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THE NEW STAR OF GERMANY'S FAR RIGHT

Frauke Petry is a mother, a scientist, and the leader of the country's most successful nationalist phenomenon since the Second World War.

By Thomas Meaney

You can tell well in advance when Frauke Petry, the leader of Alternative für Deutschland, a burgeoning new right-wing party, is going to give a speech. AfD members put up posters all over a town's main streets declaring, "Frauke Petry Is Coming." As the appointed hour approaches, police assemble, and usually demonstrators, too, protesting against a woman known to her enemies as "Adolfina" and "die Führerin." At bigger events, hundreds show up bearing placards with slogans like "Voting AfD is *so* 1933," pelting Party leaders with cake. Occasionally, a few of them sneak into Petry's talks.

Petry, who is forty-one, with a pixie haircut and a trim, athletic build, frequently arrives late. She travels continually, often without any immediate electoral aim—the next federal elections won't be till the second half of 2017—but simply to publicize the Party and herself. Like most German politicians today, Petry observes the national moratorium on charisma, but her appearances have the feel of a celebrity tour. Her audiences seem awed, unsure whether it is appropriate to take photographs. But, once someone starts, the room fills with the soft clicks of phone cameras.

Petry sees the presence of protesters as an opportunity to score points. “We’re not the sort of people who shut voices out,” she tells her audiences. One evening in Landau an der Isar, a small town in Bavaria, she produced a flyer that had been distributed outside and read it aloud, in the tone of a teacher who has intercepted a note being passed around a classroom: “You believe women should return to the kitchen? You’re against the protection of the environment? You have homophobic, xenophobic, and extreme right-wing tendencies? Then you’ve come to the right place. Thank you for your vote!” Silence filled the hall, and Petry gave a tight smile. “That must have been written by some very gutsy and well-informed citizens,” she said. “Maybe they should come forward and tell us where they got these ideas.” The audience cheered.

A nervous-looking sixteen-year-old with a mop of blond hair shuffled toward the platform. The audience jeered, but Petry motioned for silence and said to the boy, “I’ll give you the microphone for a bit and you can explain to us how you got the idea that women should return to the kitchen.”

“But of course I don’t believe that,” the boy muttered in a deep Bavarian accent. “It’s your people here who do.”

“Now you’re repeating your hypothesis,” Petry said, leaning over him from the stage. “But how do you justify it?” He hesitated in confusion, and other protesters joined him. A teen-age girl began to speak from prepared notes, saying that the AfD denied climate change. “You have to hold the mike closer to your mouth,” Petry interrupted, and then rocked from foot to foot, marking the slow tempo of the girl’s speech. “Your party claims that CO_2 is not dangerous, but how do you explain all the people dying from air pollution in China?” the girl asked.

“I’m a chemist,” Petry said. “The problem is not CO_2—it’s the nitrogen and sulfur oxides that make the smog. So many people make this mistake.” She went on, “Let me ask you a question. If you dissolve CO_2 in water and the

temperature rises, will you have more or less CO_2?" It was a trick question that Petry often uses.

"More," the girl said, meaning CO_2 in the atmosphere.

"Exactly wrong," Petry said, meaning in the water. She made a dismayed face to the audience. "There's a huge amount of misinformation out there," she said. "When you see what's in their school textbooks, it's no surprise they believe these things."

Petry spent half an hour more raking through the protesters' arguments, expressing concern that Germany's youth could be led so badly astray and exasperating the students with her pedantry. Both the protesters and the audience were relieved when she finally began her speech.

For decades, the German far right has been a limited force, with easily recognizable supporters—nicotine-stained ex-Nazis in the sixties and seventies, leather-clad skinheads in the eighties and nineties. Petry is something different, a disarmingly wholesome figure—a former businesswoman with a Ph.D. in chemistry and four children from her marriage to a Lutheran pastor. During a month I spent with her this summer as she drove around Germany giving speeches, she drew connections between politics and laboratory science, sprinkled her speech with Latin phrases, and steered discussions about German culture toward the cantatas of Bach.

Petry is not a gifted orator. Her speeches tend to be dull, with ornate sentences and technocratic talking points, and she is more comfortable citing economic studies than discussing the lives of ordinary people. Her manner belies the extremism of the AfD's views. At the start of this year, Petry said that, in the face of the recent influx of refugees (many of them fleeing the war in Syria), the police might have to shoot people crossing the border illegally. In April, the Party said that head scarves should be banned in schools and universities, and minarets prohibited. Party members called for a referendum on whether to leave the euro; for the expulsion of Allied troops, who have

been stationed in Germany since 1945; and for school curriculums that focus more on "positive, identity-uplifting" episodes in German history and less on Nazi crimes. Most contentious of all was the declaration "Islam does not belong in Germany."

By American standards, especially in the age of Donald Trump, contemporary German politics is decorous and understated. But although Petry's crisp style is in many ways the opposite of Trump's, her rise has similarities to his. She, too, has come late to politics and relishes her outsider status. Like him, she often works by insinuation, fanning right-wing conspiracy theories not merely to stir up grievances but to bind members together with a sense of shared beliefs. Like him, she has been accused of financial improprieties. Like him, she castigates the media for liberal bias but also thrives on media attention. Petry and her colleagues have mastered the art of dominating the news cycle, to the point where a visitor to Germany listening to the radio or reading the newspapers could be forgiven for thinking that the AfD is the party in power.

Two years ago, the AfD won its first seats in regional parliaments. (Petry was elected to the parliament of Saxony, one of Germany's sixteen federal states.) Earlier this year, support for the AfD reached fifteen per cent in national polls, three times more than for any previous right-wing party, and well beyond the five-per-cent threshold required to enter the Bundestag after next year's national elections. In a recent election in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, where Germany's Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has her constituency, the AfD got more than twenty per cent of the vote, edging Merkel's party—the center-right Christian Democratic Union—into third place. A week ago, the AfD won its first seats in the state parliament of Berlin, traditionally a social-democratic stronghold, in an election that brought the C.D.U.'s worst ever result in the city.

Populist parties have been flourishing across Europe, and are already in power in Hungary and Poland, but a far-right resurgence in Germany is uniquely alarming, both because of its history—the postwar constitution was designed

to curb populist influence—and because of its dominant position on the continent. “It’s my hope that the future will bring a Chancellor named Petry,” the leader of Austria’s Freedom Party recently said. That hope is still far from fruition, but the AfD is already the most successful far-right phenomenon in Germany since the Second World War.

I first met Petry in April at her offices in the Saxony State Parliament, a gray modernist building, in the center of Dresden, which incorporates the ruins of a government office destroyed in the Allied bombing raid of 1945. She was in her pressroom, preparing for the AfD’s annual convention and dictating posts for its Facebook page to two assistants. Behind her was a shelf of binders decorated with stickers that said, “Merkel Must Go.” Petry took me to her office, where a biography of Merkel that she’d been reading lay on the floor. “Like me, she’s from the East and trained as a scientist, so I can relate with her to some extent,” Petry said. “You get the sense that she’s a woman who just fell into things. When Merkel was young, she had no passions.”

When conversation turned to the AfD’s rise, Petry said, “You could say we are Merkel’s children.” She meant that the AfD owed its popularity to Merkel’s announcement, in August, 2015, that Germany would take in anyone who was a refugee. (Last year, 1.1 million refugees arrived.) Merkel argued that Germany’s history gave it a moral obligation to respond to the humanitarian crisis. “We can do this,” she said—a call for national solidarity that achieved the opposite. The phrase electrified the German right, which accused the Chancellor of selling out the country in order to burnish her cosmopolitan image abroad. Voters began to flock to the AfD, many of them from Merkel’s own party.

Several events this year have exacerbated this rightward turn. On New Year’s Eve, in Cologne, roving groups of Middle Eastern and North African men sexually assaulted and robbed hundreds of women as they celebrated in the city center. The German Federal Criminal Police Office drew an analogy with cases of group sexual harassment in the Arab world—the ones that occurred

during the Tahrir Square protests are the most famous instance—and the crimes were quickly established in the public imagination as a specifically Islamic phenomenon. In July, there was a weeklong spate of violent attacks, unconnected with one another but involving perpetrators of Muslim heritage: a teen-age Afghan refugee pledging loyalty to ISIS wounded four people with an axe on a train near Würzburg; an Iranian-German gunman killed nine people at a shopping center in Munich; in Reutlingen, a small town near Stuttgart, a machete-wielding Syrian refugee murdered a pregnant Polish woman at the kebab shop where they both worked; and a Syrian asylum seeker blew himself up outside a night club in the Bavarian town of Ansbach, injuring fifteen people.

The response of Merkel's government, and of most of the German press, has been measured, emphasizing the unique aspects of each attack: the Munich shooting turned out to be a case of right-wing, rather than Islamist, extremism; the kebab-shop murder a crime of passion; the Syrian asylum seeker a psychiatric case. When I spoke to Petry not long afterward, she was scornful of what she saw as a liberal tendency to suppress politically inconvenient truths. "Big German media are always careful about what they report," she said. "Our political opponents absolutely avoid acknowledging the factors of illegal migration and open borders in these attacks." For her, the attacks had a simple explanation: "These people coming into Germany are used to being in completely different social circumstances."

I asked Petry if she had ever met a refugee, and she told me about an official visit she had made to an asylum shelter. "It's true the quality of their rooms was not very good," she said. "But I saw food on the walls, excrement as well—I saw how they behaved. And I thought, This is not going to work." Most of the refugees, she said, were a threat to contemporary German values, such as the separation of church and state and the freedom of the media. Sometimes she justified her views with long discourses on the history of Islam and the European Enlightenment. At other times, she cited Muslim clerics who she claimed agreed with her, or opted for statistics about the failures of

integration. But generally she hewed to a kind of populist folklore. “Asylum seekers must appear for appointments in order to have their status reviewed, but they are often late by one or two hours,” she told me matter-of-factly. “If you’re German and you’re fifteen minutes late to a court date, that’s it, it’s over!” When I asked whether Germany wouldn’t need younger workers to service its rapidly aging population—a common argument for a liberal immigration policy—she laughed and said, “To be frank, I don’t see young Muslim men wiping the asses of old German pensioners.”

Last week, Merkel publicly admitted that her original decision to let in so many immigrants had been a mistake. “If I could, I would rewind time by many, many years so that I could better prepare myself and the whole government,” she said. She now believes that her “We can do this” slogan was “almost an empty formula,” and sees that she gravely underestimated the challenges involved. This was the climax of months of backpedalling in response to the AfD’s electoral momentum and to criticism within her own party. After the sexual assaults in Cologne, she expedited the deportation of refugees who commit crimes and cut a deal with the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to reduce the number of Syrians crossing into Europe. After the recent attacks, Merkel’s Interior Minister, Thomas de Maizière, called for a ban on burkas in a wide range of public contexts—an appropriation of the AfD’s party line. The government also announced a new Integration Law, which gives the state the power to determine where refugees can live and requires them to learn German and to take classes on the country’s history and culture. The underlying assumption—that immigrants don’t want to learn the language—is a widespread belief in the AfD, and the C.D.U.’s embrace of it represents an about-face: such programs have been underfunded for years.

So far, this tack to the right has done nothing to halt the AfD’s rise, and politicians in other parties have been alarmed at how much power the AfD now has to shape government policy. Kerstin Köditz, a representative for Die Linke, the main left-wing party, who has often clashed with Petry in the

Saxony parliament, told me that she thought the Integration Law would prove counterproductive. “People are now under general suspicion until they prove otherwise,” she said. “Migrants are deprived of all self-evident fundamental rights, such as the free choice of residence. The law provides them with jobs but pays them only eighty cents an hour. That’s not even a tenth of the minimum wage. Second-class citizens are being created—a poor prerequisite for integration.”

Some version of the law would have passed even without the AfD, Köditz thought, but the Party’s influence had made it harsher. The outcome demonstrated the precariousness of Merkel’s position, in a system where coalition governments are the norm. “Will the C.D.U. continue to be a moderate people’s party, representing broad sections of the population?” Köditz said. “If so, then there is a gap to the right, which the AfD can easily occupy. Or will the AfD push the C.D.U. to the right? Then the C.D.U. might start losing votes in the middle but take them away from the AfD. And yet the closer the parties move together, the more likely the AfD is to form some part of the government. It will be only a matter of time.”

One morning in May, at a thermal spa on the outskirts of Munich, I joined Petry as she relaxed before an event at a beer hall downtown. There was a drowsy atmosphere, with pensioners suspended in the pool, exercising in slow motion. Petry had changed into a dark-blue one-piece and a swimming cap. She lowered herself into the water, annexed a lane, and launched into an efficient breaststroke. I hung back, splashing around aimlessly with a businessman named Wilfried Biedermann, an AfDer who organizes Petry’s Bavarian appearances. His duties had somehow included bringing an extra Speedo for me to wear. After forty laps, Petry signalled that she had finished. As she got out of the pool, she pointed to a sign warning swimmers of the deep end—in German, French, English, Turkish, and Arabic. “Really, Arabic, too, now?” she said, smiling.

We made for the hot pools, and Petry positioned herself in front of a jet of

water, while Biedermann fiddled with the controls. "That's one thing they did right in the East," he said. "They trained you to be real athletes."

"No, I wouldn't say that," Petry said. "They wanted me to be a gymnast—I had the right body for it—but I wasn't going to be in their circus."

Petry was born in Dresden in 1975. Her mother was an industrial chemist, and her father was an engineer who was unhappy under Communism and tried to escape to West Germany three times, finally succeeding in 1989, just before the Berlin Wall fell. The rest of the family joined him soon after, settling in a small town near Dortmund. "There's a cruel stereotype of Easterners coming to the West and taking advantage of everything," Petry told me. "I pretty much fit that." In her teens, she took after-school language courses and singing classes, and made extra money playing the organ in church on Sundays.

In high school, she met her future husband, Sven Petry, and played in his father's church. "He comes from a line of something like four or five generations of pastors," Petry said. "I fell in love with him for his brain. He wanted to study chemistry, like me, but I thought one chemist was enough for the family. We agreed he would study theology." Keen to perfect her English, Petry got a bachelor's degree in chemistry in the United Kingdom, and moved back to Germany in 1998. She and Sven pursued Ph.D.s in Göttingen, where their first two children were born. Later, Sven became a pastor in a small town near Leipzig, where they had two more.

In 2009, Petry won a competition for entrepreneurs and invested the prize money in a chemicals company she had just started with her mother. The company didn't grow fast enough to repay its debts, and after five years Petry declared personal bankruptcy—which is far more uncommon in Germany than it is in the United States. She was sued by creditors of the business; the case was eventually settled, but journalists still delight in speculating about the state of her finances.

While the company was struggling, Petry's mother read on the Internet about a new political party called Electoral Alternative 2013. "It was about the euro, family policies, and energy, and it demanded more direct democracy," Petry recalled. The Party, which soon changed its name to Alternative für Deutschland, had been founded by a group of economists and journalists who felt betrayed when Merkel broke a promise not to bail out Greece. Petry contacted the founders and helped set up an office in Leipzig. The Party's leader, Bernd Lucke, was a mild-mannered free-market economist, whose agenda was based on a conviction that the euro was unsustainable as a currency. Other Party founders, however, wanted stronger restrictions on immigration, and soon more people were joining for anti-refugee reasons than for euro-related ones. Petry felt that Lucke was failing to adapt to the concerns of the membership, and at last year's Party conference she seized control.

Her accomplice was a Party leader from North Rhine-Westphalia named Marcus Pretzell, with whom she is now in a relationship. The pair, who have divorced their previous spouses, are inseparable, courting publicity at every turn, and their relationship has become tabloid fodder in a way that is a novelty in German politics. The Petry-Pretzell phenomenon complicates Petry's long-established image as a figure of maternal wholesomeness; where she once bounced children on her knees at Party meetings, she is now more likely to be found on motorboats, in hotel bars, and at summits in the Alps. Her glamorous transformation has aroused suspicion and opprobrium among the Party's rank and file, but many forgive it. Several AfDers I spoke to expressed pride that the Party now had a clever, starry member of the meritocracy who can take on the élites of the establishment parties.

At the conference, Petry and Pretzell filled the hall with their supporters, who shouted Lucke down when he exhorted the Party to shed its extremist image. Petry's faction then riotously applauded her speech, which asserted that the AfD existed beyond conventional political categories and should ignore what outsiders thought of it. A few hours later, a vote established Petry as Lucke's

replacement.

When I met with Lucke, he characterized Petry not as an ideologue but as an opportunist. “A new party attracts all sorts of people who see a new professional future in an otherwise unsuccessful career,” he said. He told me that he first suspected her motives when she refused to help him quell wild conspiracy theories that were circulating on the Party’s fringes—for instance, that Germany was not actually a state but a registered company on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange. Petry didn’t want to risk losing votes by disavowing the rumors. “I was starting to realize that she would do anything to keep her position in the Party, even if she didn’t herself believe in it,” Lucke said.

Petry’s tendency to temporize may be a crucial asset, according to Hajo Funke, an expert on Germany’s far right who has just published a book, “On Angry Citizens and Arsonists,” about the AfD. The party she presides over, he explained, is fundamentally split. On one side there are moderate members, for whom the AfD is basically a protest vote; on the other is what he called a “dark core” of true believers—people like Björn Höcke, a former history teacher who has said that the “reproductive strategies” of Africans are diluting the ethnic-German population. Petry had been a link between the two wings, Funke said, but now she was vulnerable, because the dark core had succeeded in moving the AfD even further to the right. “The Party is in the hands of radicals now,” he said.

Every Monday in the city of Dresden, a few thousand nationalist protesters take to the streets for what they call an “evening stroll.” One week in April, I joined them. Skinheads marched alongside elderly people and gentle-looking fathers in fleeces trying to keep overtired children in line. Banners with Angela Merkel’s face filled the streets: there was “Fatima Merkel,” in a head scarf, and “Adolf Merkel,” wearing a Nazi armband but with a euro symbol in place of a swastika. “Homeland, Freedom, Tradition!” the crowd chanted. “Ali Go Home!” The protest is the work of a movement

called PEGIDA—an acronym that stands for Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West—which arranges similar demonstrations across Germany. It is not officially allied with the AfD, but the groups share many supporters.

I was puzzled to see among the placards a yellow pennant with a picture of a brown leather shoe. "It's the Union Shoe," an excited voice behind me said. "The symbol of the Peasants' War of 1524!" I turned to find a small blond man in his forties. He introduced himself as Andreas Kucharicky, and took me to meet the men holding the flag—colleagues of his at a construction-equipment firm where he is an engineer. I asked them if they joined in PEGIDA's strolls every week, and they said that Kucharicky did. We caught sight of a placard with Petry's face, beaming angelically. "That's Frau Doktor Petry," Kucharicky said. "That's who we want for our next Chancellor."

We marched out of the Old Market Square onto the main avenue in downtown Dresden. "This is where the Communists had their big parades," Kucharicky told me with satisfaction. I asked when he began to think of himself as a nationalist, and he told me about a protest in 1999, to commemorate the victims of the Allied bombing of Dresden, half a century before. Police broke up the march, because of neo-Nazi involvement, and Kucharicky was appalled. "Germans trying to remember Germans being arrested by Germans—it made no sense," he said.

As we marched, Kucharicky pointed to some teen-agers outside a McDonald's and said, "They just sit there while the nation slips away from them." He was disgusted that so many of his countrymen were immune to the tug of patriotism, and called Merkel "the Germany abolisher"—a newly popular term derived from a right-wing tract titled "Germany Abolishes Itself," by Thilo Sarrazin, a member of the executive board of the German Bundesbank. The book, which appeared in 2010 and sold more than a million and a half copies, argues that everything from high immigrant crime rates to low test scores among Muslims could be partly traced to genetic factors.

The success of Sarrazin's book revealed an important shift in public opinion. For decades, Germany was proud of not being proud—of confronting its past openly and of accepting the principle of collective guilt. It developed a political identity based on allegiance to the laws and norms of the state, rather than on any cultural or ethnic sense of Germanness. As a result, patriotic displays that would be uncontroversial in other countries, such as flying the national flag or saying that you love your country, were taboo in Germany. But, as the memory of the Third Reich recedes and the last generation of perpetrators and victims dies out, the nation has begun to see itself differently. The AfD is attracting voters, like Kucharicky, who want Germany to become a normal country again, with an unashamed sense of nationalism.

In the weeks that followed, I struck up a correspondence with Kucharicky. His e-mails gave me his nationalist perspective on current events: he used the word *Vaterland* without irony. In some ways, he seemed like a typical AfD supporter. On the other hand, as I discovered, there is no truly typical AfD supporter, because the Party attracts voters who have a wide range of concerns and grievances. At town-hall meetings, conferences, white-sausage breakfasts, dinners, and late-night carouses, I encountered many types. I met a doctor from Kiel who had come back to Saxony to reclaim ancestral land confiscated by the Communists; I met a middle manager for Mercedes who had had to seek medical attention for his heart when he learned of Merkel's bailout of Greece; I met a Vietnamese-German man who joined the AfD because it was the only party that talked about the global influence of the C.I.A.; I met a trainee pilot for United Airlines who admired Trump and had decided that the AfD was the closest German equivalent; I met a quiet architect who thought that most of the Party was unhinged but still joined, because it was right about the economy. I met very few women. (The membership is eighty-five per cent male.)

In April, soon after the AfD issued its statement that "Islam does not belong in Germany," Aiman Mazyek, the head of the Muslim Central Council, publicly compared the Party to the Nazis. He invited Petry to

exchange views at a summit meeting in Berlin. Other Party leaders sensed danger, but Petry accepted.

Surrounded by the German press corps, Petry and Mazyek, a sturdy forty-seven-year-old former media consultant, met in a boardroom on the second floor of the Regent Hotel. The discussion escalated when Petry accused Mazyek of wanting to impose Sharia law on Germany, a popular but unfounded claim. In response, Mazyek produced what he said was a gift—a giant copy of the German Basic Law, which was drafted in 1949, under Allied supervision. Mazyek had put his signature next to Article 4, which guarantees religious freedom.

Petry was in a bind. If she rejected the gift, she would be disrespecting the German constitution; if she accepted it, her supporters would say that she was capitulating to the caliphate. She got up, rushed out of the room, and told reporters that she would hold a brief press conference in the hotel's lobby. Mazyek held his own press conference, and journalists had to choose which one to attend. Most followed Petry. "I asked Mr. Mazyek whether he would approve of marriages between Christians or atheists with Muslims," she announced. "He could not give me a guarantee that Islam does not dominate these relationships. We came here for guarantees and we got none."

As damage control, Petry's words were more or less effective, but she clearly realized that the meeting had been a mistake. "On Facebook I said we taught him a lesson," she admitted to me afterward. "But no one was able to teach anyone a lesson. It was a good play on his part." Mazyek, when I asked him about it later, admitted to an element of showmanship. "We did not go into the meeting with any expectations but approached the AfD in the hope of raising awareness about its unconstitutional agenda," he said. The ploy had succeeded in showing that "the AfD is not capable of having democratic discussions."

He went on, "The AfD uses the refugee crisis to foment a propaganda of fear

in the minds of its followers. Insults and daily Islamophobia have led to the desecration of houses of worship, and bullying in the streets." According to an estimate by the German Interior Ministry, violence against foreigners increased by more than forty per cent last year. There were six hundred and sixty-five assaults on asylum shelters—an average of almost two a day—including fifty-five cases of arson, and there were more than a hundred attacks on individuals.

The most notorious attacks have been in Saxony, Petry's state. At the start of this year in Chemnitz, neo-Nazis beat and trampled a thirteen-year-old Tunisian girl. In Bautzen, a small town close to the Czech border, a large crowd cheered when a refugee shelter went up in flames. In Clausnitz, another crowd attacked a bus transporting refugees to a shelter.

The attacks take place in a sinister atmosphere of municipal complicity. The police keep interventions to a minimum, and prosecutions are rare, in part because few witnesses come forward. In one town, after the home of an immigrant family was firebombed, a volunteer fireman who helped fight the blaze was later discovered to have thrown the Molotov cocktail that started it.

In the economically stagnant, mostly Eastern, towns where anti-immigrant feeling runs highest, hatred of the new arrivals has not prevented people from taking advantage of their presence. The government has invested millions of euros in housing for refugees, which local interests have welcomed as a rare form of economic stimulus. The Clausnitz attack was led by an AfD supporter named Frank Hetze, whose brother, another AfD member, turned out to be the director of the shelter. It later emerged that the Hetze family business, a metals factory, had sold shipping containers to a refugee center in Leipzig, which used them for temporary accommodations.

The day after the Clausnitz attack, Petry gave a press conference in which she blamed refugees on the bus for inciting the violence. "The incoming refugees were making unsightly gestures—possibly obscene gestures," she said. When

asked about the involvement of AfD members, she said that the matter would "need to be further researched." Later, when I said that the AfD affiliation of the attackers was well established, she became flustered. "That's not true!" she kept saying. "There were no AfD members connected with any of the attacks, or whatever you are calling them."

When I asked if AfD rhetoric contributed to the violence, she said, "Typical German journalist question!" Her voice took on a steely hauteur. "The first question you have to ask is what is causing so many cases of breaking the law in Germany," she said. "Of course masses will get out of control. Most of the Saxon protesters stay peaceful, but these are never talked about." She began to speak faster and faster. "We have to distinguish between the causes and the symptoms," she said. "In order to get rid of the symptom, you have to get rid of the problem." After all, if there were no immigrants there would have been no protests.

Last winter, I took the first of a number of trips to Berlin's main center for processing refugees, not far from where I live. It is in Moabit, a former working-class neighborhood that is now gentrified. The center—called LAGESO, an acronym, in German, for State Office for Health and Welfare—is in a bureaucratic slab of concrete occupying a city block across from a small park. Next to the main building, there is an empty lot with two large makeshift tents where people wait for their appointments. There are guards out in front, but no one ever tried to stop me from going in.

Each tent had a wood-plank floor and benches around the perimeter. Berlin winters are very cold and damp, and families clustered near large white ducts that piped in warm air. The men paced back and forth, nursing giant plastic cups of tea or bottles of mineral water that had been handed out. The tents filled up throughout the day, as buses arrived with exhausted-looking asylum applicants from camps outside Berlin. My eyes were drawn to people's shoes. Some were nearly falling to pieces, from the journeys that had been taken to get this far. Others were new and shiny—recent purchases by those with

connections in Berlin or access to a bank account.

I met a gangly eighteen-year-old from Aleppo named Muhammed Fateh. He was leaning against one of the warm-air ducts, drinking tea. He had braces on his teeth that had worked themselves crooked, and wore track pants and a sleeveless T-shirt. He told me that he and his father had left Aleppo during the Russian bombing campaign in January. Initially, they took cover in a nearby village. When they returned to their house, they found that it had been destroyed. "It was unbelievable," he said, sweeping his arm across the tent. "It was gone, gone, gone." But his tone was nonchalant, as if he were referring to something much milder, like a car accident. He didn't want to burden me with all the details.

Fateh spoke decent English, wincing when he thought he'd mispronounced something. He was impatient to begin learning German, and confident that he would find a place in a German school. Assimilation seemed to present few challenges for him. But his father appeared crushed. He lay on the floor, staring at the metal beams of the tent. A relative of theirs hovered nearby, looking warily around and examining the bottles of water to see if they had been tampered with. Fateh periodically glanced over at them with concern. When I asked him what their future in Germany might be, he shrugged.

I spoke to Cemile Giousouf, a politician who is a rising star of the C.D.U. and is well placed to understand the position of people like Fateh. Thirty-eight years old, she is of Turkish descent and the first Muslim member of the C.D.U. to enter the Bundestag. Looking around her office there—a shrine to multiculturalism, adorned with Islamic, Christian, and Jewish iconography—I wondered how she would defend her party's burka ban, which had been proposed a few days earlier. Her answer showed how valuable she is to a party that has traditionally had little in the way of multicultural bona fides. "When my parents came to Germany, in the seventies, my father worked in a factory," she said. "He never learned German. I still have to translate letters for him when I'm home. But German wasn't as necessary for the work he was doing as

it is for the work we need immigrants to do now. I'm talking about nurses, I.T. programmers, and so on. You need to know German to do these jobs, and so we need people to integrate more quickly. We can't afford to wait a whole generation."

The last time I met Petry was in August, back at the Saxony State Parliament. When I arrived, she was standing in a glass atrium, speaking sternly to a group of advisers—all men, all much taller than she was, and most at least a decade older. She looked like a young Renaissance prince consulting with his courtiers. She was complaining about the latest machinations of one of her AfD rivals, a favorite topic. We moved to a pressroom, where Petry addressed a handful of journalists about the AfD's budget policy. Her speech was, as usual, boring, but its dullness muted the radicalism of her proposal—to defund asylum shelters and put the money into teachers' salaries.

Afterward, in her office, we talked about the AfD's connections to other populist movements. She has established close ties with Heinz-Christian Strache, the leader of Austria's Freedom Party, and has also met with Geert Wilders, the star of the Dutch far right. She told me that a colleague had recently met with Marine Le Pen, of France's Front National, and that over the summer she had spoken to various American Republicans, including the Iowa congressman Steve King, who has compared immigrants to dogs and suggested building an electric fence on the U.S. border with Mexico. When I asked her what she thought of Donald Trump, she said, "My impression is that Trump may become the American President, because the alternative to him, Hillary Clinton, is just so unconvincing. She is almost like a copy of someone like Merkel—someone who just keeps on with the same policies that led to the trouble in the first place." She admired the American willingness to take risks: "It might not be better under Trump, but at least with him there is the chance to change."

She thought that German politics was more weighed down by liberal pieties. "It's so moral to allow these attacks to happen," she said sarcastically. "It's so

moral to promise to people around the world that they can come to Germany and find paradise." She found this outlook anti-democratic, disdainful of the views of ordinary Germans. "I myself am not morally good," she said. "I'm just a human being. I try to stick to the rules. And I think there is a majority of Germans who agree with me. So, reducing the entire Enlightenment and all of the successes of European history down to this need to be morally good: I find that extremely dangerous. There's this saying of Nietzsche"—she took out her phone and pulled up the quote almost instantly. "Here it is, in 'Zarathustra': 'The good have always been the beginning of the end.' " ♦

This article appears in other versions of the October 3, 2016, issue, with the headline "Germany's New Nationalists."

Thomas Meaney, a writer and a historian, is working on a book about American thinkers and decolonization. Next year, he will be the Einstein Fellow in Potsdam, Germany. *Read more »*

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