one is left behind (Antifaschist*innen aus Italien, 2024, p. 99). Here clearly again solidarity is framed as an obligation of taking responsibility.

Important for this is, according to the afterword, that Ilaria Salis never presented herself and is never presented in the comic as victim. This is said to be especially important in a time in which just being an antifascist is discredited and punished. It remains unclear why here 'antifascist' is not gendered in the German translation and remains in masculine ("das bloße Sein von Antifaschisten"). Since it is gendered in the text in general this might be interpreted as a careless mistake (Antifaschist*innen aus Italien, 2024, p. 100). Against this danger and threat a 'need' for being antifascist, in a newly needed consciousness, is brought forward – in the end the idea of intersectional antifascist solidarity: "Antifascism is a collective responsibility that we inherit from those who gave their lives before us against a deadly ideology and for a world based on justice and equality. For this reason, it is our duty to live it, spread it, and fight against its criminalization, as is currently happening in the courtrooms of Hungary and Germany (but we could also add the USA, Italy, France...). For us, antifascism must free itself from hypocrisy; it must not be used merely as a bogeyman in election campaigns, but should be something living and constructive."²⁴ (Antifaschist*innen aus Italien, 2024, p. 100) This is a call for action, making being antifascist a kind of historical obligation and at the same

24 Antifaschismus ist eine kollektive Verantwortung, die wir von denen erben, die vor uns ihr Leben gegen eine tödliche Ideologie und für eine Weltidee basierend auf Gerechtigkeit und Gleichheit gegeben haben. Aus diesem Grund ist es unsere Aufgabe, ihn zu leben, zu verbreiten und seine Kriminalisierung zu bekämpfen, wie es momentan in den Gerichtssälen Ungarns und Deutschlands geschieht (aber wir könnten auch amerikanische, italienische, französische... hinzufügen). Für uns muss sich der Antifaschismus von Heucheleien befreien; er darf nicht nur als Schreckgespenst in Wahlkämpfen verwendet werden, sondern sollte etwas Lebendiges und Konstruktives sein.

time demanding to make being antifascist more than a claim or acting as an agent of hypocrisy. This is constructed as an obligation to also work against strong tendencies of societies moving towards the far right, as legal threats would show, especially, but not only, in Hungary and Germany, making another link between the Italian production and the German adaption of the comic. In line of this call to action the afterword ends with the explanation that part of the money earned with the comic will be used in a solidarity fund and the activists call to “free all antifas!” (Antifaschist*innen aus Italien, 2024, p. 100)

The comic – more background and a clear positioning

Preface and afterword are only the framework of the comic that is centerpiece of the publication. But they give purpose and reasoning to the comic, a direction and an interpretation. The comic starts with identical pages of “Unten im Loch” – basically pages 15 to 40 are a reprint of “Unten im Loch.” However, this appears in another translation, to cover for the humor of Zerocalcare, based on his Roman dialect, made possible by following the Berlin dialect of Nico Seyfrid (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 13). While “Unten im Loch” remains more or less in standard German, albeit informal even in writing, on the same pages in “Diese Nacht wird keine kurze sein” it is a Berlin dialect for the drawn words by Zerocalcare himself, while the rest of the text is in standard German, if nonetheless in another translation than “Unten im Loch.” This is, most of the time, only a slight movement but no change content-wise. However, what is missing are the parts not translated in “Unten im Loch”, explained to be untranslatable swearing words there. Yet they are translated nonetheless in “Diese Nacht wird keine kurze sein,” but not word for word, not even in their meaning, just to signify ‘swearing in dialect’ – and by this – translated by the words – “Damn the oviparous clergy of Pomezia...”²⁵ (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 5) becomes, in Berlin dialect, “Dude, born stupid, learned nothing, and forgot the rest!”²⁶ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 19) Another change is that the parts in red in “Unten im Loch” as: “Dear reader [only male in German], please read the next three pages, then continue with the lighter, more relaxing comic”²⁷ (p. 14), is no presented in standard text without any form of highlighting, for the most part. Only some of the words are underlined in “Diese Nacht wird keine kurze sein” (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 28f.). Furthermore the comic “Diese Nacht wird keine kurze sein” moves references to a German-context, as the joke of what the worst punishment could be. While this remains in “Unten im

25 Mo', mannaggia al clero oviparo paludoso do pomezia...

26 Alter, Dumm jeboren, nüscht dazujerlert und den Rest verjessen!

27 Lieber Leser (sic!), lies bitte die nächsten 3 Seiten, danach geht es mit dem eher leichteren und Kopf abschaltenden Comic weiter.

Loch” with “Ride Mailand-Rom with Guiseppe Cruciani”²⁸ (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 19) in an Italian example, in “Diese Nacht wird keine kurze sein” it transforms to a partly adapted German example “Frankfurt to Berlin in a BlaBlaCar with Richard David Precht”²⁹ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 33). Taking this “Diese Nacht wird keine kurze sein” in this first part is less direct in content, more a narration, a general story, while the zine-like publication “Unten im Loch” is on the one hand more linked to the Italian context and original and on the other hand more directly addressing. Only in some parts the adapted translation is more a direct translation, as in the dedication not anymore to those – in English in the comic itself – “on the run” (Zerocalcare, 2024b, p. 26) in “Unten im Loch,” but to those “who keep on running”³⁰ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 40), as in the original – “chi continua a correre” (Internazionale, 2024, p. 65). These parts are the exception of the general tendency of “Diese Nacht wird keine kurze sein” to be more an adaptation in translation, fitted to a German audience, than a very direct translation.

From there, the yet unpublished German comic part starts, the part now called “Diese Nacht wird keine kurze sein” – the title of the comic as such. This is described as a weekly comic-series looking at actual developments of the case of Ilaria and other antifascists of the ‘Budapest-complex’ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 43). It starts with the question why the comic is still necessary – with the clear message it is necessary to keep attention and those ‘in the hole’ in focus and not allow media attention to shift as for other topics. This again is modified with a German contextualization and listing of topics in high awareness in the German media and soon no longer in mass attention (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 45). “That’s why the big media fireworks that lights up the sky at midnight for a brief moment is pointless – and then it gets dark and everyone goes to bed.”³¹ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 46) Instead, there is a need for light and care for those keeping the light, the attention, to allow for orientation and recognize each other in the night. “Also because this night... ..fuck it, isn’t going to be a short one.”³² (in dialect in: Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 47) – explaining the title. The ‘long night’ of far-right dominance has to be covered, and the comic calls for linked action and raises awareness on the need for covering. This is linked to a donation website address for the juridical costs on the same page – showing the comic clearly goes beyond informing in a certain way but calling for action and activism.

The following comic is ordered in episodes. Episode 1, one of four pages, is about the manipulation of the debate. Fake news producers are named and described here

28 Mitfahrgelegenheit Mailand-Rom mit Guiseppe Cruciani

29 Frankfurt-Berlin in nem BlaBlaCar mit Richard David Precht
30 die weiterhin laufen.

31 Deshalb bring das große mediale Feuerwerk nix, das den Himmel um Mitternacht für einen kurzen Moment taghell erleuchtet – und dann wird’s dunkel und alle ab ins Bett.

32 Auch weil diese Nachtverfickt noch mal keene kurze sein wird.

while the term itself is criticized as too weak. And concrete examples are shown of far-right descriptions and media statements, contrasted with facts, as the use of pictures of beaten-up Nazis that in fact were not beaten up by those linked to graphically (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 48f.). At times this is linked to other debates, as in the German translation the question how to address the crimes in Gaza and who is to be called antisemite and who not.³³ But main point is not to decide about guilt or rectifying anything in Budapest. Instead: “The point is that those who spread lies, distort facts or omit important details do so deliberately. (...) Because this [the trial against Ilaria] is a purely political process. It is political in its course and political in the way it is told. It is important to be clear about that.”³⁴ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 51)

Episode 2 is about ‘the other attacks’ discussing the counter-argument often heard, that crimes are crimes and those committing violence have to be punished. But it is shown, that for the similar attacks far-right attackers are punished with some hours in jail while Ilaria and Tobi are in jail for more than one year (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 52f.). This episode is shorter than episode 1 with just two pages. The same holds true for episode 3 showing how private details of Ilaria and the police photo of Ilaria moved fast to fascists websites. This fact is used to argue for an immediate need to transfer Ilaria to Italy to get at least a fair trial in tendency since police forces in Hungary and fascists seem to be too close (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 54f.). Next comes an interlude, showing the author travelling to Budapest to the trial and telling the reader this time they will be ahead with their information since the newspaper will be published in two weeks only (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 56). From the interlude onwards a clear episode structure is lost. After this section, the next pages are about the days in Budapest, the author and others being followed all the time, and the author looking worried for the things yet to come. This is followed by the comic-diary ‘A day in Budapest’ that tries to capture the atmosphere, but also how much of a fair trial the situation in Budapest is allowing for. There are no police forces at the court building outside. Instead, there are multiple and diverse fascists filming and threatening others, no free press, no state forces, only a fascist controlled zone. Even at the door seemingly fascists, or at least not state security, are positioned (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 62ff.). And as opposed to potential readers that might be afraid of being filmed by fascists or afraid of potential violence, the author is not and makes a different point: “But that is the best example of what we mean when we say that

33 The Italian original unfortunately is not available for these parts of the comic to the author.

34 Der Punkt ist, dass diejenigen, die Lügen verbreiten, Fakten verzerren oder wichtige Details weglassen, das bewusst tun. (...) Denn das ist ein rein politischer Prozess. Er ist politisch in seinem Ablauf und politisch in der Weise, wie er erzählt wird. Es ist wichtig, das klar zu haben.

there are no conditions for a fair, democratic process there.”³⁵ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 69)

In the courthouse the author finally sees Ilaria, covered by two police in anti-terror-armor, first barely visible behind, then shown to the press as public. All scenery in the courthouse is more and more seen by the author as something antique, the presentation of the body of enemies, a hunting trophy. And this broadens for the author the distance between the trial and a state of law and habeas corpus (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 73f.). At court it is only decided about the request that the arrest be made outside the jail, with electronic cuffs. But instead of arguing and accepting the arguments put forward by Ilaria’s lawyer, the judge simply decides that Ilaria has to stay in prison, without even considering the new circumstances. Much more so than before the author reports about a state of fading hope, of injustice, with him getting back to Rome while Ilaria goes back to ‘the hole’ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 75ff.). Contrary to this scenery of fading hope, supporters from all over Italy gather in front of the court building, including some not in favor of what Ilaria had done, but all united by the conviction that Ilaria should not be ‘thrown to dogs with rabies.’ The decision at the Hungarian court is further contrasted in the following with the juridical decision in Italy against Gabriele Marchesi, confronted with the accusation of the same crimes. However, in contrast to Ilaria Gabriele is set free and will not be extradited to Hungary, referring to inhumane conditions in jails in Hungary. This simultaneously makes Ilaria more a hostage than a defendant as comic and Zerocalcare stress (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 78ff.). But how to react to this? – the comic asks. Some claim that less politicization and more silence would be the solution. The comic clearly argues against, giving counterarguments in bullet points. It does not provide a solution, no easy steps to follow, but explains a path, that those ‘outside the hole’ none the less have to act. According to Zerocalcare they cannot opt for silence or easy answers, because those in ‘the hole’ do not give up, which makes those outside even more obliged to carry on. Again, the comic stresses a need for solidarity, an obligation for solidarity, taking differences into account – an intersectional antifascist solidarity (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 83).

After this message another black page follows and one more, albeit unnumbered episode. Now readers are confronted with the apparent ‘solution’ to the Ilaria case – in the moment of writing –, the option of arrest at home until the court rules. The last part of this ‘solution’ is stressed by the author, in the translation in Berlin dialect again – making it no ‘solution’ at all: “It’s a kind of mini summer break. With an electronic ankle bracelet instead of chains. Then she might get 20 years in Octo-

35 Aber das ist das beste Beispiel dafür, was wir meinen, wenn wir sagen, dass es dort keine Voraussetzungen für einen fairen, demokratischen Prozess gibt.

ber and have to go back. Until 2045, understood?”³⁶ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 85) And it is even worse – again putting the Hungarian legal system into spotlight – the judge is publicly mentioning the address of the arrest at home. “A moment of carelessness? Or revenge to pay her back for getting out of prison? Either way, it shouldn’t have happened. Because Ilaria Salis and her family are constantly threatened by neo-Nazis.”³⁷ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 86) And indeed 72 hours later the address can be found on a fascist-website. This leads to the last page of the comic, a one-page panel – a night scenery with a tram without light and apparently a person’s shoulder on the left corner. The text above the picture is: “This is the 1454th example of how there are no conditions for a fair and democratic trial in Hungary. On the contrary, the lives and safety of Ilaria and the people who are sheltering her are being deliberately endangered by the institutions and neo-Nazis.”³⁸ And in the picture itself: “And in the darkness of night, the boundary between these shadows is truly difficult to discern.”³⁹ This is finalized beyond the nearly page-large picture with: “It’s not morning yet. / And / Nothing has been resolved.”⁴⁰ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 87) The night that is not a short one continues, as the page suggests.

However, after this page another comic part follows, an epilogue of four pages, discussing the question: “But now, finally, why did you get so worked up about it?”⁴¹ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 90) This epilogue narrates the insecurity of the situation and the conclusions drawn. At the moment of drawing, the European elections have not taken place yet, there was no court ruling yet. Nonetheless the author stresses, that even though some parts of the comic might ‘age badly,’ one principle remains immortal and will stand true – in German ‘seven simple words:’ “You don’t let people rot in jail”.⁴² (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 90) This principle is framed as indispensable, especially in ‘our times’ when ‘all’ warn that fascism is on the rise again and we have to do something. But if someone is doing something, most nonetheless distance themselves from methods or certain aims. According to the comic only a podcast

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- 36 Det is so ne Art Kleene Sommerpause. Mit de elektronische Fußfessel statt die Ketten. Dann kann es sein, dass sie im Oktober 20 Jahre kriegt und wieder zurück muss. Bis 2045, verstanden?
- 37 Eine Unachtsamkeit? Oder Rache, um ihr den Gefängnisausgang heimzuzahlen? So oder so hätte das nicht passieren dürfen. Weil Ilaria Salis und ihre Familie ständig von Neonazis bedroht werden.
- 38 Das ist das 1454. Beispiel dafür, dass es in Ungarn keine Bedingungen für einen fairen und demokratischen Prozess gibt. Im Gegenteil. Das Leben und die Sicherheit von Ilaria und den Menschen, die sie bei sich aufnehmen, werden von den Institutionen und den Neonazis absichtlich gefährdet.
- 39 Und in der Dunkelheit der Nacht ist die Grenze zwischen diesen Schatten wirklich schwer zu erkennen.
- 40 Es ist noch nicht Morgen. / Und / Nichts ist gelöst.
- 41 Aber jetzt zum Schluss, warum hast du dir da so druff einjeschossen?
- 42 Man lässt Menschen nicht im Knast verrotten

might be accepted by most, again reframed in writing with a German podcast-example. But the position of the author is a different one, because “this should really be basic knowledge (...) / If you see yourself as part of a community.”⁴³ (p. 91). It is the hope of Zerocalcare that when he himself will stumble in the drawn darkness others will help him up and not walk away as if nothing happened. Otherwise none can ask for engagement according to the author. Here a circle is drawn, connections made between conservative narratives of an unengaged- or disinterested-youth, a rising far right, and being left alone as soon as something happens. This is the circle civic engagement is stuck in often, endangered by neglect and just too easy distancing. And this has highly adultistic features, as the comic lines out indirectly. There is no unengaged- and disinterested-youth, but a system disengaging, especially youth and voices against current trends in society. Though, this is not followed up further. Rather, the focus of both comic and author is the simpler but at the same time more fundamental message, that it needs collective support to and for change: “I know that sounds almost like a political prerequisite. But in the sense that it prepares us for politics. Taking responsibility only works collectively. You defend everyone who goes with you.”⁴⁴ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 92) This ‘conclusion’ finally is used for a statement on the current situation in the time of drawing the comic: “In Budapest, it is not only Ilaria Salis who is being sentenced, but dozens of antifascists [in binary gender in the translation]. / Arrested or on the run across Europe. / (...) 1,000 survival tricks for those who find themselves in this stranglehold. / But just a few words to those who are outside. / – Seven are enough – / You don’t let people rot in jail [.] even if I have to repeat it 7,000 times.”⁴⁵ (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 93)

And following this idea the comic has three last pages after the afterword by ‘Italian antifascists,’ first sound appearing to be emanate from or to the opening of ‘the hole’ on one page, light and faces and people appearing in the dark around ‘the hole,’ assumably symbolizing collective action and awareness raising, on the second page. Finally a last page showing many people in the center, standing against what can be assumed to be police forces depicted only as shadows in both corners of the page, with the line “Free All Antifas” above them and on a sign between the people and the police again. This is completed by a kind of paper bird flying on the back of the back

43 Aber das hier, das sollte wirklich das Einmaleins sein. / Wenn man sich als Teil einer Gemeinschaft versteht.

44 Ich weiß, das klingt fast wie eine politische Vorbedingung. Aber in dem Sinne, dass uns das auf die Politik vorbereitet. Verantwortungsübernahme funktioniert nur kollektiv. Du verteidigst alle, die mit dir gehen.

45 In Budapest wird nicht nur Ilaria Salis verurteilt, sondern dutzende Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten. / Festgenommen oder in ganz Europa auf der Flucht. / (...) 1000 Überlebens-Kunstgriffe an diejenigen, die sich in diesem Würgegriff befinden. / Aber nur einige Worte an diejenigen, die draußen sind. / – Es reichen sieben – / Man lässt Menschen nicht im Knast verrotten [.] Auch wenn ich es 7000 Mal wiederholen muss.

cover and the feet chains torn apart on the back cover itself (Zerocalcare, 2024a, p. 102ff.). There is hope in the ending of the comic – if you follow intersectional antifascist solidarity.

Comics and intersectional antifascist solidarity – the example of Zerocalcare and beyond

Activism against the far right can be labeled as antifascist action. However, the label is rejected by many whose work could be labeled as ‘working against fascism’ on an analytical basis. This is not the case for the comics in focus here, neither for the author nor the structures behind. They themselves label and see themselves as antifascists. But at the same time being aware of the broad rejection of the label, the call to action is broader and more inclusive, going beyond ‘antifa,’ and by this way providing a first pillar for intersectional antifascist solidarity. Part of this is to understand not all want to or can call themselves antifascists, but can work against the far right in their own manners nonetheless. Including all of them in their diversity and differences in power, makes it an intersectional approach. This is not without limits and flaws, as misgendering, remaining in binarisms or being still ableist, as the comics – but also preface and afterword – in part do. Approach and demand are not the limits, but the opening, making it a practical intersectional approach, with all its limits in different forms of practice. And it is an intersectional antifascist approach, following a broad understanding of antifascism as working against the same tendencies and actors, loosely labeled far right or Nazis. While this is frame and base, the call for action is one of solidarity. No solidarity as a mere claim or one too easily achieved, but rather a challenging one. Nevertheless it is no question of choice, following the comics and their message, but of obligation and responsibility. To remain human and part of civic society it is necessary to take responsibility – along their own limits and power, making it an intersectional obligation. This duty of solidarity is the clear message in the comics. And the comics themselves are part of this duty and solidarity, following a specific constructed perspective. They are sold or spread for money used for those imprisoned or ‘on the run.’ And they call for action and raise awareness. In this sense the comics by Zerocalcare are clear examples of media for antifascists calls to action and solidarity in an intersectional perspective. Even though the topic is a concrete case of an Italian woman accused in Hungary, the comics once and again try to move beyond this limited perspective and remain open for further intersectional perspectives. And even though they inform, educate and raise awareness, they also call for action. Lived intersectional antifascist solidarity is not looking away, but giving light, going on fighting the far right, as the comics and the accompanying preface and afterword make clear. And this needs transnational action without fixed limits, making the label antifascism not just a choice, but a de-

scription of solidaric action against the far right in intersectional awareness at the same time. This claim, description and call is fostered and constructed in different ways – here summarized in analytical manner as intersectional antifascist solidarity –, but comics like the ones by Zerocalcare play a significant role in this, to intervene and give perspective, as shown here. And they are not only the perspective of Zerocalcare, who is declaring once and again that all work is always a collective one, only this makes them political (Ercolani, 2014). The comics by Zerocalcare are clearly political, not giving voice to just one, but to a collective with different perspectives. This is lived – and drawn – intersectional antifascist solidarity, with the ability of Zerocalcare to offer a specific and unique contribution to this solidarity.

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