

In Search of Sovereignty. Neo-Nazis, „Reichsbürger“ and other sovereignists in Germany

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Introduction

For many years, the milieu of the “Reichsbürger” (“Reich Citizens”) and sovereignists¹ in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was trivialized and neglected. Only since a German policeman was shot dead in 2016 by a sovereignist in Georgensgmünd, Bavaria, and several other policemen were seriously injured, has this well differentiated milieu come into the focus of public attention. In January 2017, various weapons, ammunition, and explosives were found among other “Reichsbürger” as part of a nationwide raid.² There are even cases of police officers adhering to sovereignist ideology; in Bavaria and Berlin, for example, officers were suspended for this reason.³ Public administration is increasingly confronted with threats to its employees from members of this milieu. And even among the German protest movements (Pegida and the yellow vests movement) “Reichsbürger” and sovereignists try to spread their ideology. For a long time, they were regarded as innocuous lunatics, although civil society initiatives and scholars have been pointing out for years the increasing threat by this milieu.⁴

¹ Thanks be expressed to Susann Bischof, who proposed the use of the concept of sovereignism for the milieu as a whole. For a details on sovereignism, see Stephan De Spiegeleire, Clarissa Skinner and Tim Sweijs, *The Rise of Populist Sovereignism: What it is, where it comes from, and what it means for international Security and Defense* (The Hague, 2017), accessed April 10, 2019, 32–36.

² See *Deutschlandfunk*, “Polizei beschlagnahmt Waffen und Munition: In der Wohnung eines sogenannten Reichsbürgers sind in Baden-Württemberg Waffen und Munition beschlagnahmt worden.” August 10, 2017, accessed August 10, 2017, <http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/dlf24-startseite.1441.de.html>.

³ See Aert van Riel, “Die lange unterschätzten Neonazis,” *Neues Deutschland*, January 27, 2017, accessed January 27, 2017, <https://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/1039908.die-lange-unterschaetzten-neonazis.html>; Malene Gürgen, “Staatsdiener gegen den Staat,” *taz*, January 11, 2017, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.taz.de/!5370781/>.

⁴ See, for example, “„Wir sind wieder da“: Die „Reichsbürger“: Überzeugungen, Gefahren und Handlungsstrategien” (Berlin, 2014); Matthias Quent and Peter Schulz, *Rechtsextremismus in lokalen Kontexten: Vier vergleichende Fallstudien*, Edition Rechtsextremismus (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2015), 77ff.

But only since the murder of the Bavarian police officer the German security authorities have taken this threat more seriously. According to the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz), in 2018 there were about 19,000 “Reichsbürger” and sovereignists in Germany, of whom 950 were considered right-wing extremists.⁵

Intelligence services and police generally describe this milieu as one which is primarily determined by the reasoning for its rejection of the state and the assertion of the continued existence of a German Reich. Since only a small fraction of its members are classified as extreme right-wing, the majority of the authorities regard the milieu as an independent form of extremism. In contrast, this article argues that these heterogeneous groups and individuals are indeed part of the extreme right. An emphasis will be placed on the role of antisemitism in shaping ideas of identitarian collectives within the milieu.

“Reichsbürger” and other sovereignists

In the past, the following basic assumptions were regarded as central components of the ideology of the “Reichsbürger”:⁶

1. The non-existence of the Federal Republic of Germany.
2. The continued existence of the German Reich (within the borders of 1937).

However, a deeper analysis of the milieu shows that these basic assumptions are not shared by all of its members. Not all necessarily and directly refer to the continued existence of a

⁵ See “Aktuelle Zahlen der „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“,” Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/aktuelles/zur-sache/zs-2018-007-reichsbuerger-selbstverwalter-aktuelle-zahlen-september-2018>. For German standards, this is a significantly high number of members, especially since the already rather large milieu was perceived too late. In its annual report for 2018, the Federal Office reported 24,000 right-wing extremists, 29,500 left-wing extremists and 25,810 Islamists. See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, “Verfassungsschutzbericht 2017” (Berlin, 2018), 51, 103, 173.

⁶ See Michael Hüllen, Heiko Homburg, and Yasemin D. Krüger, ““Reichsbürger” zwischen zielgerichtetem Rechtsextremismus und Staatsverdrossenheit,” in Wilking, *“Reichsbürger”*, 14.

German Reich.⁷ Since the beginning of the 2010s, first distinctions have been made between the “Reichsbürger” and “self-administrators”.⁸ Accordingly, the former want to restore the legal capacity of a German Reich, the latter believe to be able to depart from the Federal Republic of Germany. They establish “self-administrations” or fictional states on their properties or within their residences. The criminal psychologist Jan-Gerrit Keil initially expanded this differentiation to include the groups of monarchs and founders of own kingdoms and principalities as well as milieu managers.⁹ This separation, however, seems to be rather unsystematic. Within the group of monarchs, conspiracy ideological views, as well as widespread esotericism and sectarianism, are also prevalent. The milieu managers' grouping is determined by the claim to capitalize on the ideology.¹⁰ However, the preference for monarchistic states, as well as the endeavor to make a living out of one's own conviction, are by no means characteristics that are inherent to only the last two groups. Milieu managers are active within the entire milieu; also, monarchist ambitions are unequally represented within the Milieu of “Reich citizens” and “self-administrators”.

Since 2016, the definition of the milieu has changed as a result of state and nationwide observation. The report of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution from 2018 postulates as a unifying element of “Reichsbürger and self-governors” solely “[...] the fundamental rejection of the legitimacy and sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Germany as well as its existing legal system”.¹¹ With this, the Federal Republic authorities follows the view of Austria, which subsumes the milieu under the term of "anti-state associations".¹²

⁷ See Jan Rathje, “Verschwörungsideologie mit deutscher Spezifik.: Gedanken zur Aporie des "Reichsbürger"-Begriffs,” in *Vorsicht Volk!: Oder: Bewegungen im Wahn?*, ed. Markus Liske and Manja Präkels (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2015).

⁸ See, for example, ““Reichsbürger” und "Selbstverwalter": Eine Information des Verfassungsschutzes” (Potsdam, 2014).

⁹ See Jan-Gerrit Keil, “Zwischen Wahn und Rollenspiel: Das Phänomen der "Reichsbürger" aus psychologischer Sicht,” in Wilking, *Reichsbürger*, 54f.

¹⁰ See. *ibid.*, 55; Michael Hüllen and Heiko Homburg, ““Reichsbürger" zwischen zielgerichtetem Rechtsextremismus, Gewalt und Staatsverdrossenheit,” in Wilking, *Reichsbürger*, 39.

¹¹ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, “Verfassungsschutzbericht 2017,” 90.

¹² See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Terrorismusbekämpfung, “Verfassungsschutzbericht 2017” (Wien, 2017), 62f.

Furthermore, both German and Austrian authorities regard the milieu under the aspect of an extremism “sui generis”, which admittedly follows an extremely right-wing argumentation to a “not inconsiderable” extent,¹³ but whose members, however, have hardly developed any ideology elements of the extreme right.¹⁴

As an external common characteristic of the milieu, the rejection of the legitimacy and sovereignty and of the Federal Republic of Germany is certainly valid - and this conclusion can be comprehended from the perspective of authorities of the interior whose central concern is the preservation of the state and its liberal-democratic basic order - but it is merely a derivated position. The rejection legitimacy is not an arbitrary one but is closely linked to feelings of lacking individual and collective sovereignty, for which the Federal Republic serves as a screen for projections. Consequently, it is not the lack of sovereignty of the FRG that is of central concern, but a (supposed) re-sovereignization of the people, which members of the milieu believe the FRG would actively obstruct. World conspiracy ideological ideas are used to justify this action of the state against its own populace. To facilitate a typology of the milieu, a common core element will be set at this point, which is illustrated in the following using concrete examples of groups and individuals:

The Germans are not free since they are controlled by a foreign power operating in secret.

In a further development of the categorization of Jan-Gerrit Keil, the groups of the Sovereignist milieu and its border areas can be divided into four types; due to the heterogeneity of the groups and individuals, this is an ideal-typical subdivision:¹⁵

1. traditionally organized extreme Right since 1945,
2. “Reichsbürger”, who stand in the tradition of the “Reich-Chancellor” Wolfgang Ebel,

¹³ See Jan Freitag, Michael Hüllen, and Yasemin Krüger, “Entwicklung der Ideologie der „Reichsbürger“,” in *Jahrbuch Extremismus & Demokratie (E & D): 29. Jahrgang 2017*, ed. Uwe Backes, Alexander Gallus and Eckhard Jesse (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2017), 165.

¹⁴ See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, “Verfassungsschutzbericht 2017,” 90.

¹⁵ See Jan Rathje, *Reichsbürger, Selbstverwalter und Souveränisten: Vom Wahn des bedrohten Deutschen*, Transparent 17 (Münster: Unrast, 2017).

3. individual, group and secessionist sovereignists who act as “self-administrators”, sovereigns or establish their own states,
4. members of the "New Right", who assert only that Germany is not sovereign.

The following sections demonstrate the connection between the different sovereign milieus, which is characterized by shared perceptions and certain elements of an extreme right ideology.

Traditionally organized extreme right since 1945

The belief that the German Reich is the legitimate state of the Germans outlasted the defeat of National Socialism and the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The political scientist Richard Stöss identifies a campaign within the organized extreme right to restore the German Reich from 1945 to 1982.¹⁶

The Sozialistische Reichspartei

The Sozialistische Reichspartei (SRP, Socialist Reich Party) was one of the first parties in the FRG to prominently promote this claim from 1949 until its ban in 1952. It emerged as a radical demerger of other nationalist parties who were accused of being too close to the occupying forces, the Federal Republic of Germany and its government. According to the party, the German Reich had not ceased to exist with the capitulation of the Wehrmacht and it considered the arrest of the last Reich president and deputy of Hitler, Karl Dönitz, as an illegal act of the Allied Forces directed against its government.¹⁷ On behalf of the SRP, Otto Büsch states that the “[...] ‘Reich’ and the activities aimed at its realization [...] were the purpose of the [party's] entire political and state life.”¹⁸ Its members considered themselves as part of a

¹⁶ See Richard Stöss, *Rechtsextremismus im Wandel*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Forum Berlin, 2010), 31.

¹⁷ See Otto Büsch, “Geschichte und Gestalt der SRP,” in Stammer, *Rechtsradikalismus im Nachkriegsdeutschland*, 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

“resistance movement”, as a “national opposition”¹⁹ against the German division, the FRG and its democratic parties, which reflected in their political activities, characterized by a strong friend-enemy scheme according to Carl Schmitt.²⁰

In its agitation, the party did not limit itself to the genuine conditions of the restrictions on the sovereignty of the Federal Republic and the actual occupation by the Allies. Beyond that, it used the myth of the “Jewish world conspiracy” to embed all world affairs and the identity of its followers into an antisemitic framework. This can be seen as an expression of regressive crisis management: The SRP “[...] proclaimed the multiplicity of interests and conflicts as mere, misleading appearances, reduced them to a single contradiction, in which the enemy was regarded as the embodiment of evil par excellence, while it directed all the light of good towards itself,”²¹ as Peter Furth states in his analysis of the party's ideology. The Reich was thus the postulated antithesis towards abstract social processes of modernity, in which all contradictions and the non-identical were to merge into the German Volks-/Reichsgemeinschaft (national/Reich community). After the party was banned by the Federal Constitutional Court in 1952, party members moved to the German Reich Party and finally to the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), founded in 1964, in which the restoration of the German Reich over time became a secondary goal.²²

In this context, the role of SRP's founder and hero Otto Ernst Remer must be highlighted. Since the 1980s, he has been primarily active in the field of Holocaust denial and other forms of revisionism.²³ The combination of Reich ideology and Holocaust denial, that is explicit

¹⁹ Gideon Botsch, *Die extreme Rechte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949 bis heute* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2012), 3.

²⁰ Vgl. Otto Büsch, “Geschichte und Gestalt der SRP,” in Stammer, *Rechtsradikalismus im Nachkriegsdeutschland*, 17-23, 29f; Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen: Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2015).

²¹ Peter Furth, “Ideologie und Propaganda der SRP,” in Stammer, *Rechtsradikalismus im Nachkriegsdeutschland*, 229.

²² See Fabian Virchow, “Will die NPD ein 'Viertes Reich'?,” in *88 Fragen und Antworten zur NPD: Weltanschauung, Strategie und Auftreten einer Rechtspartei - und was Demokraten dagegen tun können*, ed. Fabian Virchow, Christian Dornbusch and Robert Andreasch (Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau-Verl., 2008).

²³ See Michael Bauerschmidt et al., “Remer, Otto Ernst Fritz Adolf,” in *Handbuch deutscher Rechtsextremismus*, ed. Jens Mecklenburg, Antifa-Edition (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1996); “Otto Ernst Fritz Adolf

antisemitism, remains a primary field of action within the German traditionally organized extreme right.²⁴

„Reich vicar“ Manfred Roeder

For the extreme right in this tradition, Manfred Roeder's actions are to be emphasized with regard to alleged arguments and actions of the sovereignist submilieu of the “Reichsbürger”. Roeder shared the basic assumptions of the SRP on the continued existence of the German Reich, but his strategy for restoring its legal capacity did not include parliamentary work. Instead, in 1975 he contacted Karl Dönitz, whom he considered to be the last legitimate head of state of the German Reich. When Dönitz rejected the offered leadership position, Roeder organized a “Reichstag” (imperial diet), a pseudo-parliamentary meeting, in Flensburg on May 23, 1975, the purpose of which was to “liberate Germany from the occupying powers and occupational law, so that a free government elected by the German people can finally be re-established.”²⁵ Three years later he had his group “Freiheitsbewegung Deutsches Reich” (Freedom Movement German Reich) appoint him “Reich vicar”.²⁶ As of 1980, Roeder was part of the far-right terrorist organization “Deutsche Aktionsgruppen” (German Groups of Actions), which was responsible for seven incendiary and explosive attacks in which two Vietnamese were fatally injured. After being convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison, Roeder was active from 1990 onwards in settling Germans in Russian Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg), spreading reichsideological propaganda and denying the Holocaust.

Remer,” in Grumke; Wagner, *Handbuch Rechtsradikalismus*; Juliane Wetzel, “Remer, Otto Ernst,” in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus: Personen*, ed. Wolfgang Benz, *Handbuch des Antisemitismus 2* (Berlin: De Gruyter/Saur, 2010).

²⁴ Richard Stöss identifies the campaign to restore the German Reich and the revisionist campaign among the central fields of activity until 1982. As of 1962, within the revisionist campaign, he included Holocaust denial among the questioning of Germany's responsibility for the Second World War. See Stöss, *Rechtsextremismus*, 31–35.

²⁵ Manfred Roeder, *Ein Kampf um's Reich: Eine Dokumentation und politische Streitschrift um die Nachfolge des Reiches* (Schwarzenborn/Knüll, 1979), 38. For a detailed report on the „Reichstag“ see Richard Stöss, *Die extreme Rechte in der Bundesrepublik: Entwicklung - Ursachen - Gegenmaßnahmen* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1989). doi:10.1007/978-3-322-94164-0, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-94164-0>, 163f.

²⁶ See Roeder, *Kampf um's Reich*, 60-62, 67f.

Roeder identified the Federal Republic of Germany and its government as henchmen of a foreign occupying power, of which he considered the Jews to be the masters. While the Allied occupation could actually be experienced during the years of existence of the SRG, it must be noted for the subsequent time in which Roeder made his statements that the occupation or central supervision of the Federal Republic, as in its founding years, no longer existed. At that time, the allegation of occupation was no longer related to real conditions but was based solely on antisemitic world conspiracies.

Deutsches Kolleg und Horst Mahler

Horst Mahler also follows this tradition. In 1997, the former left-wing terrorist outed himself as a supporter of the far right and became involved in their organizations.²⁷ Along with Reinhold Oberlercher and Uwe Meenen, he was an active leadership member of the Deutsches Kolleg (DK, German College), an educational institution of the extreme right that emerged from a “new right” study group in 1994. The main objective of the college was the “restoration of the law, dignity, and sovereignty of Germany (=reestablishment of the German Reich)”²⁸

On November 9, 1999, Mahler and Oberlercher published “Postulates on the Reich governorship” in Leipzig, in which they called for a peaceful rebellion of the Germans against foreign rule and for the German Reich. Leipzig had been selected for their publication as the “City of Monday Demonstrations against the Soviet occupation regime and the Battle of Nations against Napoleon's Armies”.²⁹

²⁷ See “Horst Mahler,” in Grumke; Wagner, *Handbuch Rechtsradikalismus*; Michael Fischer, *Horst Mahler: Biographische Studie zu Antisemitismus, Antiamerikanismus und Versuchen deutscher Schuldabwehr, Europäische Kultur und Ideengeschichte / Studien 9* (Karlsruhe, Baden: KIT Scientific Publ, 2015), Zugl.: Karlsruhe, Karlsruher Institut für Technologie (KIT), Diss., 2014, 339.

²⁸ “Schulungszyklus "Die Neuordnung Deutschlands": Einführungskurs (Reichsbürgerkunde),” accessed March 20, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/19970511151122/http://www.thulenet.com/texte/schulung/text0002.htm>.

²⁹ Horst Mahler, Reinhold Oberlercher, and Johannes P. Ney, “Thesen zur Reichsstatthalterschaft,” accessed March 21, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040630162250/http://www.deutsches-kolleg.org/hm/texte/991107.html>.

Of particular importance for the traditionally organized, extreme right submilieu of German sovereignism is the publication of the antisemitic pamphlet “Ausrufung des Aufstandes der Anständigen” (“Proclamation of the Uprising of the Decent”) in October 2000, in which the three members of the DK leadership called for the implementation of their 100-day program to restore the legal capacity of the German Reich and described Judaism as a “deadly danger to the peoples”. Furthermore, they claimed that a “war of the Jewish organizations against the German people” would persist, as a means of which the Jewish organizations would use the “Holocaust religion” in addition to the “Zersetzung” (corruption) of the Volk by their rule of money.³⁰

“We have learned with great effort that the two world wars against the German Reich were organized with the significant participation of Jewish bankers and the Jewish media with the intention of destroying the German Reich forever, because at the beginning of the century it had by peaceful trade challenged the British Empire dominated by Jewish bankers and, notwithstanding the military defeat in World War I, obstructed the awakened world power aspirations of the US East Coast.”³¹

In 2004, the publication of the pamphlet led to a trial against Mahler, Oberlercher, and Meenen for incitement of the people. Horst Mahler used the trial as a stage to “speak out in public for the German Reich”. He made extensive use of the defendant's right to testify in court to claim that the German Reich still existed and that the Holocaust was a lie directed against the German people, spread by Jewish world conspirators.³² This strategy eventually caused a

³⁰ “Ausrufung des Aufstandes der Anständigen,” Deutsches Kolleg, accessed March 9, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20020205065231/http://www.deutsches-kolleg.org/deutscheskolleg/Aufstand.html>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Bekanntmachung: Vorschau auf eine wichtige Wortergreifung,” Deutsches Kolleg, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040407073052/http://www.deutsches-kolleg.org/hm/aktuelles/wortergreifung.html>. For a detailed report on the trial see Rainer Erb and Andreas Klärner, “Antisemitismus zur weltgeschichtlichen Sinnstiftung: Horst Mahler vor Gericht,” in *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 14, ed. Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung (Berlin: Metropol, 2005).

rupture between Mahler, Oberlercher, and Meenen. The latter were sentenced to fines and Mahler in a separate trial to imprisonment.³³ The German Reich and Holocaust denial remained central issues for Mahler after the verdict. To Mahler, the freedom of the German people, the German Reich and Holocaust denial formed an essential junction:

“The Germans will only ever be free again when the German Reich has regained its legal capacity. The path to the self-glorification of the German Reich goes through the overthrow of Jewish foreign rule. The Jewish foreign rule falls with the unmasking of the Auschwitz lie.”³⁴

In 2003, Mahler founded several organizations to pursue these goals: The “Reichsbürgerbewegung”³⁵ (“Reich Citizens' Movement”) can be regarded as designating the entire milieu with its name within the German discourse. In the “Verein zur Rehabilitierung der wegen Bestreitens des Holocaust Verfolgten” (VRBHV, Association for the Rehabilitation of Those Persecuted for Denying the Holocaust), which he co-founded, many other Holocaust deniers and “Reichsbürger” of the extreme right gathered alongside Mahler.³⁶

“Kommissarische Reichsregierung” and “Reichsbürger”

Since the 1980s, the campaign to restore the German Reich has played a subordinate role within the traditionally organized extreme right.³⁷ During the same period, a new group of “Reichsbürger” emerged. Based on the state of knowledge to date, it was founded by Wolfgang Gerhard Günter Ebel. The former West Berlin railway employee of the Reichsbahn gradually

³³ See Erb and Klärner, “Antisemitismus”.

³⁴ Horst Mahler, *Das Ende der moralischen Geschichtsbetrachtung führt zur Antwort auf die Judenfrage* (Kleinmachnow, 2004), Einlassung zur Anklage wegen Volksverhetzung vor der 22. Großen Strafkammer des Landgerichts Berlin (522) 81 Js 3570/KLs (1/03), accessed July 2, 2017, <http://www.vho.org/aaargh/fran/livres8/MahlerZurAntwort.pdf>, 5.

³⁵ See Horst Mahler, “Verkündigung der Reichsbürgerbewegung,” accessed July 26, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040602233745/www.aufstand-fuer-die-wahrheit.net/reichsbuergerbewegung.html>.

³⁶ See Fischer, *Horst Mahler*, 348.

³⁷ See Stöss, *Rechtsextremismus*, 34.

appropriated the titles “Reich Minister of Transport”, “General Representative” and finally “Reich Chancellor” of the German Reich.³⁸ In the first half of the 1980s, he claimed that the Western Allies had commissioned him to represent the German Reich and to advance the "construction of the United States of Europe from the Atlantic, including the Mediterranean, to the Urals".³⁹

Over the years, Ebel gathered a group of supporters, with whom he formed a “Kommissarische Reichsregierung” (KRR, Provisional Reich Government). This was provisional as he always claimed to be acting in agreement with the Allies. The “government affairs” of the KRR consisted primarily of conducting legal disputes with the Federal Republic, teaching courses on their ideology, and selling identity documents. Ebel believed, that the FRG was not a real state, but a construct of oppression. During an interview with an esoteric, conspiracy ideological and sovereignist internet channel he hinted that the former chancellor Helmut Kohl was Jewish and part of a secret lodge.⁴⁰ This refers to the myth of Kohl actually being “Hennoch Kohn” thus making him an enemy of the German Volk – a myth being disseminated by conspiracy ideological revisionists and neo-Nazis like Gary Rex Lauck.⁴¹ Furthermore, Ebel claimed during the same interview that German chancellor Angela Merkel owned an Israeli passport.⁴²

³⁸ See Johannes Conrad, *Reichskanzler Ebel?* (2011), accessed July 21, 2017, <http://bewusst.tv/reichskanzler-ebel/>.

³⁹ Wolfgang G. G. Ebel, “Kurzübersicht des Reichskanzlers Dr. h. c. Wolfgang Gerhard Günter Ebel,” accessed March 10, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20120710013806/http://www.der-reichskanzler.de/Kurzuebersicht_Ebel.pdf, 2.

⁴⁰ See Conrad, *Reichskanzler Ebel?*, 14:34–14:54.

⁴¹ See Jürgen Langowski, “Javok Lind: Der Erfinder,” Holocaust-Referenz, accessed July 26, 2017, <http://www.h-ref.de/literatur/l/lind-jakov/erfinder.php>.

⁴² See Conrad, *Reichskanzler Ebel?*, 15:59–16:00.

Until his death in 2014, several secessions occurred within the group around Ebel. At present, there are various “Reich governments” whose degree of activity and size vary considerably.⁴³

Individual, group and secessionist sovereignists

Alongside the submilieu of the “Reichsbürger”, other sovereignists emerged in the 2000s. Its members no longer seek to restore the sovereignty of the German Reich immediately, but to reestablish sovereignty first of all or predominantly for themselves as individuals, groups or for their own states. Even though the Reich thereby nominally and territorially plays a subordinate role for the submilieu, the associated volkish antisemitism remains. The lack of sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Germany and its citizens, as well as the reason for their own defiance of it, is still explicitly or implicitly justified by the myth of the “Jewish world conspiracy”: The FRG is not a state of the Germans, but part of a conspiracy against the Germans. Members of this submilieu strongly believe in the myth of the “BRD GmbH” which states that the Federal Republic of Germany is actually a corporation, a limited liability company to be precise (GmbH).⁴⁴ This submilieu is influenced by both “Reichsbürger” currents and also by Anglo-Saxon groups such as the “sovereign citizens movement” or the “freeman on the land”.⁴⁵ Moreover, esotericism and other conspiracy ideologies play a greater role for these groups than for the majority of the traditionally organized extreme right “Reichsbürger”.⁴⁶

⁴³ An updated list of “Reich governments” and pseudo-states may be found on the website of the satire project “Sonnenstaatland”, see “Liste von reichsideologischen Scheinstaaten,” Sonnenstaatland, accessed March 26, 2019, https://wiki.sonnenstaatland.com/wiki/Liste_von_reichsideologischen_Scheinstaaten.

⁴⁴ For more details see Rathje, *Reichsbürger*, 45–48. For the dissemination of the code „BRD GmbH“ see Jan Rathje, “The State as a Company: Reconstruction of the Origin and Dissemination of the Code BRD GmbH in the German-Speaking Conspiracy-Ideological Milieu,” in *Virality and Morphogenesis of Right Wing Internet Populism*, ed. Eva Kimminich and Julius Erdmann (Peter Lang, 2018).

⁴⁵ See Trystan Stahl and Heiko Homburg, ““Souveräne Bürger” in den USA und deutsche “Reichsbürger” - ein Vergleich hinsichtlich Ideologie und Gefahrenpotential,” in Wilking, *Reichsbürger*”.

⁴⁶ For more details on esoteric influences on National-Socialism see, for example, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black sun: Aryan cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the politics of identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The occult roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan cults and their influence on Nazi ideology* (London: Tauris Parke, 2005).

Within the submilieu, Peter Frühwald ranks among the more important persons. At the beginning of the 2010s, he propagated the establishment of “self-administrations” and the dissemination of the “declaration of marital/civil status”. While he did not completely detach himself from the German Reich, he propagates primarily a basis of legitimacy for the self-administrations. His efforts focused on the immediate renunciation of the FRG. With his group “Arbeitsgemeinschaft Staatlicher Selbstverwaltungen” (staseve, working group of stately self-administrations) he adopted the attribution of the FRG as an “occupational construct” from the extreme right, alternatively, he also called it a non-governmental organization.⁴⁷ In October 2013, the group placed a poster at the Cottbus tax office containing an article calling for the liberation of “multiculturalism, capitalism, globalism, and Zionism”.⁴⁸

Furthermore, the actions of Peter Fitzek, an esoteric guru and “Supreme Sovereign” of the “Kingdom of Germany”, are typical of secessionist sovereignism. Between 2012 and 2017 he proclaimed his “Kingdom” on a former hospital premises in Wittenberg, where many supporters worked for him. As early as 2008, Fitzek had published his ideas of the Federal Republic of Germany as “a kind of limited liability company” or “state simulation” in an esoteric magazine, which he expanded to include the terms “foreign rule” and “voter deception” in his “declaration of marital/civil status” of 2010.⁴⁹ In an interview with the “new right” and conspiracy ideological COMPACT Magazine (see below), he claimed that the Federal Republic of Germany had a “puppet government”.⁵⁰ Fitzek eventually used openly antisemitic terminology on the occasion of the foundation of his “kingdom”. In an interview with the

⁴⁷ Peter Frühwald, “Proklamation und Erklärung der Selbstverwaltung” (Leipzig, 2010), <http://www.selbstverwaltung-deutschland.de/Selbstverwaltung.pdf>, 2.

⁴⁸ Quoted from “Verfassungsschutzbericht Brandenburg 2013” (Potsdam, 2014), 124.

⁴⁹ Peter Fitzek, “Die Kooperationsgemeinschaft Wittenberg: Das ENGELgeld,” *SEIN*, October 8, 2008, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.sein.de/die-kooperationsgemeinschaft-wittenberg-das-engelgeld/>; Peter Fitzek, “Erklärung zum veränderten Personenstand” (2010), https://web.archive.org/web/20131228045937/http://neudeutschland.org/tl_files/Neudeutschland/personenstands_aenderung_fuer_peter.pdf, 5.

⁵⁰ Jürgen Elsässer and Marc Dassen, “Königreich Deutschland: "Egal, was passiert, wir ziehen das durch",” *COMPACT*, 2015, 10, Interview mit Peter Fitzek, 63.

Mitteldeutsche Zeitung, he stated that his state – as opposed to the FRG – was not subject to “Zinsknechtschaft” (“interest servitude”), thereby reproducing an antisemitic term from the vocabulary of National Socialism that refers to the alleged Jewish control of banks and the economy.⁵¹ Fitzek was sentenced to prison in 2018 for illegal insurance transactions, which he offered his followers: These included treatments according to the antisemitic “Germanic New Medicine”. Further legal proceedings have not yet been finally decided. Since then, his group has been dissolved.⁵²

“New Right” and sovereignism

The magazine COMPACT, whose subtitle “Magazine for Sovereignty” already refers to its core mission, represents sovereignism from the submilieu of the “New Right”. The co-editor and editor-in-chief Jürgen Elsässer spreads nationalistic and conspiracy ideological contents. Already the second issue, no. 2/2011, contains a dossier titled: “Occupied country. Who is really governing [Germany]?” According to the dossier, Germany is occupied by the imperialist USA, which enforces the NWO (New World Order) against the peoples of Europe, and especially against the German Volk.⁵³ In special issue No. 6, the Federal Republic of Germany is described as a “military colony”, “US occupation”, “economic colony” and the Federal Government as an “allied shadow government”.⁵⁴ In addition, COMPACT disseminates the code “BRD GmbH”.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Steffen Könauf, “47-Jähriger gründet sein eigenes Königreich,” *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, September 14, 2012, accessed July 28, 2017, <http://www.mz-web.de/mitteldeutschland/gesellschaft-47-jaehriger-gruendet-sein-eigenes-koenigreich-5260860>; Christoph Kreuzmüller, “Wirtschaftsantisemitismus,” in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus: Begriffe, Theorien, Ideologien*, ed. Wolfgang Benz, *Handbuch des Antisemitismus 3* (Berlin: De Gruyter Saur, 2010).

⁵² The alternative “healing concept” was conceived by the anti-Semite and Holocaust denier Ryke Geerd Hamer; see Jean-Philipp Baeck, “Wenn er König von Deutschland wär’: Peter Fitzek und sein Imperium in Wittenberg,” in Speit, *Reichsbürger*, 77.

⁵³ Jürgen Elsässer, *Editorial: Asterix und die Römer* (2011) COMPACT, no. 2.

⁵⁴ Jürgen Elsässer, “Ami go home!,” *COMPACT Spezial*, 2015, 6; *COMPACT Spezial: Ami go home!* (2015), no. 6, 1, 17, 53.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Oliver Janich, “Wie souverän ist Deutschland?,” *COMPACT*, 2012, 11.

As Kevin Culina and Jonas Fedders have pointed out, COMPACT continuously reproduces various antisemitic stereotypes. It conveys the image that Jews or Israel, as the last instance of foreign rule, “pull the strings”: Controlling the German state via the control of the government, controlling the German economy via the control of the banks and the interest rate.⁵⁶ The antisemitic myth of the “Volksaustausch” (“Exchange of the Volk”/“The great Exchange”) is also explicitly covered in the special issue No. 18. An entire section is devoted to the alleged masterminds behind the “exchange”, among whom George Soros is ascribed a central role. The special issue furthermore suggests that the conspirators ultimately strive for a “final solution of the patriot question”.⁵⁷ The COMPACT magazine functions as a link between the traditionally organized German “new right”, the volkish part of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, sovereignist and other conspiracy ideological milieus – Peter Fitzek was interviewed in detail by Elsässer for the magazine and its YouTube Chanel.⁵⁸

Violence against "foreign domination"

Adrian Ursache, former Mister Germany, and failed businessman is also committed against the NWO. The secessionist sovereignist Ursache claims to be the “head of state of the state of Ur” and adheres to the widespread idea in his submilieu of the “BRD GmbH”, of which Angela Merkel would be the “managing director”.⁵⁹ On the website “no-nwo.info”, which states that it was “created on the initiative of the head of state of ‘Ur’”, information is provided about the great conspiracy against the Germans.⁶⁰ The site offers the download of the book “Das Deutschland Protokoll” (“The Germany Protocol”) by Ralf Uwe Hill, in which the FRG is

⁵⁶ See Kevin Culina and Jonas Fedders, *Im Feindbild vereint: Zur Relevanz des Antisemitismus in der Querfront-Zeitschrift Compact*, Reihe Antifaschistische Politik (Münster: edition assemblage, 2016), 43–71.

⁵⁷ See *COMPACT Spezial: Volksaustausch* (2018), no. 18, 46–56.

⁵⁸ See Elsässer and Dassen, “Königreich Deutschland” COMPACTTV, “Königreich Deutschland”: Interview mit Peter Fitzek (2015), YouTube, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jFr47AMN1A>.

⁵⁹ Adrian Ursache, *Was stimmt hier nicht? Wovor habt ihr Angst?* (2017), accessed July 28, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmD6yfp922o&feature=youtu.be>, 23:20.

⁶⁰ Peter, “no-nwo.info ist online,” accessed July 28, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160927073405/http://www.no-nwo.info:80/de/blog/no-nwo.info-ist-online>.

presented as part of the NWO led by Zionists. Ursache himself shares the mythical idea of a German people who had already resisted the Roman Empire and against whom a “Holocaust” is currently being waged.⁶¹ On his property in Reuden, Saxony-Anhalt, he proclaimed his “State of Ur” in 2014. Henceforth he refused to pay taxes and levies to the FRG, which eventually led to foreclosures. On 25 August 2016, about 200 police officers in order to enforce a foreclosure entered the property on which over 100 supporters, some from the extreme right, had gathered. The situation escalated to the point where Ursache threatened the policemen with a firearm, which led to shots being fired, injuring the sovereignist.⁶² This is the first documented case of the use of firearms involving the police and members of the milieu.

The aforementioned sovereignist and convicted murderer, Wolfgang Plan, was also one of Ursache's supporters in August 2016. He shared Ursache's ideas of a world conspiracy against the Germans, which were carried out by means of the FRG. On his Facebook account, he shared videos in which the police were described as “Zionist mercenaries”. Shortly before his shooting with the police, he shared a link to a page that reported of a supposed “secret war against the Germans” by the Rothschild family.⁶³

While secessionist sovereignists like Wolfgang Plan reactively defend the nonexistent and non-recognized sovereignty of their territory, other members of the milieu call on the alleged perpetrators to be held accountable. On January 25, 2017, Karl Burghard Bangert, a former insurance agent and "druid" with the stage name "Burgos of Buchonia", and six other “Reichsbürger” were subjected to house searches in the course of an investigation by the Attorney General's Office on suspicion of the formation of a right-wing terrorist organization.

⁶¹ Ursache, *Was stimmt hier nicht*, 29:32–29:42, 34:26–34:34.

⁶² Carsten Janz and Andreas Speit, ““Wir sind im Krieg”: Waffen innerhalb der Szene,” in Speit, *Reichsbürger*, 127.

⁶³ See Wolfgang Plan, “B L I T Z E R – M A R A T H O N das Ende der zionistischen Söldnerschaft [POLIZEI]!,” accessed July 31, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170731082403/https://www.facebook.com/wolfgang.plan/posts/426596134168619>; Wolfgang Plan, ““Geheimkrieg gegen die Deutschen”,” accessed December 22, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/wolfgang.plan/posts/630129063815324>.

The police seized several weapons and ammunition.⁶⁴ Bangert had already attracted attention in the run-up to the investigations due to his antisemitic extermination fantasies spread online and offline. He also believed in a supposed “secret war” of Jews and Zionists against the Germans that had been taking place for centuries.⁶⁵ In the description of his account in the Russian social network vk.com, he clearly states that he regarded the creation of the “final solution”⁶⁶ as his task:

“My instinct of self-preservation tells me that I must destroy the Jews and Muslims before they destroy my clan or my family.”⁶⁷

The self-proclaimed druid used social media to openly recruit founding members of a medieval-inspired “fortified village”⁶⁸ and also called for the killing – under the premise of “self-defense” – of journalists, “political marionettes” as well as “anti-German” lawyers and employees in authorities which he identified as Jewish or controlled by Jews.⁶⁹ The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office did not confirm the suspicion of the formation of a right-wing terrorist organization, as there was no evidence of any organizational or structural ties or any concrete intention to commit the crime. The weapons and ammunition were said to have been accumulated in the expectation of an apocalyptic scenario (civil war, Third World War) for which Bangert and his allies wanted to prepare with the creation of the “fortified village”.⁷⁰ It

⁶⁴ See “21.08.2017 - 71/2017: Tatverdacht der Bildung einer rechtsterroristischen Vereinigung nicht erhärtet,” Generalbundesanwaltschaft beim Bundesgerichtshof, accessed August 21, 2017, <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/de/showpress.php?themenid=19&newsid=726>.

⁶⁵ See Karl Burghard Bangert, “Das jüdische Zeitalter geht jetzt zu Ende,” accessed August 22, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=745392355548031&set=pb.100002318206736.-2207520000.1503388940.&type=3&theater>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Karl Burghard Bangert, “Mein Selbsterhaltungstrieb sagt mir, dass ich die Juden und Moslems vernichten muss, bevor diese meine Sippe oder meine Familie vernichten.” vk.com, accessed August 23, 2017, <https://archive.is/trPD4>.

⁶⁸ See Florian Eisheuer, “German Angst: (Selbst-)Opfer und nationaler Wahn,” *Antifaschistisches Infoblatt*, no. 114 (2017).

⁶⁹ Karl Burghard Bangert, “Töten wir aus Notwehr die Lügenmedienschaffenden.” vk.com, accessed December 27, 2018, https://vk.com/wall300071324?offset=2860&own=1&w=wall300071324_1521.

⁷⁰ See Generalbundesanwaltschaft beim Bundesgerichtshof, “Generalbundesanwaltschaft beim Bundesgerichtshof 2017”

remains unclear, however, which event would trigger the apocalypse in detail. Research by the Berlin daily newspaper *taz*, for instance, suggests that groups of the extreme right wanted to stage an Islamist terrorist attack that was to be regarded as "Day X" for the armed resistance.⁷¹ This illustrates that within the sovereignist ideology the beginning of the Apocalypse and the associated use of stockpiled weapons in the final battle between the powers of good and evil are in the not too distant a future.

Conclusion

The ideology of the milieu is part of a regressive crisis management strategy by which its followers meet restrictions on their collective and individual capacity to act in modern societies. Instead of criticizing the structural constraints and immanent contradictions of such a modern society, sovereignists reproduce conspiracy ideological and antisemitic stereotypes by interpreting individual and social suffering as part of a world conspiracy against one's own group and thus constructing individual and collective identities without contradictions. An essential feature of this identity is the nationalistic notion of the oppressed, and therefore resistant, German. The recourse to this mystical German identity, which stems from the nationalism of the extreme right, also illustrates that the milieu is not to be considered an extremism *sui generis*, since this nationalist ideology in Germany is particularly closely linked to the ideological element of antisemitism.

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⁷¹ See Martin Kaul, Christina Schmidt, and Daniel Schulz, “Rechtes Netzwerk in der Bundeswehr: Hannibals Schattenarmee,” *taz*, November 16, 2018, accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.taz.de/!5548926/>.

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