

Entangled Drag/Trans Panics: A Reflection on the Intersections of Anti-Gender U.S. Politics and Recent Attacks on Drag Storytelling in Germany and Austria

Christine M. Klapeer (University of Giessen, Germany)

The Year of Drag Panics

2023 will be remembered not only as the year of drag panics in the U.S.,¹ but also in Germany and Austria. A number of right-wing, far-right² and conservative Christian groups mobilized fiercely and violently against drag story hours (*Drag Lesungen*) – educational events, for example, in public libraries, where drag performers playfully read stories to children. Drag Queen Vicky Voyage, Drag King Eric BigClit, and Julana Gleisenberg, who do drag storytelling events in Munich, describe their program as follows: “[We read] from picture books that tell the stories of different heroes/heroines: boys in dresses, princesses with a mind of their own, the colors blue and pink, rabbits and foxes, discovering their own freedom and much more.”³ The stated objective of the drag story

-
- 1 For an overview of anti-drag bans and respective legislations in the U.S., see New Democracy Maps, “Restrictions on drag performances,” Movement Advancement Project, n.d., https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/criminaljustice/drag_restrictions; Tim Squirrel and Jacob Davey, “A Year of Hate: Understanding Threats and Harassment Targeting Drag Shows and the LGBTQ+ Community,” Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2023, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Understanding-Threats-and-Harassment-Targeting-Drag-Shows-and-the-LGBTQ-Community.pdf>.
 - 2 In this article, I use ‘far right’ as an umbrella term that includes both radical right-wing and extreme right-wing actors.
 - 3 Münchner Stadtbibliothek, “Wir lesen euch die Welt, wie sie euch gefällt. Draglesung für Kinder,” June 13, 2023, <https://www.muenchner-stadtbibliothek.de/veranstaltungen>

hours is to promote diversity and to inspire children's imaginations through the use of non-stereotypically gendered, diverse, and inclusive storytelling.



Figure 7: Poster against Drag Story Hours by the Alternative for Germany (AfD)⁴

In Germany, the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) has in particular publicly agitated against drag story times for children. For example, the chair of a local AfD group in Bavaria and the organizer of a protest rally against a drag story time event in a public library in Munich, Rene Dierkes asserted that these events constitute a form of “psychological harassment of children” with the intent of “indoctrinating them through gender propaganda and early sexu-

n/details/wir-lesen-euch-die-welt-wie-sie-euch-gefaellt-20505. Where not otherwise indicated, all translations by the author.

4 Firm, “Alternative für Deutschland Wahlplakat Bayern 2023,” 2023, archive.

alization.”⁵ To advertise this protest rally, the AfD put up billboards and posters throughout the city of Munich in the spring 2023 that depict a drag queen in the background – or, in the AfD’s imagination, a ‘man wearing make-up’ – reaching for a scared little boy seated in the foreground.⁶ The slogan “Hands off our children! – Ban gender propaganda!” is displayed beneath the image.⁷

Not only did the posters and billboards portray drag queens and trans people as interchangeable, but also as potential ‘pedophiles’ and ‘groomers.’ Further, the images made use of anti-Semitic stereotypes and narratives, such as Jews as child abductors and child murderers. The protests organized by the AfD against a drag story time event in Munich were also supported by the prominent and influential anti-gender organization *Demo für Alle* (the demonstration for everyone). Inspired by the French group *La Manif pour tous*,⁸ the German organization *Demo für Alle* was established during 2013 and 2014 in the context of a planned reform of the school curriculum in Baden-Württemberg. The Ministry of Education intended to incorporate “the acceptance of sexual diversity” as a fundamental aspect of school education.⁹ *Demo für Alle*, a political coalition of Christian conservatives, right-wing and far-right activists, successfully

5 AfD München, “Wahlkampfauftakt in München – Impressionen und Presse zur Demo gegen Genderpropaganda,” June 14, 2023, <https://www.afd-muenchen.de/tag/paedophilie/>.

6 The billboards of the AfD anti-drag campaign can be viewed at Michael Schulze, “Volksverhetzung: Anzeige gegen AfD gestellt,” *Queer*, June 10, 2023, https://www.queer.de/detail.php?article_id=45887.

7 Ibid.

8 A political organization in France, *La Manif pour tous* (“The Protest for all”) was responsible for most of the large demonstrations in opposition to the opening of marriage to queer couples. The name *La Manif pour tous* was taken from the French phrase *Le mariage pour tous* (“marriage for all”), the popular term used in France to promote same-sex marriage. The movement supports heteronormative family constellations, agitates against the teaching of ‘gender theory’ and sex education in French schools, and opposes LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusive education as ‘gender ideology.’

9 Anna Lena Oldemeier et al., “Divergenz, Ambivalenz, Kongruenz: Verhältnisbestimmungen zwischen antifeministischem Diskurs und pädagogischem Feld,” in *Antifeminismen. ‘Krisen’ – Diskurse mit gesellschaftsspaltendem Potential?* ed. Annette Henninger and Ursula Birsl (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 231–264; Frauke Grenz, “Let’s (Not) Talk About Sex: Eine Analyse von Unsagbarkeiten in der Debatte um den baden-württembergischen Bildungsplan,” in *Jahrbuch erziehungswissenschaftliche Geschlechterforschung*, 17, ed. Susann Fegter, Antje Langer, and Christine Thon (Opladen: Budrich, 2021), 185–200; Imke Schmincke, “‘Besorgte Eltern’ und ‘Demo für alle’ – das Kind als Chiffre politischer Auseinandersetzungen,” Heinrich Böll Stiftung: Gunda-Werner-In-

organized protests and public rallies against the school reform, claiming that a LGBTIQ+ inclusive education would promote the “early sexualization of children” and that it was an “attempt to indoctrinate” children with “gender ideology.”¹⁰

In this context, Imke Schmincke sheds light on the distinctive role that ‘the child’ plays in the mobilization strategies of the *Demo für Alle* and in the anti-gender politics of right-wing and far-right organizations more broadly.¹¹ According to Schmincke, the image of the child functions as a “cipher ... in right-wing conservative and right-wing populist arguments against ‘early sexualization’ and ‘gender ideology,’” because the child “secures attention, lends credibility and, above all, moral weight. In these references, children represent innocence and neediness.”¹² The trope of the innocent child that needs protection in order to safeguard the future of ‘the family’ and ‘the nation’ has also appeared in more recent statements by the *Demo für Alle*, in which the organization explicitly denounces drag storytelling events. They claim that

so-called Drag Queen Story Hours (DQSH) are about much more than just harmless reading sessions for children. One of the declared aims ... is the ‘subversion of gender roles.’ The pivotal point is therefore gender ideology, which then drives insecure children into the transgender delusion.¹³

This statement by the *Demo für Alle* strongly resonates with the arguments of Dominik Nepp, the chairperson of the Viennese branch of the Austrian far-right political party, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), and one of the most vocal opponents against drag story hours for children in Austria. In a press re-

stitute, July 29, 2016, https://www.gwi-boell.de/sites/default/files/uploads/2016/07/input_besorgte_eltern_schmincke.pdf.

10 Grenz, “Let’s (Not) Talk About Sex,” 192–193.

11 Schmincke, “‘Besorgte Eltern’ und Demo für alle.”

12 Ibid., 4.

13 Demo für Alle, “Wie sich Drag Queens in Kinderherzen schleichen,” n.d., <https://demo.fueralle.de/2023/04/24/subversive-ziele-wie-sich-drag-queens-in-kinderherzen-schleichen/>.

lease, he requested that drag readings for children be prohibited in Austria.¹⁴ He argues, that

there must be an end to propagating to children and young people that transgender or gender reassignment is something completely normal. Because there are only two biological sexes, namely man and woman and nothing else. ... Any form of indoctrination [such as drag story times] to the contrary must therefore be kept away from children.¹⁵

The aforementioned statements in conjunction with the posters in Munich serve to illustrate that the FPÖ and the AfD perceive drag story hours as indications of a dangerous ‘normalization of trans’ and ‘gender transgression,’ particularly with regard to children. Both of these conservative parties support the prevailing narrative behind anti-gender movements that presents the innocent child as in danger of becoming permanently damaged in its development due to the blurring of ‘natural facts’ – the existence of only two sexes/genders – through drag story hours.¹⁶

Analyzing Drag Panics as Trans(gender) Panics

Recent cases of drag panics in Germany and Austria are inextricably linked to what Sally Hines has termed “(trans)gender panics.”¹⁷ Such “(trans)gender panics” are part of a broader anti-feminist and anti-gender landscape that has emerged globally over the past decade in particularized geopolitical manifestations.¹⁸ Anti-gender and antifeminist campaigns comprise a heterogeneous group of actors, and not all anti-gender actors are part of the far-right political

14 FPÖ Wien Rathausklub, “Nepp: Drag-Queen-Lesung verbieten, Kinder schützen: Transgender-Propaganda muss von Kindern und Jugendlichen ferngehalten werden,” OTS, April 14, 2023, https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20230414_OTS0048/fpoe-nepp-drag-queen-lesung-verbieten-kinder-schuetzen.

15 Ibid.

16 Marie Wittenius, “The transnational anti-gender movement in Europe,” Heinrich Böll Stiftung: Gunda Werner Institute, February 3, 2022, <https://gwi-boell.de/index.php/en/2022/02/03/the-transnational-anti-gender-movement-europe>.

17 Sally Hines, “Sex Wars and (Trans) Gender Panics: Identity and Body Politics in Contemporary UK Feminism,” *Sociological Review* 68, no. 4 (2020): 699–717.

18 Marie Wittenius, “The transnational anti-gender movement in Europe.”

spectrum. Yet the respective ideologies and politics of these actors have become a central element of contemporary (new) far-right and right-wing populist groups, particularly in Austria and Germany.¹⁹ Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, amongst others, argue that an “obsession with gender” has become “an omnipresent mark in right-wing discourse,”²⁰ especially with respect to the centrality of racialized and “ethnosexist” images of ‘white (German/Austrian) women’ who need to be protected from ‘foreigners.’

Furthermore, the terms “gender ideology” and “early sexualisation” have become highly resonant in right-wing and far-right groups in Germany and Austria and would not have become so well-known without their inclusion in the respective parties’ political narratives and campaigns.²¹ Within the heterogeneous antifeminist and anti-gender movements, the terms “gender” and “gender ideology” function as “empty signifiers” that can be imbued with various meanings,²² as Birgit Sauer and Stefanie Mayer contend. “Gender” can stand for the alleged threat that equality policies pose to the natural order of the sexes; it can also stand for the so-called ideology of gender studies, or for the danger that LGBTQIA+ rights and LGBTQIA+ inclusive education supposedly pose to ‘normal’ families and the future of the nation and children’s well-being.

According to Birgit Sauer, this implies that very different topics can be invoked with or against ‘gender’ and incorporated into a strategy against ‘those up there’ and against supposed ‘others.’²³ However, as Sauer points out, opposition to and mobilizations against ‘gender’ also have to be understood as part of

-
- 19 Juliane Lang and Ulrich Peters, “Antifeminismus in Deutschland Einführung und Einordnung des Phänomens,” in *Antifeminismus in Bewegung: Aktuelle Debatten um Geschlecht und sexuelle Vielfalt*, ed. Juliane Lang and Ulrich Peters (Hamburg: Marta Press, 2018), 11–33; Annette Henninger and Ursula Birsl (eds.), *Anti-Feminismen: ‘Krisen’-Diskurse mit gesellschaftsspaltendem Potential* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020); Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020).
 - 20 Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, “Right-Wing Populism and Gender: A Preliminary Cartography of an Emergent Field of Research,” in *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives*, eds. Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 7.
 - 21 Wittenius, “The transnational anti-gender movement in Europe.”
 - 22 Stefanie Mayer and Birgit Sauer, “‘Gender Ideology’ in Austria: Coalitions around an Empty Signifier,” in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, eds. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 19–30.
 - 23 Birgit Sauer, “Anti-feministische Mobilisierung in Europa: Kampf um eine neue politische Hegemonie?” *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Politikwissenschaften* 13, no. 3 (2019): 339–352.

a broader struggle for “hegemony” by the far right and within right-wing populism. In this context, not only are gender and sexual relations continuously negotiated but so is the meaning of democracy itself and the relationship between the state and its citizens.²⁴ At the same time, ‘gender’ and ‘gender ideology’ function as a unifying force and a multi-purpose enemy that serves to encourage cooperation between various parts of the political spectrum, especially those on the Christian conservative, right-wing, and far-right end of the spectrum.

Anti-gender discourse and respective key terms such as “gender ideology,” “early sexualization,” “indoctrination,” and “Trans Lobby” provide a transnational, unifying meta-language for diverse political groups and actors.²⁵ It is therefore evident that contemporary protests against drag story hours in Germany and Austria can be situated within a global anti-trans, anti-gender and anti-feminist discourse, as respective tropes and key terms are mobilized in this context.

Drag Story Hours as Catalysts for Anti-Gender Campaigns

However, I also contend that drag story times serve as a *particular powerful catalyst* for anti-gender campaigns. Several contentious issues that were already targeted in contemporary right-wing, anti-feminist and anti-gender politics in Germany and Austria can *simultaneously* be addressed when agitating against drag storytelling events. On the one hand, drag story hours are portrayed as the *epitome* of the so-called early sexualization of children. On the other hand, they are represented as the *pinnacle* of ‘indoctrinating gender ideology,’ as they ‘target’ children while propagating the ‘lie’ of ‘transgenderism’ and promoting the destruction of the ‘normal family’ at a ‘family event.’ In light of the growing internationalization of anti-gender narratives and movements, critiques of drag readings have proven to be instrumental points of reference for a wide range of political actors from the right-wing, far-right, conspiratorial, and Christian conservative spectrum. Anti-drag rhetoric plays an important role in transnational networks and discourses, while, at the same

24 Birgit Sauer, “Anti-feministische Mobilisierung in Europa.”

25 Agnieszka Graff, Ratna Kapur, and Suzanna Danuta Walters, “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44, no. 3 (2019): 541–560.

time, allowing for a “very localized flavour” of protests against drag story hour events.²⁶ Local far-right and/or anti-gender groups represent these protest as ‘protecting’ and ‘safeguarding’ their city, family, and nation.

In addition to the public criticism of drag story times by far-right political parties in Austria and Germany, there have been instances of violence directed against drag story hour events that were framed as protective measures. As early as in 2022, Austrian members of the *Identitarian Movement*, a pan-European, extremist, violent, and anti-democratic far-right organization with connections to the AfD and the FPÖ, blocked the entrance to a public library in Vienna where a drag story time event was scheduled to be part of the library’s Pride Month celebrations.²⁷ A red, white, and red wall in the colors of the Austrian national flag was erected overnight and bore the inscription “#NoPrideMonth.” Flyers were distributed, warning against a “state-financed Globohomo-Ideology” and “early sexualization.”²⁸

The term “globohomo” is used by a wide range of right wing, far-right, conspiracist and (white) nationalist groups in Europe and the U.S. to organize against the alleged threat of a global plot by the LGBTIQ+ lobby that is said to control the world.²⁹ The term “globohomo” has anti-Semitic connotations and continues to be used by alt-right and far-right extremists in the context of (violent) attacks on drag story time events in the U.S.³⁰

-
- 26 Mark Chou, Rachel Busbridge, and Benjamin Moffitt, “The Far Right Goes Local: What the Precinct Strategy and Drag Queen Story Hour Attacks Tell Us about the Far Right’s Local Ambitions,” C-REX – Center for Research on Extremism, May 28, 2024, <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2024/far-right-goes-local.html>.
 - 27 Der Standard, “Wien: Rechtsextreme mauerten vor Dragqueen-Lesung Eingang zu Bücherei zu,” June 3, 2022, <https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000136283306/wien-rechtsextreme-betonierten-buechereieingang-vor-lesung-einer-dragqueen-zu>.
 - 28 Ibid.
 - 29 GLAAD, “Guide to Anti-LGBTQ Online Hate and Disinformation,” 2024, <https://glaad.org/smsi/anti-lgbtq-online-hate-speech-disinformation-guide/>.
 - 30 Advocate, “Neo-Nazis Chanting ‘Sieg Heil’ Target Drag Queen Story Event,” March 13, 2023, <https://www.advocate.com/news/ohio-nazi-drag-story-hour>.

International Networks of Anti-Drag Story Time Organizations

More recent research indicates that the German/Austrian *Identitarian Movement*, the AfD, and the FPÖ, have all developed a wide range of international contacts with various groups and parties from the (violent) far-right and alt-right end of the political spectrum; this includes parts of the Republican Party surrounding Donald Trump.³¹ These networks are also intertwined with anti-feminist and anti-gender organizations from the Evangelical Christian conservative spectrum that are mostly based in the U.S.³² In the context of European far-right parties and political movements, Trump has emerged as a particularly important figure. Dawid Aristotelis Fusiek and Cecilia Marconi argue that since 2016, “Trump [has] take[n on] the role of ‘international god-father’ and inspiration for the European far right,” and that he has “become a heroic figure” in respective political contexts.³³

In their analysis of the same trend, Kofi Arhin, Daniel Stockemer, and Marie-Soleil Normandin also highlight the growing parallels between the Republican Party under Trump and far-right parties in Europe.³⁴ They posit that Trump has “transformed the Republican Party into a party that closely resembles populist radical right-wing parties in Europe” and that the Trump led Republican Party “has become a prototypical radical right-wing party” with

-
- 31 Counter Extremism Project Germany, “Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures,” November 2020, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism_Nov%202020.pdf; Rita Abrahamsen, “Nationalist Internationalists? The Strange Paradoxes of the Global Right,” Centre for International Policy Studies, September 9, 2019, <https://www.cips-cepi.ca/2019/09/09/nationalist-internationalists-the-strange-paradoxes-of-the-global-right/>.
 - 32 David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar, “The Anti-Gender Movement in Comparative Perspective,” in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, eds. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 253–276; Agnieszka Graff, Ratna Kapur, and Suzanna Danuta Walters, “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right.”
 - 33 Dawid Aristotelis Fusiek and Cecilia Marconi, “Trumpism and the European Far Right: An Analysis of Trumpism’s Impact on the Post-2016 AfD, Lega Nord, and Fidesz,” *Środkoeuropejskie studia polityczne* 12, no. 4 (2021): 61–84, 61.
 - 34 Kofi Arhin, Daniel Stockemer, and Marie-Soleil Normandin, “The Republican Trump Voter: A Populist Radical Right Voter Like Any Other?” *World Affairs* 186, no. 3 (2023): 572–602.

strong similarities to the Alternative for Germany Party.³⁵ The similarity between the Republican Party under Trump and the AfD is also demonstrated by the importance of anti-gender and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourse during Trump's presidency from 2016–2021 and is further reflected in his current election campaign.

As Julie Moreau elucidates: “Hostility toward LGBT people” can be analyzed as part of a larger set of anti-gender and anti-immigrant rhetoric “that explains Trump's popularity.”³⁶ Not only was Trump's presidency characterized by its political homo- and transphobia and multiple attacks on LGBTIQ+ and reproductive rights, but Trump has also publicly declared that he plans to roll back a number of LGBTIQ+ anti-discrimination regulations and LGBTIQ+ citizenship rights during his 2024 election campaign. In particular, he has highlighted his opposition to gender-affirming care – or what he has called “transgender insanity” in minors.³⁷

Additionally, a number of Republican politicians have been engaged in efforts to prohibit drag performances in front of children, or in public spaces, more generally.³⁸ Since 2023, over forty discriminatory anti-drag bills have been drafted with the intention of criminalizing drag performances and non-conforming gender expressions in public. However, some of these legal initiatives are currently on hold.³⁹ The website *Trans Legislation Tracker* shows that thirty-seven bills with anti-trans content were introduced on the federal level in 2023, across categories like healthcare, student athletics, the military,

35 Ibid., 572.

36 Julie Moreau, “Trump in Transnational Perspective: Insights from Global LGBT Politics,” *Politics & Gender* 14, no. 4 (2018): 619–648, 620.

37 ACLU, “Trump on LGBTQ Rights: Rolling Back Protections and Criminalizing Gender Nonconformity,” June 13, 2024, <https://www.aclu.org/news/lgbtq-rights/trump-on-lgbtq-rights-rolling-back-protections-and-criminalizing-gender-nonconformity>; James Pollard, “GOP candidates elevate anti-transgender messaging as a rallying call to Christian conservatives,” *The Associated Press*, February 18, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/lgbtq-transgender-republicans-trump-christian-conservatives-election-83bec009d8123d96a75c2e4940ab339>.

38 Squirrell, and Davey, “A Year of Hate.”

39 Center for Education, Research, and Advocacy, “Understanding Drag Bans: The Latest Legislative Attacks on Queer Communities,” Howard Brown, March 21, 2023, <https://howardbrown.org/understanding-drag-bans-the-latest-legislative-attacks-on-queer-communities/>.

incarceration, and education. In 2024, forty-four anti-trans bills had been passed at the point of writing, in July 2024.⁴⁰

The International Implications of Assaults on Drag Story Hours

Consequently, it is important to consider the international implications of the recent assaults on drag story times in Germany and Austria and how they are linked to anti-gender and far-right politics in the U.S., particularly with regard to Donald Trump. Prominent politicians from the Alternative for Germany Party (AfD) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) travelled to the United States shortly before they launched their own anti-drag campaigns. In the U.S., these politicians attended various meetings with political supporters of Donald Trump and his right-wing agenda.

Just one month before the aforementioned FPÖ politician Dominik Nepp started to agitate against drag story hours in Vienna, he engaged in discussions with members of the right-wing faction of the Republican Party and attended a speech delivered by Donald Trump.⁴¹ While publicly demonizing drag story hours for children in Vienna, Nepp also made explicit reference to 'positive' developments in the U.S. He lauded the Republican Party's anti-drag and anti-trans policies, and referred in particular to political and legal initiatives in Tennessee that are aimed at banning drag story hours for children.⁴² In March 2023, Dominik Nepp also succeeded in convening a special session of the Vienna city council on the potential dangers of drag story times for children. In his address to the city council, he once again linked drag story hours to questions of trans rights and also praised the growing opposition to drag storytelling events in the United States.⁴³ He argued that in the U.S. "there is already massive opposition from people in the mainstream, from normal families, who

40 Trans Legislation Tracker, "2024 anti-trans bills tracker," 2024, <https://translegislation.com/>.

41 Wien heute, "Nepp und Vilimsky besuchen in USA Trump-Auftritt," heute.at, February 21, 2024, <https://www.heute.at/s/nepp-und-vilimsky-besuchen-in-usa-trump-auftritt-120021112>.

42 ORF Wien, "FPÖ: Drag-Queen-Shows für Kinder verbieten," ORF Wien, March 9, 2023, <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3197965/>.

43 Wiener Landtag, "Wörtliches Protokoll der 21. Sitzung vom 24. März 2023, 21. Wahlperiode," Wiener Landtag, March 24, 2023, <https://www.wien.gv.at/mdb/lgt/2023/lgt-02-1-w-2023-03-24-001.htm>.

say ‘We don’t want our children to be indoctrinated in schools, in private institutions or by the state.’”⁴⁴ According to Nepp, the U.S. can serve as a role model for how for how to effectively halt “this transgender agenda [of holding drag story times] in Vienna.”⁴⁵

In December 2022, another European delegation, comprised of members of the AfD and the FPÖ, attended a meeting of the New York Young Republican Club (NYIRC).⁴⁶ The objective of this meeting was, among other things, to enhance transnational and transatlantic collaborations among right-wing and far-right political groups and parties. Two Freedom Party of Austria politicians, Maximilian Krauss and Gerald Grosz, numbered among the delegates. Prior to their visit to the United States, Krauss and Grosz had already engaged in anti-gender and anti-LGBTQ+ discourse. Yet their rhetoric against drag story times and trans rights intensified following their visit to the United States. In April 2023, Gerald Grosz posted a social media video directed against the “gender madness of drag queens at school,” in which he argues that drag storytelling events are a form of “thought terrorism” (*Gesinnungsterror*) that needs to be “cleaned up.”⁴⁷ Maximilian Krauss declared in a press release that the new “gender madness in Viennese schools must be stopped immediately,” demanding that trans girls, who are, in his view, “young, highly pubescent men” should be banned from female restrooms.⁴⁸ Further, Maximilian Krah attended the previously mentioned meeting of far-right and right wing delegates in New York. Krah is a former member of the European Parliament who represented the German Alternative for Germany before the AfD was kicked out of the far-right coalition in the European Parliament because of Krah’s

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Sandra Schieder and Fabian Schmid, “Freedom Party im Trump-Land: Die USA-Reisen der FPÖ,” *Der Standard*, January 6, 2023, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000142294314/freedom-party-im-trump-land-die-usa-reisen-der-fpoe>; De:hate, “AfD und FPÖ-Abgeordnete zu Besuch bei US-Rechtsextremen,” *Belltower News*, December 15, 2022, <https://www.belltower.news/netzwerke-afd-und-fpoe-abgeordnete-zu-besuch-bei-us-rechtsextremen-144367/>.

47 Gerald Grosz, “Gender-Irrsinn: Drag-Queens im Unterricht?!” Facebook, April 25, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/DK.Nachrichten/videos/gender-irrsinn-drag-queen-s-im-unterricht-ein-kommentar-von-gerald-grosz/1022855125763609/>.

48 FPÖ Wien Rathausklub, “FPÖ – Krauss: Genderirrsinn in Wiener Mittelschule muss umgehend gestoppt werden,” *OTS*, November 16, 2023, https://www.ots.at/presseaus-sendung/OTS_20231116_OTSo152/fpoe-krauss-genderirrsinn-in-wiener-mittelschule-muss-umgehend-gestoppt-werden.

affirmative statements about the SS (the paramilitary elite corps of the Nazi Party, responsible for the institutional murder and democide of more than twenty million people during the Holocaust).

The German Domestic Intelligence Services (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz) has categorized Maximilian Krah's political ideology as "völkisch nationalist," "Islamophobic" and "anti-democratic;" it has stated that Krah advocates for ethno-pluralistic positions and socializes in New Right circles.⁴⁹ Krah also actively promotes misogynistic, anti-LGBTIQ+ and anti-gender ideologies, and, for instance, argues that "real men vote right-wing," that Pride Month is "disgusting," and that "Gender theory is nonsense and feminism is cancer."⁵⁰

In December 2022, a delegation of members of the AfD and the FPÖ met with Donald Trump Jr. and with the far-right, ultra-conservative politician and congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene. Greene is also known for her vocal support of Donald Trump and his right-wing radicalization of the Republican Party. She is perceived as a staunch opponent of trans rights, particularly with regard to gender-affirming care for trans youth. Greene's anti-Semitic, conspiracist, and trans-hostile statements have attracted attention on a number of occasions.⁵¹ The delegation also convened with Steve Bannon, a former advisor to President Trump and one of the far-right media strategists behind the Make America Great Again campaign. Bannon recently asserted in German media that he intends to actively endorse and support the Alternative for Germany.⁵² In 2017, the AfD had already sought support from Republican media strategists. The AfD Party employed the U.S. graphic design company Harris

49 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, "Verfassungsschutz-Gutachten zur Alternative für Deutschland," tp-presseagentur, January, 2019, <https://tp-presseagentur.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Verfassungsschutz-Gutachten-AfD.pdf>.

50 Henrik Düker, "AfD-Politiker zu LGBTQ: 'Echte Männer sind rechts,'" Campact Blog, May 8, 2024, <https://blog.campact.de/2024/05/afd-zu-lgbtq-echte-maenner-sind-rechts-homonational/>.

51 Brooke Migdon, "Marjorie Taylor Greene takes aim at gender-affirming care for trans youth," The Hill, March 3, 2023, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/3882637-marjorie-taylor-greene-takes-aim-at-gender-affirming-care-for-trans-youth/>; GLAAD, "Marjorie Taylor Greene," October 25, 2023, <https://glaad.org/gap/marjorie-taylor-greene/>.

52 Kleiser Anna, "Warum Steve Bannon der AfD helfen will," ZDF, April 9, 2024, <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/bannon-trump-afd-deutschland-war-room-podcast-100.html>.

Media, which has a reputation for having radicalized the electoral campaigns of Republican candidates in the U.S. as well as of other conservative and far-right political parties internationally.⁵³

The Implications of Drag Panics

What are the implications of these developments in terms of the 2024 U.S. elections? Firstly, drag story time events serve as a significant *transnational mobilization point*, which provides a meta-language for a diverse array of political parties and groups, ranging from the alt right to right-wing branch(es) of the Republican Party, to the Christian right, and the New Right in Germany and Austria. On the one hand, attacks on drag storytelling events occur in reaction to local circumstances. Yet, on the other hand, anti-gender concepts such as so-called early sexualization, gender indoctrination, and the trope of drag performers as ‘groomers’ facilitate transnational connections between various right-wing actors and groups. These concepts and tropes enable far-right European groups such as the AfD and the FPÖ to connect with and be supported by right-wing, alt-right, and Christian conservative branches of the Republican Party, despite their differences.

Secondly, it is crucial to consider conservative, right-wing, and Evangelical U.S. organizations’ significant financial investments in anti-gender campaigns in Europe, for instance, in the support of organizations such as the *Demo für alle*, which also has strong ties to the Alternative for Germany. In 2020, the independent international media platform *openDemocracy* created the largest database to document how right-wing U.S. Christian groups that oppose LGBTQ+, sexual and reproductive rights spend their money in Europe.⁵⁴ Research from *OpenDemocracy* reveals that respective organizations may have already spent up to ninety million U.S. dollars. For example,

53 Nicole Doerr, “The Visual Politics of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): Anti-Islam, Ethno-Nationalism, and Gendered Images,” *Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2021): 1–15; Melanie Amann, “U.S. Ad Agency Boosts Right-Wing Populist AfD,” *Der Spiegel*, August 30, 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/u-s-ad-agency-boosts-right-wing-populist-afd-a-1164956.html>.

54 Nandini Naira Archer, “US Christian anti-LGBT ‘hate group’ spent more than \$20m in Europe,” *openDemocracy*, October 27, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/us-christian-anti-lgbt-20m-europe/>.

the American Center for Law and Justice financed the organization's European branch, the ECLJ, which defended Poland's restrictive abortion laws in the European Court of Human Rights. This organization is led by Donald Trump's former lawyer, who is also a financial supporter of his current election campaign, Jay Sekulow.⁵⁵

It is important to shed light on international and translocal dimension of right-wing and far-right anti-gender politics and to take account of what Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash have described as a new form of transnational "heteroactivism."⁵⁶ In their view, "heteroactivism" involves more than organized mobilization against LGBTIQ+-rights and the promotion of a particular type of conservative anti-gender discourse. Rather, Browne and Nash demonstrate how contemporary 'anti-gender' and 'anti-LGBTIQ+' campaigns produce new, highly specific political narratives that aim to recuperate and reaffirm the place of the heteronormative couple and family as that which is best for society and best for children. However, these narratives always manifest themselves in manners that are particular to their specific local contexts. Hence, in examining the transnational entanglements of the AfD, and the FPÖ, and Trump's far-right Republican Party, it is essential to account for the central role that (white) heteronormativity plays in these parties' anti-drag and anti-gender politics and mobilizations. Anti-drag politics represent more than a backlash against LGBTIQ+ rights. These politics also constitute more than a political movement designed to oppose and delegitimize LGBTIQ+ rights. Rather, anti-drag mobilizations aim to re-establish (white) cis-heteronormative gender structures in alignment with the existing neoliberal and post-/neocolonial world order. They aim to erase – literally and symbolically – everything else.

Thirdly, the potential victory of Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential election will result in the strengthening of anti-gender, heteroactivist, and right-wing mobilizations on discursive and symbolic levels, as well as on material ones. It can be anticipated that far-right Austrian and German parties will view Donald Trump's presidency and a Republican Party that has demonstrated a

55 Tatev Hovhannisyán, "The U.S. Funding behind the Anti-Gender Movements in Europe," IWM, n.d., <https://www.iwm.at/publication/iwmpost-article/the-us-funding-behind-the-anti-gender-movements-in-europe>, post 131.

56 Kath Browne and Catherine Nash, "Heteroactivism," *Lambda Nordica* 25, no. 1 (2020): 72–80.

strong commitment to anti-trans and anti-drag policies as a model for politics in Germany and Austria. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, images of Trump were utilized in political protests against pandemic health regulations that were organized by far-right and conspiracist groups.⁵⁷

In this context, Trump was regarded as a “hero who stands up to the elite and endeavors to save the people.”⁵⁸ In 2016, the Alternative for Germany was among the first political organizations in Germany to congratulate Donald Trump on his election victory, stating that the party would be a “natural ally at his side.”⁵⁹ Trump has thus already “become the new symbol of the German far-right,”⁶⁰ and this symbolism is likely to become all the more powerful if he wins the 2024 elections. This is especially the case due to the increased role of anti-gender rhetoric by far-right parties in Germany and Austria as well as by Trump’s Republican Party during the last few years. Should Trump be elected for a second term, the normalization of anti-democratic, anti-LGBTI+, anti-gender, and far-right positions in Germany and Austria will be advanced further.

Attacks on Drag Performances as Global Assaults on Democracy

It is imperative to recognize that anti-drag politics and related mobilizations extend beyond the scope of single gender or sexual minority-related issues. Rather, attacks on drag story times and performances relate to broader efforts to de-democratize society and render it more authoritarian. Attacks on drag performances and opposition to sexual and gender diversity constitute global assaults on democracy. They are part of the weakening of democratic citizenship, democratic deliberation, and democratic norms and institutions. Thus, drag storytelling events are fundamentally about democracy itself. Drag story times concern the practice and possibility of imagining and creating more di-

57 Clara Meyer, “Why has Donald Trump become the new symbol of the German far-right?” Euronews, September 22, 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2020/09/22/why-has-donald-trump-become-the-new-symbol-of-the-german-far-right>.

58 Ibid.

59 Kay-Alexander Scholz, “AfD and Trump,” DW, February 1, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-right-wing-afd-and-donald-trump/a-37373538>.

60 Meyer, “Why has Donald Trump become the new symbol of the German far-right?”

verse and inclusive political communities with (our) children and future generations.⁶¹

61 This article is based on discussions in the COST Action "LGBTI+ Social and Economic (In)Equalities" (CA19103).

