

# Capitalism is the Virus

## Witnessing Voices from Leipzig Opposing the German Corona Policy

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**Abstract** The proclamation of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has created a kind of asymmetrical duel situation internationally between supporters and critics of the various state-imposed measures. It has become a dramatic situation, a matter of life and physical as well as social death that puts work and family relationships as well as friendships to the test and sometimes even causes them to break. Many even see it as a threat to social cohesion, because behind the heated controversy over the question of how dangerous the virus is and what the best and most socially balanced way of reacting to it is, fundamental issues are quickly at stake: attitudes toward life and community, toward the state, science, disease, healing, and death. In Germany, too, a vivid and continually changing protest movement has emerged that the public mainly perceives as a diffuse mixture of right-wing and esoteric groups, but is actually much more heterogeneous. What is striking is the collage of left-wing and right-wing attitudes, actors, and goals, which is also confusing for many protesters themselves. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among members of this movement, this text presents the “natives’ points of view” in regard to their oscillation between different utopias and dystopias and analyzes this movement as part of a preexisting “conspiracy culture” with a specific combination of discourses and a specific history of stigmatization and counter-stigmatization. The descriptions focus mainly on examples from my city of residence, Leipzig. Since there are a lot of people in this region who explore the current situation against the background of their socialization in the German Democratic Republic, this text becomes not only a commentary on the pandemic year 2020, but at the same time one on the 30th anniversary of German reunification.

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**Keywords** SARS-CoV-2 – social movement – conspiracy culture – stigmatization – German reunification

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*Le barbare, c'est d'abord l'homme qui croit à la barbarie.*

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS 1952

### **“Wake up, no matter what the others say!” *Old and new doubts***

Because of a request to give a lecture at the University of Bremen on the topic of Corona from an economic anthropology perspective, I attend two different demonstrations at the end of May 2020 in Leipzig, where I live, hoping for inspiration. These demonstrations take place at the same time on the market square and both seem to make a critical reference to the current economic system against the background of recent developments. What had happened so far? The World Health Organization (WHO) had declared a pandemic, due to the worldwide spread of the coronavirus called

SARS CoV-2, and the German government had subsequently imposed a partial curfew on March 22. Leaving one’s apartment or house without a valid reason was prohibited. Valid reasons included going to work and shopping, sports, and other outdoor activities. Catering and service businesses were closed, public gatherings of more than two people were prohibited, and a minimum distance of 1.50 meters between people from other households was recommended. On March 25, Germany’s parliament, the Bundestag, passed the *Gesetz zum Schutz der Bevölkerung bei einer epidemischen*



**Fig. 1** Leipzig-Plagwitz. May 16, 2020.

*Lage von nationaler Tragweite* [Law for the Protection of the Population in the Event of an Epidemic Situation of National Significance], and at the same time declared the existence of such an epidemic situation, as a result of which the law went into force on March 28.<sup>1</sup> The Act empowered the Federal Ministry of Health to make far-reaching health policy decisions by statutory order without the consent of the Bundesrat, the upper house of the German parliament. The Bundestag can declare an end to the epidemic situation of national importance if the conditions for its declaration no longer exist (which has not happened yet in December 2020). On the same day, Anselm Lenz, Hendrik Sodenkamp, and Batseba N'Diay founded the initiative *Nicht ohne uns!* [Not without us!] in Berlin, set up the association *Kommunikationsstelle Demokratischer Widerstand* [Communications Office for Democratic Resistance], and regularly called for *Hygiene-Spaziergänge* [hygiene walks] on Saturdays in front of the *Volksbühne* [People's The-

ater], on whose model smaller demonstrations were held in many other German cities within a very short time. The demonstrations were initially most popular in Berlin, where the demonstrators distributed copies of Germany's constitutional Basic Law and the meetings were regularly terminated by the police. The association lists its goals on its website, which translates as:

Freedom, Equality, Siblingity!<sup>2</sup> 1. OUR GREATEST VICTORY WILL BE REGAINING OUR LIBERAL FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS! // 2. SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT RETURN THEM VOLUNTARILY, WE WILL HAVE DONE RIGHT // 3. HOWEVER, SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT TURN PERMANENTLY INTO A TOTALITARIAN REGIME—WE WILL HAVE BEEN NEEDED ALL THE MORE! WE SHOULD MAKE THE NEW RULES FOR OUR ECONOMY OURSELVES! A constitution for our new economic system: Do you have suggestions and experiences? Then write a mail with the subject *Let there be law...* to [verfassung@posteo.de](mailto:verfassung@posteo.de)

In addition to the three listed initiators (of whom, however, only Anselm Lenz and Hendrik Sodenkamp appear in public), the Italian philosopher GIORGIO AGAMBEN is named as a co-editor of the weekly newspaper *Demokratischer Widerstand* [Democratic Resistance], which the association publishes and distributes free of charge. Since the pandemic was declared, AGAMBEN has published texts in various media in which he identifies the establishment of authoritarian state structures through the measures taken against the spread of the virus known as SARS-CoV-2; under the guise of claiming to protect “bare life,” crucial democratic freedoms were being restricted, and he fears the permanent abolition of these freedoms through the perpetuation of a state of emergency (AGAMBEN 2020a, 2020b).

In mid-April, the Federal Constitutional Court annulled bans on demonstrations in several cities. Among other people, Michael Ballweg, later the founder of the *Querdenken* [lateral thinking, or thinking out of the box] movement, was allowed to hold a demonstration to “end the state of emergency regime” scheduled for April 18, which the city of Stuttgart had initially banned. He had sued against the ban together with the Leipzig lawyer Ralf Ludwig, who later also became an important figure of the *Querdenken* movement. On April 20, various *Lockerungen* [easings] of the Corona protection measures went into effect. Stores up to 800 square meters in size were allowed to reopen, schooling resumed in Saxony with shortened class times, and Saxony was the first state to introduce a requirement to wear a mouth-and-nose mask in shops and on public transport, with the other states following suit a short time later.

One of the demonstrations on the Leipzig market square is organized by the newly founded *Bewegung Leipzig* [Leipzig movement], which until recently acted as the Leipzig offshoot of *Nicht ohne uns!* and distributed Germany’s constitutional Basic Law and the weekly newspaper *Demokratischer Widerstand* on their “hygiene walks.” Since gatherings were allowed again, there have been several public rallies with an “open microphone.” The *Bewegung Leipzig* calls quite simply for a *Versammlung für die Freiheit* [Rally for Freedom] followed by a “walk.”

The second demonstration was announced by the *Aktionsnetzwerk Leipzig nimmt Platz* [Action

network Leipzig takes a seat], which was founded in 2011 and has since then mainly carried out actions against right-wing actors. Its website displays the following message in German:

We want to [...] raise the question whether all the measures are really reasonable and whether all the selected procedures, despite the time pressure, are appropriate. The lack of monitoring of political actors’ encroachments on fundamental rights and the need for this to be communicated also merits critical consideration. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of transparency. On the sidelines, however, there is also a need for some self-criticism. We, who see ourselves as emancipatory forces, were and are too quiet on this topic. We are convinced: this should and must urgently change! So let’s take a closer look at the most far-reaching current restriction in Saxony, the general decree on restrictions on leaving one’s home in connection with the previous general decrees in force. These encroach on the following fundamental rights: physical integrity and personal freedom (Article 2 GG<sup>3</sup>), protection of marriage and family (Article 6 GG), freedom of movement (Article 11 GG), freedom of occupation (Article 12 GG) and, of course, freedom of assembly (Article 8 GG). The general decree lists a number of “valid reasons” when people are allowed to leave their homes. Unfortunately, this enumeration leaves too many questions unanswered. This alone raises doubts about legal certainty and, when individual aspects are considered, also about reasonableness (AKTIONSNETZWERK LEIPZIG NIMMT PLATZ 2020a).

At first glance, the two demonstrations seem to complement each other quite well. But the *Aktionsnetzwerk Leipzig nimmt Platz*, together with the initiative *Jugend gegen Rechts* [Youth Against The Right], has called to demonstrate against the demonstration of the *Bewegung Leipzig* and writes on their homepage:

[Regarding the demonstration of the *Bewegung Leipzig*], the initiative “*Jugend gegen Rechts Leipzig*” [Youth Against The Right Leipzig] declares: “For weeks, there have been demonstrations by Corona deniers in Leipzig. Among these demonstrators are also right-wing populists, Reichsbürger<sup>4</sup>, and neo-Nazis. These are often active in groups, ready for violence and contemptuous of humanity. That we as anti-fascists do not want to leave the street to such a toxic mixture of

actors of the new and old right, esotericists, and anti-vaccination activists, is one of our principles. At the same time, Corona shows once again how inhumane the capitalist economic system is. It is important to us to counter the simplistic criticism of ‘those up there’ or the ‘elites’ with a holistic one and to show that this system as a whole is not sustainable. That’s why we want to take to the streets together with you.” Irena Rudolph-Kokot adds for the Aktionsnetzwerk “Leipzig nimmt Platz”: “We use the necessary rallies against conspiracy ideologues, Corona deniers, and the hodgepodge of right-wing forces to make issues that the pandemic has pushed into the background present again. We also want to point out the social effects of the necessary restrictions. For example, many people are losing their jobs or livelihoods, are on short-time work, or have extensive psychological and social problems because of the restrictions. All these people need our solidarity, as do those who are particularly vulnerable to the virus. Just as we have critically accompanied the restrictions of fundamental rights, we will also critically accompany the further handling of easing measures and aid measures and point out gaps or undesirable developments, as well as standing in solidarity at the side of people who need that solidarity. Our weapon is solidarity!” (AKTIONSNETZWERK LEIPZIG NIMMT PLATZ 2020b).

About two hundred people gradually gather on Leipzig’s market square for the meeting of the *Bewegung Leipzig*. A microphone and several large loudspeakers are set up, rainbow and peace flags are waved, and the organizers have an “alternative” style of dress. Among the protesters, a woman wears a T-shirt with the inscription “conspiracy theorist” and a man has a tinfoil-covered sun hat on his head. On a side street, about 15 police buses are waiting. The song *Wir ziehen in den Frieden* [We march off for peace] by Udo Lindenberg is played over the loudspeakers. The lyrics translate as: “We are all blood sisters and brothers. We are a big human family. We don’t need power-hungry idiots. With their bribe money from the arms industry. C’mon, let’s march off for peace. We are more than you think. We are sleeping giants. But now we’re rising up.” One of the organizers steps up to the microphone and welcomes all those present to the “Rally for Freedom:” they are the *Bewegung Leipzig*; they do not belong to any group, party, or other current; they are, like all of us here, human

beings, belong to the human family, that means peace, connection, and friends; their wish is that we all work for a solidary, free, and just society.

While she is speaking, a demonstration procession of about 40 mainly black-clothed young people comes through the pedestrian zone at her back and heads for the marketplace. As a coherent marching bloc with masks, but without maintaining security distance, and with posters emblazoned with slogans like “Protect fundamental rights and keep your distance from anti-Semitism, right-wingers, and conspiracy idiots,” “Solidarity instead of right-wing agitation,” and “Mandatory vaccination for tinfoil hats,” it is accompanied by loud music. In front of a chain of police officers separating the marketplace into two halves, they stop and shout again and again in unison, interrupted by rhythmic clapping in the direction of the *Bewegung Leipzig*, “Alerta, alerta, antifascista!” The speaker on the side of the *Bewegung Leipzig* continues unperturbed, while the *Aktionsnetzwerk Leipzig nimmt Platz* brings its own loudspeaker van into position, so that both demonstrations hold their speeches virtually back to back: she herself is a creative trainer, she continues, and has been working in the health sector for 15 years; she stands here, like all those present, as an individual in this temporary community of courageous people, in which each and everyone stands for himself or herself, independent, free, and unique in his or her knowledge, thoughts and hopes. They want to invite everyone, regardless of age, gender, and nationality. They clearly distance themselves from racism, sexism, and violence in word, deed, and writing. At this point, applause set in.

After a short break, she continues: because this arises on the breeding ground of mental pigeonholes, but since we are all unique individuals, pigeonholes are only our mind’s desperate attempt to impose order; pigeonholes are thought constructs that need to be questioned and dissolved; you can find out what motivates another person’s actions only by approaching him or her openly and without judgment and listening to what he or she has to say; this seems to be very difficult in the current society; as an organizing team, they have one overriding, common goal, they wish for a free, democratic and peaceful society in the future, which would promote happiness and joy for



Fig. 2 Protest by Bewegung Leipzig. May 30, 2020.



Fig. 3 Counter-protest by Leipzig nimmt Platz. May 30, 2020.

all people and other living beings inhabiting this planet. Applause again.

But this can only work if each individual recognizes herself or himself and takes personal responsibility; this would enable people to find their place in the community again; people should have the opportunity to express themselves without being defamed, censored, or silenced; they see themselves merely as organizers who offer a platform for exchange; they are not responsible for the content of the speeches and do not necessarily agree with them, but they ask for absolute respect for those who have had the courage to present their thoughts, worries, fears, and visions for the future and to avoid any interruption of the speakers. She wishes everyone joy, open hearts, and lots of love.

A song follows, accompanied instrumentally by a CD and sung by another woman from the organizing team, to which the bystanders clap rhythmically. The lyrics translate as follows:

*Wake up, no matter what others say  
 Wake up, finally start questioning  
 Wake up, I'm telling you, you're not alone  
 Wake up, the truth will always be the truth  
 [...]  
 Give a piece if you have too much... Accept different  
 opinions  
 Start discussing  
 Accepting other points of view  
 We shouldn't lose our freedom  
 Now is the time to stand up for each other  
 Politicians do not really want to see the misery  
 Homeless people, food banks, and women's shelters,  
 children in need, social workers, old people, the door  
 must be open!  
 How much is a life worth?  
 What can you really give?  
 All this becomes apparent when the curtains rise  
 And what does "systemically important" actually  
 mean here?  
 Have we not yet recognized the value of each indi-  
 vidual?  
 [...]  
 What would you feel? Forget fear and panic, use em-  
 pathy instead.  
 I'll stand behind you when the going gets tough and  
 express my opinion  
 Do not be deceived  
 Awareness for the whole population!*

The first speaker is introduced as a physician from Hamburg. He is the internist Walter Weber, about 60 years old, who fiercely tells how he founded the initiative *Ärzte für Aufklärung* [Doctors for Enlightenment] with a colleague. In March, they realized that something was wrong in this country. He himself "woke up" when he heard a podcast by virologist Christian Drosten<sup>5</sup> predicting 250,000 deaths and the president of the Robert Koch Institute<sup>6</sup> Lothar Wieler talking about a possible 1.5 million deaths. But he completely woke up, he said, when Drosten advocated lowering the standards for approving a vaccine for the new coronavirus and leaving liability for any damages to the state. That would not work at all for a medical doctor. He and his colleagues said they had to take a closer look and see what really killed the people to see if it was really that bad. As it happens, Professor Püschl in Hamburg had performed corresponding autopsies against the advice of the Robert Koch Institute and had concluded that most had died with, but not from Corona. At the moment, we had the ridiculous number of 8,000 corona deaths, though we did not even know how many of them were not really Corona deaths. He had just learned that a doctor had been paid 5,000 euros to determine Covid-19 as the cause of death. In his research, he said, he tried to find out where this worldwide scaremongering suddenly came from, and in the process he came across a lecture from 2009 in which a public relations manager from the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) presented seven steps on how to increase demand for vaccines: 1. people circulate the idea that a killer virus is on the way. 2. renowned scholars scare people. 3. the press picks it up and carries it day after day and night after night. 4. horrible pictures of dead people and affected families are shown. Steps 5 and 6 were known from the book *Propaganda*:<sup>7</sup> You always have to repeat and dramatize it. In seventh place would come the knight in shining armor. And who is that? The vaccination! He concludes each of the points mentioned with the question whether those present had heard this before, which they answer with shouts of "Yes!" He doesn't know if that's exactly how it's going to be now, but he has his thoughts. And then everyone always asks, "What about Italy?," where so many people had died. There, most of the Eastern Euro-

pean nursing staff had fled the country because of the scaremongering and the curfew threatened by the emergency government, leaving the nursing homes literally alone. Then, because of their panic, people ran to the hospitals, which were much more poorly equipped than ours, anyway; moreover, they had many more problems with hospital germs and antibiotic resistance there. The pictures of the piling coffins had come about because the funeral homes were forbidden to carry out the funerals due to the Infection Protection Act. It is not acceptable that the normal standards are suspended, he says: the development of new vaccines is always associated with dangers and needs a sufficient testing phase—especially if, as in the case of the planned vaccine, it is a completely new procedure in which humans are changed on the genetic level. After that, he became more and more involved in researching the new coronavirus. The collection of data is dubious, often no distinction is made between deaths from Corona and deaths with Corona and, in addition, doctors and hospitals earn more when they treat a Corona patient. To him, it looks as if the pandemic is being hyped for economic interests. Now, these strange masks are being forced on us. In March, he would have had understanding for that measure, but at this point in time, there is hardly any virus around anymore, and furthermore, even the WHO has already written that masks show no evidence of protection. He calls to give him names of the heads of the local authorities, they will be sued personally for coercion. They must know that they are executing nonsensical orders, everyone is responsible only to his conscience. In addition, there is another thing: it is currently slowly being prepared to make vaccinations compulsory. Politicians know that doctors won't cooperate, that's why pharmacists are being trained in fast-track courses. He can only advise the pharmacists not to be part of it, because they are being used! The new president of the Federal Constitutional Court said that after the so-called crisis the Basic Law will come back, but not in the same way as before. What does he mean by that? How can a supreme constitutional court judge say something like that?, he asks rhetorically, before concluding by coming back to the mask issue. He considers masks to be a humiliating gesture of subjugation; we are to be conditioned to ultimately accept ev-

erything. He is just interested in what comes next. We really need to stand up now, otherwise we will all soon be forcibly vaccinated and forcibly chipped. *Therefore, he concludes, stop the Corona dictatorship! We will bring those responsible to justice, you can count on that!*

Another speaker notes that certain experts are not be heard by the government and names the microbiologist and epidemiologist Sucharit Bhakdi<sup>8</sup> and the physician Wolfgang Wodarg,<sup>9</sup> as well as an employee from the Ministry of the Interior who presented a paper criticizing the exaggerated scope of the measures and warned of economic damage.<sup>10</sup> The federal government was acting against its better judgment.

Meanwhile, an old acquaintance comes up to me; he had come with the counter-demonstration. What am I doing here, he asks. Since I wear a mask, unlike all the other bystanders, he immediately suspects ethnographic interest. He wears his mask above all to distinguish himself from the people here, he says. Then he talks himself into a rage about how bad it is here, all these conspiracy theorists, he can't stand it. What do all those people want, now they can finally go shopping again, so, what are they complaining about? And then this talk about compulsory vaccination and so on, has anyone ever announced that already? And anyway, it is complete nonsense that vaccination is dangerous. Somebody once claimed that vaccination causes autism; his PhD thesis was withdrawn long ago, but this belief persists. We have the best health care system in the world, people should be happy about that. And then over there, the two guys with the "Don't give Gates a chance" T-shirts, that's blatantly anti-Semitic.<sup>11</sup> And the five guys in front, they had always been at the Legida [anti-Muslim-immigration] demonstrations in the past.<sup>12</sup> This is a small, but loud and, above all, completely insignificant minority, to which far too much attention is already being paid. You shouldn't start talking to people like that, you should just exclude them and punish them with disregard.

The tenor of the speeches by the counter-demonstrators on the other side of the marketplace is similar to his stance: what is happening at the self-proclaimed hygiene demos has nothing to do with a rational discourse on the meaningfulness of measures, one speaker says. And Corona is not

a question of belief, but bitter reality. Anyone who ignores the hundreds of thousands of deaths or even dismisses them as lies is aiding and abetting the pandemic. Those who deliberately ignore essential measures of infection protection are acting irresponsibly and without solidarity. Throughout Germany, participants of these demonstrations carry right-wing and Shoah-relativizing images and anti-Semitic symbols or signs with conspiracy-ideological slogans, for example, about the alleged compulsory vaccination. Right-wing forces like the AfD have long since become part of these protests. Those who do not distance themselves from these right-wingers or take action against them should not be surprised to be lumped together with them. Something dangerous is brewing here. It is necessary to prevent a second Pegida. That is why they marked the red line. Covid-19 is a threat to the lives of many people. We all have to show solidarity and not Social Darwinism. Instead of returning as quickly as possible to the normal operation of fossil capitalism, they call for a transformation oriented toward the common good. Instead of pumping billions into climate-damaging car and aircraft companies, they demand the socialization of the health care system, the fair distribution of care work, and consistent climate justice. Instead of returning to the inhumane deportation process imposed on refugees, they demand decentralized shelter for those seeking protection at the Greek-Turkish border and as many sea rescues as possible.

Another young speaker asserts that the “conspiracy idiots” and the “aluminum bobble wearers”<sup>13</sup> on the other side of the marketplace display structural anti-Semitism, above all in a reductionist form of criticism of capitalism.

I turn back to the demonstration of the *Bewegung Leipzig*. The woman next to me, around 50 years old, says that this Drosten podcast, which the physician had talked about, was also one of the turning points for her, when Drosten said, hmm, yes, the numbers are all not reliable at all, but he had calculated everything back and forth again and again and could only say: it will all be very, very bad and we need a vaccine as quickly as possible and must leave out the usual safety criteria, and the state must bear the risks. The latter is actually nonsense, she says, because it is already the case that the state, i.e., the general public, pays

for vaccination damage. At the beginning, she herself was also afraid of Corona, but she has long since stopped believing the tale of a killer virus. The goal of “flattening the curve” initially made sense to her, even though she was surprised by the lack of discussion about the fact that the population would now have to pay for years of austerity in the healthcare system. However, she quickly became suspicious of the way the data were presented. These would always be given in absolute and cumulative terms, so that the curves could never decrease. The numbers of infected persons are also not put in relation to the population or to the number of tests conducted, and the number of deaths is also never put in relation to the number of infected persons. And nothing is ever said about the hospital occupancy rate. The result is a lot of scary graphs with rising curves, most of which are colored red, which is totally unscientific. And when Bill Gates, without a single critical question from the interviewing journalist, got ten minutes in the news program *Tagesthemen* to create a worldwide horror scenario and to say that the goal is to vaccinate seven billion people in order to avoid endless deaths, she completely lost faith. Fortunately, she came across the website of the physician Wolfgang Wodarg early on, who put everything in a different context. And on the YouTube channel of the physician Bodo Schiffmann,<sup>14</sup> who was a bit special, but at least authentic, she had followed his development a bit, how he had always wondered about individual aspects at the beginning and went deeper and deeper into the subject and everything became more and more monstrous for him. She recommends to me the documentaries “Trust WHO” and “The Profiteers of Fear”. The latter had been available in the ARTE media library for a long time and had now been taken out during the pandemic. In the first documentary, one can see that in 2009, silently and without being able to provide a reason even when asked, the WHO changed the criteria for declaring a pandemic. Before this was linked to a certain number of deaths and after the change only to the spread of a virus, completely independent of the incidence of disease or deaths. And shortly afterwards, swine flu was declared a pandemic, and it turned out that the vaccines had already been produced in advance and then ordered by the German government. The vaccine all had to be destroyed,



because the swine flue had not turned out as badly as announced. And already at that time the virologist Christian Drosten had been the one who had drawn up the worst scenarios and already at that time it had been Wolfgang Wodarg who had fought against that and had exposed the whole thing as a criminal action of the pharmaceutical industry. Only Sweden fell for it and vaccinated en masse with the vaccine, which led to a lot of neurological damage. That's probably why Sweden didn't participate this time, because they would have seen right away that this was just a new version of the swine flu scam. Anyway, why this focus just on vaccination? Vaccination and respiratory equipment are the only things that are talked about, as if only biomedicine and intensive care medicine can save us. No one talks about strengthening the immune system or the danger of civilization diseases that arise, for example, from an unhealthy diet and that also make you susceptible to such viruses. Instead, the politicians Renate Künast from the Green Party and Julia Klöckner from the Christian Democratic Union are currently running a campaign against vitamins because they are claimed to be so dangerous. She can't believe it! Why does everyone think that governments are suddenly concerned about health? Health has never been a big issue before. How many people die from hospital germs or diabetes or whatever, and what sustainable health measures could have been paid for with all the money that is now being thrown at pharmaceutical companies for the development of vaccines against a claimed killer virus that is not a killer virus? The whole thing is obviously not about health, but about something else.

The uniformity of the speeches alone must make one suspicious, they always say that we know nothing about the virus and at the same time the population is told from the beginning that nothing will be the same as before, they speak of the "new normal", and so on. How can you say something like that right at the beginning, when you don't know anything about the virus yet, you have to wait and see how the situation develops. And then the talk of systemically important professions, where did this term suddenly come from? We don't think that way at all here in Germany, it comes from somewhere else. It all seems to be scripted, as if it had been recited. What lies behind it is not clear, of course, but there are all

kinds of clues. At best, it is simply a matter of earning a lot of money with vaccines; at worst of population reduction and a transformation of all societies into a worldwide totalitarian system with total surveillance.

It is clear that the world cannot go on as before, but if the super-rich, who are not democratically legitimized, take up the cause, nothing good will probably come out of it for the populations. In the person of Bill Gates, Big Pharma and Big Tech overlap, which already indicates where the journey is going. Most likely, the whole thing will lead to a worldwide digitalized surveillance state in which the population is treated like cattle and in which people have to be vaccinated against the latest flu viruses every year in order to even be allowed to go outside. It frightens her how China is already being considered a role model in some talk shows. And when she first saw the reports about the starving day laborers in India, it occurred to her that this might not only be accepted as an accident, but perhaps even intended. After all, this will be the case not only in India, but also in many parts of the world, and it is probably just not being reported.

She doesn't understand why the left apparently doesn't see that, dismisses any criticism of the state measures as a conspiracy theory, and now has nothing better to do than to join in the general bashing of the protesters and demonstrate against these Corona rallies. Until now, she had always voted Green, but that would no longer be an option for her. The political opposition was just totally failing. The defamation of the demonstrations in the media and by politicians is already extremely blatant, which is why she has not been to such a demonstration until for the first time today. Just consider the designation "covidiot" and even more so "Corona deniers", as if it was about denying the existence of the virus, which places one in the vicinity of Holocaust deniers. The point is simply that the virus is obviously not as dangerous as the government and most of the media claim, and that the measures are doing more harm than good. And she finds her daughter's teachers, who pretend to be leftists and who get upset about the many "amateur virologists", really disgusting. In such a big crisis and with such blatant measures and restrictions on freedom, how can one simply rely on the people at the top to do everything

right? What kind of blind faith in authority is this that is being conveyed to the children? That is like Merkel, who in her television address to the nation said that from now on we should only believe the statements of the official institutions. What is that?! In such a serious crisis, you simply have to take a closer look and form your own opinion. As if there were not also different opinions among virologists. Apart from the fact that one should perhaps listen not only to one virologist, but also to other experts from the health sector.

How can it be that in the Western world, where there is such a high level of education and so much access to information, so few people take a closer look? It is simply obvious that the official narrative is not correct. And even the left-wing newspaper *taz* concentrates all its energy only on agitation against the Corona protestors. That is so self-righteous and at the same time so naive. And if the protestors are now defamed from all sides as totally leprous, that is for her not far from the category of the *Volksschädling* [a dehumanizing term that the Nazis used for “enemy of the people”]. She finds it so shocking that the left obviously has no fucking idea. They probably believe that when fascism comes, it would march lockstep through the streets with combat boots and brown shirts. And of course, then all the leftists would be in resistance. Don't they realize what they are doing? That's so stupid, she can't believe it. How stupid and naive one had to be. Hitler had also promised a good “new normality” for those who fit into the healthy body of the German people. And also he had described exactly what he was going to do, that could have been known before. The current leftists apparently only need to be told something about solidarity and about the need to protect the weak, and they will go along with anything. But it is above all the weak who suffer from the measures. When she hears that, and when people believe that now, at last, politics is attaching more value to the protection of the weak than to the oh-so-evil economy, and that politics is finally no longer following a neoliberal logic, then she can only grab ahold of her head. The opposite is the case; it looks like we will soon have a society that is subject only to the dictates of the economic interests of the super-rich and in which only those who are considered systemically important and maintain basic functions have any value. And probably most

people will not even notice that. As Orwell already put it in *1984*: they will love their oppression.

Another speaker says that, looking at the current statistics, the pandemic is already over, it had never been an infectious disease of national importance, and thus all measures had to be annulled immediately, as they are unlawful. It is the duty of every citizen to stand up against injustice, he said, and this has already happened once in Leipzig [referring to the demonstrations that helped weaken and ultimately defeat Socialist rule in East Germany], peacefully, with determination and vigor. We should repeat this and take courage from our own history, we should believe in the saying that history repeats itself; he prays that our history repeats itself.

Another speaker, like his predecessor around 50 years old, says he has been in the organizing team from the beginning, he has a son in the forest kindergarten and has to cry every time he sees people alone in the forest wearing a mask, crying about the stupidity of not recognizing what that means, or he goes to the supermarket and thinks he doesn't want to shop with a mask on anymore, he doesn't enjoy social life anymore, he wants to know from the government what the institutions were planning to do with us: what such a pandemic meant had already played out in 2012; in 2016, an EU strategy was developed that we should all be made aware of vaccination and be vaccinated, then there had been swine flu, and the bird flu, for which we should all be vaccinated, in 2019 there had been the so-called Event 201, where it had been played out exactly what is currently being done. In 2020, Bavarian State Premier Söder said that this was now a successful test, and now there was a warning of a bioweapons attack. The speaker asks the government to tell us the truth, he wants to know what is happening right now. He sees that all of alternative medicine is being pushed back, the midwives via their insurances, now he sees that homeopathy is being made to look bad, he is not in favor of it, but he finds it blatant what is happening, the alternative practitioners are being abolished, the medicinal plants are being catalogued, one is no longer allowed to use them and no longer allowed to sell stinging nettles. The authorities claim that only a vaccination can make us happy, and then somehow everything could be secretly mixed into this vacci-

nation without our knowing what it was. And he doesn't want that, he wants to know what it is and demands an official Corona investigation committee. He gets a big applause for that. He wants to know what is going on here; there are three pre-conditions for a dictatorship: the control of opinion, which we were experiencing via fact checks; website blocks like Dr. Wodarg's; and the network enforcement law. On the other hand, the distribution of wealth, i.e., the monetary system, the ownership of money, factories, real estate, and properties, promoted a dictatorship. He wants a different monetary system. And the most dangerous condition for a dictatorship is access to our bodies. And that is vaccination. Vaccination gives the dictatorship access to our bodies and it can do whatever it wants. But the point now is not to complain to the government, we have to empower ourselves, grow up, that's what we want, but peacefully, powerfully, and persistently. After enlightenment comes love, the current society is totally dysfunctional, destroys its own livelihood, the current crisis is much deeper than a political crisis, it is a spiritual crisis. What have we humans done with the earth and with ourselves, with the animals, our energy, and our thoughts? The current crisis offers us the chance to grow up, as humanity, to come into power ourselves instead of rebelling. Against the patriarchy, against the father as if it were symbolic, how do I deal with my father, what have I learned in the family, this is how I also deal with the government, so this is really a personal development process that is now pending for each individual; he no longer needs others to love him, but he begins to love himself.

At the end of the demonstration, when I return to my acquaintance from the counter-demonstration, who after one hour is still standing at the demonstration of the *Bewegung Leipzig*, he was in conversation with a man of about 50 years, whom he asks aggressively, *Are you a virologist? No, you are not a virologist, so what do you know? You can tell me whatever you want, I won't believe you anyway. You're going to tell me something you heard on Ken-FM<sup>15</sup> about dark forces planning something, that's nonsense, I don't want to listen to that.*

I hear the man say quietly but firmly, *Drosten is paid by Gates.*

My acquaintance asks back, *Drosten is paid by Gates? Do you have a bank statement? Show me a bank statement!*

He has had enough now, he has to go home. The demonstrators of the *Bewegung Leipzig* just sang the song *Freiheit* [Freedom] by the German musician Marius Müller-Westernhagen. My acquaintance says that the AfD had also sung that song recently, and says goodbye, while the *Bewegung Leipzig* was getting ready for the parade through the city center, which was called a "walk".

A few days later, a video appears on YouTube with the title "Against right-wing agitation and anti-Semitism—Really?" It is a montage of the demonstrations, in which the movement portrays the *Bewegung Leipzig* as peaceful and the Antifa or rather the *Aktionsnetzwerk Leipzig nimmt Platz* as aggressors. In the *Leipziger Internet Zeitung*, an interview with the *Aktionsnetzwerk Leipzig nimmt Platz* appears after the demonstration, but without mentioning the name of the person answering:

[Question] Why did the "Aktionsnetzwerk" call for a protest against the Corona demos in Leipzig?

[Answer] At the beginning, the Berlin organizers aimed at a broad-based "liberal" protest. Soon, Reichsbürger, neo-Nazis, neo-Rightists, and anti-Semites started to gather at these demonstrations. In the Leipzig telegram groups preparing for the event, anti-Semitic narratives are now being spread on a massive scale. The urgently needed debate about restrictions of fundamental rights such as freedom of movement—I can stay where I want—or freedom of assembly must be conducted, and we want to conduct the debate as an action network. The openness of these Corona demos to any, even completely nonsensical criticism against the measures, especially from the right-wing camp, contaminates this debate. Under the pretense of wanting to discuss the sense of restrictions, mostly propaganda and the centuries-old narrative of global elites who are executing a plan prepared long ago are spread.

[Question] One accusation is that conspiracy theories are being spread there. Which ones are these specifically?

[Answer] It is often disseminated that some force—preferably the states China or USA—has spread the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which causes Covid-19, probably to attack each other. Besides, wireless towers of the fast 5G network are also suspected to cause viral infection. What

worries us even more are anti-Semitic explanatory patterns that are essentially aimed at “those at the top”, meaning a global elite that controls the world. This “global elite”, also “financial elite” or even “Soros, Gates, and the other 400 (richest) families” is plainly structural anti-Semitism. In addition, it is also the proclamations of Q, or QAnon [...], which are being spread in the preparation groups; their crude contents should actually be beyond any acceptability.

[Question] Many participants deny that the speeches had anti-Semitic content and would probably not describe themselves as anti-Semites. What exactly is anti-Semitic about certain contents?

[Answer] Since all too obvious anti-Semitism has a disturbing effect against the background of German collective guilt and lowers acceptability, it is paraphrased. The supporters ask, “Cui bono?”, i.e., “Who benefits?”, or say that they would like to check the “financial flows” of said elites—on the basis of these, they are convinced, a conspiracy can be proven. Besides the historical lie of the “well poisoners” (Corona), especially at QAnon the legend of (children’s) blood being misused for magical or medical purposes is spread. Such myths have often led to pogroms against Jewish people, with violence up to murder. It is precisely in times of crisis that anti-Semitism becomes evident.

[Question] In Leipzig, only a few hundred people have taken part in the demonstrations so far. In other cities, there are already several thousand. Can the “movement” also become so big in Leipzig?

[Answer] In times of change, people look for explanatory patterns. On the other hand, the “movement” is very heterogeneous and increasingly dominated by known right-wingers and Reichsbürger. The carrying of Reich flags and obvious racism lowers the ability to connect with people, because civil society clearly opposes this. We also see this as our task: to make the connections clear and to point out the danger of a “movement” that is not concerned with fundamental rights. Unlike, for example, the groups in Chemnitz or Zwickau, the “Bewegung Leipzig” originates from the educated middle classes, which see themselves primarily as left-liberal. It can be assumed that the “movement” is reacting to the constant warnings against the participation of overtly right-wing individuals. With a demarcation to the right, how-

ever, such pro-conspiracy demos lose most of their appeal.

[Question] “Leipzig nimmt Platz” also criticizes some of the Corona measures. How does this criticism differ from the criticism of the Corona demos?

[Answer] We do not presume to be virologists. We do not doubt the existence of the virus or the need for preventive measures against it. Our criticism of the decisions is on a constitutional level. We criticize that the restrictions of fundamental rights went too far, and we criticize that the primary logic of the state is not based on human lives, but on economics. However, we do not believe that there is a diabolical plan of an elite behind Corona protection measures or the slow withdrawal of them. At all times, people suffer from crises, and a few profit. But this is not the shady plan of some lodge; this is everyday life in capitalism (LOCH 2020, transl. by EV).

#### “Corona Deniers” vs. “Conspiracy Deniers” *The Great Divide*

The declaration of a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020 due to the worldwide spread of the coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 has led to an often undifferentiated polarization in Germany, but also in other countries. The result is a kind of asymmetrical duel situation that confronts one with the choice of either joining or letting oneself be coopted on the side of the majority of supporters or the side of the minority of critics of the various state-imposed protection measures. It is a dramatic situation, a duel for life and physical as well as social death, which puts work and family relationships as well as friendships to the test and not infrequently causes them to break. This is because this heated controversy quickly turns out to be not just about healing, but about “everything”, or at least almost everything, or rather—from the protester’s point of view—about everything but healing; in any case about fundamental issues: about attitudes toward life and community, toward the state, toward science, illness, and death, and about who is to be trusted.

The “small but loud” minority, which expresses its criticism primarily in social media and throughout Germany in both large and small street protests, faces serious accusations, as do

the counter-demonstrators who accompany them: that they are stupid, irrational, egoistic, irresponsible, unsolidary, fact-resistant, anti-scientific, following a faith reminiscent of religiosity, pursuing financial interests, masking themselves and hiding a political agenda or at least letting themselves be harnessed to political ideologues or economic interests, are obedient to authority, undemocratic, fascist, unhealthy, deadly. They are called old terms like conspiracy theorists, conspiracy narrators, or conspiracy ideologues, Nazis, fascists, anti-Semites, esotericists, confused mumbler, vaccination wackos, tinfoil hat wearers, covidiot and Corona deniers, not infrequently and increasingly also radicals, extremists, criminals, hazards, terrorists, or murderers.<sup>16</sup>

This has created a classic task for anthropology, which for a long time has dedicated itself to what a ruling majority regarded as foreign, leprous, unsavory, dangerous, irrational, and primitive: to engage in participant observation committed to the usual epistemological neutrality and to categorical openness to the emic perspectives of the marginalized actors and to portray them, among other things, in their differences from and overlaps with the majority. Based on the coincidences of my sometimes more, sometimes less sporadic following of the development of the protests since the end of March 2020—through online and offline readings of newspapers, magazines, letters to the editor, Telegram groups, YouTube videos, Twitter messages, and Facebook posts, through observations of and conversations with neighbors, friends, acquaintances, and strangers in everyday life and at demonstrations against the measures in Leipzig, Berlin, Chemnitz, Kempten, and Ravensburg, and through interviews with some of their participants—the core of the controversy seems to be the differing assessments of the meaningfulness and proportionality of individual or even all measures to contain the virus. The controversy comes to a head in the question whether the pandemic spread of the virus requires increased attention, or whether increased attention—through excessively implemented and inadequately applied and evaluated test procedures for the detection of infection, generous counting those who died both “from and with Corona”, and one-sided and dramatizing reporting—creates the facts of a pandemic in the first place. Whether, therefore,

the chosen therapy is not worse than the disease because of the worldwide “collateral damage” it causes. And whether not only the disease, but also the therapy harms above all the weak, and how this could best be countered. Whether the restrictions on fundamental rights are temporary measures to protect the population or whether some or all of the restrictions will become permanent. Whether the restrictions serve to preserve current economic and social forms or whether current forms of community life and economic life will change. And if they do change, whether this will lead to a more solidary and democratic or to a more unsolidary and undemocratic transformation of societies. And if the latter is the case, whether this is the desired or undesired effect of an abstract social development or whether such a transformation is being deliberately pushed or even induced by certain groups of people under the guise of health protection, and what can be done against that.

Behind this discussion, an intersection and consolidation of various controversies already existing before the pandemic becomes apparent. They encompass far more dimensions than immediate health and, in their potentially broadly effective interplay, should definitely be further researched anthropologically and by comparing countries. These controversies are about freedom of speech and the limits of tolerance, which in Germany, just like in the United States, are being conducted with the English catch phrases “free speech” and “cancel culture”; about political *Querfronten* [literally, cross-cutting fronts, i.e., groupings in which right and left are irrelevant] and the so-called horseshoe theory, according to which extreme left and extreme right positions overlap; about liberal and libertarian concepts of freedom and the relationship between the individual, crowds, and power; about the distinction between investigative journalism, power analyses, and conspiracy theories and the assessment of the danger of the latter for democracy and minorities; about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of comparisons between today’s German Federal Republic, formerly socialist East Germany, and/or the Third Reich<sup>17</sup>; about the extent of the impact of human activity on the earth, the associated consequences, and possible countermeasures; about the distribution of income and the excesses

and dangers of the current financial system and possible alternatives to it; about economic and political globalization and corresponding efforts at disentanglement; about the advantages and disadvantages of increasing privatization of public services, as well as the digitalization of most areas of life and its influence on individual freedoms and democratic participation; about lobbying, corruption, and the political influence of corporations, private foundations, and think tanks, and thus the question of the independence of politics, NGOs, the judiciary, the media, science, and medicine, and the balance of public-private partnerships; and last and first, about biomedical and alternative approaches to health and disease and the resulting question of individual health and physical self-determination.

That such a specific combination of controversies occurs not only in this Corona crisis became clear to me the moment when a catalog from the Kopp publishing house fell into my hands, which was enclosed with a used copy of the recently published book *Chronik einer angekündigten Krise—Wie ein Virus die Welt verändert* [Chronicle of an Announced Crisis—How a Virus is Changing the World] by the journalist Paul Schreyer, in which I recognized many topics and authors whom I had learned about only in the current context of the protests. Many of the books offered in the catalog are themselves from the Kopp Publishing House, but books from other publishers are also included if they fit the subject. *Books that open your eyes* is the advertising slogan of the publishing house, and the title page of the catalog advertises the book *verheimlicht—vertuscht—vergessen 2021. Was 2020 nicht in der Zeitung stand* [concealed—covered up—forgotten 2021. What was not found in the newspaper in 2020] by Gerhard Wisniewski, who apparently publishes such a book every year.

After this media-critical lead-in and an editorial by the publisher suggesting that the pharmaceutical industry deliberately orchestrated the Corona crisis, the first nearly 50 pages revolve around the topic of “Medicine and Health”, touting books on the broad spectrum of what is called alternative medical therapies and self-healing, on the dangers of electro-smog, environmental toxins, genetic engineering, vaccinations, and the corrupt medical system. Under the heading “Well-being”, nutritional supplements are advertised; under

“Art of Living”, essential oils and incense; under “Ambience”, books about angels, astrology, and neurolinguistic programming; under “Mystery”, about the opening of the Third Eye, reincarnations, population exchanges, secret technologies, artificial intelligence, the Bilderberg Conferences and three super-lodges that have guided the destiny of the world for at least 200 years, the plan of the elites to exterminate at least half of humanity and the role Corona plays in that, about Satanism, other dimensions, and the origin of evil, extraterrestrials, forbidden sciences, and the way to the space-time energy age; under “Revelations”, about the New World Order, the health dictatorship, Corona lies, Bill Gates’ attack on democracy and the transformation of Germany into a totalitarian state, about bullying and digital lynching by red-painted Nazis [i.e., leftists], fake news, the climate lie, and the state Antifa, unwanted truths, the One-World establishment fighting Donald Trump, the devil and how he rules the world, as well as 800 pages of hidden facts about Adolf Hitler; under “Financial World”, about the coming mega-crash and related expropriations, about gold, silver, and digital currencies and the upcoming great reboot of the financial system; under “Self-sufficiency”, about the art of fermenting, cooking, and gathering herbs; and under the last category “Crisis Preparedness”, there are hardly any books, but mostly outdoor and survival items from various stoves and emergency food to water and air filters to solar panels and self-defense utensils.

A look at this catalog shows that this complex is part of what has been first described in the U.S. (KNIGHT 2000; BARKUN 2003) and later in Europe (AUPERS 2012; HARAMBAM 2020a; SCHINK 2020) as “conspiracy culture”, which interprets George H. W. Bush’s speaking of a New World Order after the fall of the “Iron Curtain” as a threatening plot by an unelected transnational elite to undermine state and individual sovereignty (cf. SANDERS & WEST 2003), for whom Corona is only a further or rather the last and decisive stage of escalation of a long-running development.

This scene is usually attributed to a Euro-American pop culture and regularly makes outsiders wonder how big it is and whether it is more likely to gain or lose popularity. The answers are controversial and empirically difficult to assess. It can only be ascertained, on the one hand, that

the currently recurring assertion that conspiracy theories are extremely popular at the moment has been a consistent perception for decades and, on the other hand, that at least the political, journalistic, and academic monitoring of this scene has steadily increased and, in the latter case, has even established itself as a field of research in its own right (cf., for example, the international research network Comparative Analysis of Conspiracy Theories, founded in 2016, and the resulting edited volumes (DYRENDAL, ROBERTSON & ASPREM 2018; BUTTER & KNIGHT 2020)). This suggests that it is not so much the conspiracy theories that have increased as the accusations against people of adhering to conspiracy theories (KNOBLOCH 2018).

Stating that a person formulates a conspiracy theory, understood as an accusation, delegitimizes this person as a serious interlocutor today, since the accusation implies irrationality, resistance to argument, and paranoia (KNOBLOCH 2018). Thus, “conspiracy theory” and “conspiracy theorist” have become “contamination words” that, in contrast to a stigmatizing word, not only negatively frame the political program of the people it refers to, but also generally denies their ability to reason and engage in discourse (VOGEL 2020; cf. BRATICH 2008: 3). Conspiracy theories are seen as a threat to society primarily because they undermine the authority of scientific and medical experts as well as state institutions, leading to political disintegration, and quite often become conspiracies of their own, ending in self-empowering violence. For this reason, there is a large body of prevention literature that aims to educate about the dangers of conspiracy theories and provides advice on how to recognize them and how to discuss with conspiracy theorists (e.g. ALT & SCHIFFER 2018; BLUME 2020; LEWANDOWSKY & COOK 2020; NOCUN & LAMBERTY 2020).

This makes it obvious that a “conspiracy culture” can be understood only in relation to its counterpart, an “anti-conspiracy culture”. Because the formation of this scene arises from the well-known interplay of increasing stigmatization and self-stigmatization, i.e., a process of re-appropriation, in which the pejorative attribution to others becomes an identity that is at first predominantly rejected, but at the same time partially accepted and used for self-description with

diminishing irony—albeit, as will be seen in the following, with the opposite valuation.

This “anti-conspiracy culture” becomes understandable, among other things, through the awareness of the long history of persecution of the Jews, which has time and again been justified by conspiracy theories, not only, but also in times of epidemics (BENZ 2008; BERGMANN 2020, 2021; HAVERKAMP 1981). In his book about scapegoating, the French literary scholar and philosopher of religion RENÉ GIRARD (1988[1982]) shows how, given European history, group stereotypical suspicions, accusations, and persecutions are expectable effects in moments of social crisis. In anthropology, JAMES GEORGE FRAZER (1913) had already generalized scapegoating rites by placing them in a morphology of sacrifice and exorcism and treating them as an overlap of the two. In doing so, he distinguishes occasional from periodic and embodied from unembodied expulsion of evils. GIRARD focuses on the occasional and eruptive embodied expulsion of evil and develops a general theory of mimetic imitation, in which he sees in mimetic imitation not an urge to conformism and herd instinct whose outcome is pacification, but the origin of violence and thus a danger to social cohesion, conceiving mimetic imitation as a desire of the desire of others. According to GIRARD, human societies muster enormous forces to prevent all that might evoke mimetic conflict. The function of prohibitions, as well as that of scapegoating (the concentration of violence on an arbitrary victim), he argues, is to prevent the escalation of envy and thus mimetic violence, and, additionally in the case of scapegoating, to stop it once it has been set in motion. The inevitable interplay of exorcism and conjuration is also evident in GIRARD’s work on the scapegoat, for in the frenzies of purification from evil, violence is invoked in the form of all-against-one in order to dispel it and thereby bring peace, at least for a certain time (GIRARD 1983[1978], 2012[1961]).

Independent of the Eurocentric optimism of progress and redemption shared by FRAZER with his evolutionary three-step of magic, religion, and science, and by GIRARD with his Christian apologetics, which with its gesture of superiority and claim to universality contains its own anti-Judaism and violence, GIRARD’s later reflections on what he called the stereotypes of persecution are

particularly interesting in the present context. According to GIRARD, in crises, which become triggers of broad collective persecutions, those affected experienced a demise of the rules defining the cultural order. This sense of radical loss of what is actually social can be found, for example, in the numerous accounts of plague from all centuries, and this is precisely where GIRARD sees a similarity of accusations: the fundamental crime is always seen in destroying the foundations of the social order. The persecutors are always convinced that a small group of individuals or even single persons could prove harmful to society as a whole. And the crowd, at such moments, always dreams of ridding society of the betrayers who infiltrate it. GIRARD notes that in the Middle Ages chemistry replaced the demonic, that is, the nature of accusations shifted from accusations of using occult powers for evil purposes to accusations of poisoning. Increasingly, accusations were less about witchcraft or the evil eye than about well poisoning, which in the long history of their persecution was attributed primarily to the Jews. The persecutors dreamed of poisons of such high concentrations that the persecuted could poison entire populations with the smallest amounts. Regarding the question of the potential victims of persecution, Girard sees a structural similarity in certain characteristics that are common to all victims of persecution. And these he recognizes in abnormality, as he calls it, which could be physical or social: the handicapped, foreigners, cosmopolitans, intellectuals, a sedentary or nomadic minority, the poor, and likewise the rich and powerful (GIRARD 1988: 23–38).

Thus, despite all the euphoria about the obvious will for solidarity in large parts of the population, it quickly became clear in the current crisis that the veneer of civilization is thin all over the world, and in the crisis old resentments surface and xenophobic statements and attacks accumulate. Worldwide, since the beginning of the pandemic, foreigners and foreign-looking people have been identified as virus carriers, threatened, and chased away (cf. *e.g.* BYUN 2020; FREVERT 2020; NOVIKOV 2020). In the case of the Corona protests, critics of the Corona measures associate above all a powerful cosmopolitan elite of politicians and the super-rich with the crisis and ultimately hold them, as an exceptional minority,

responsible for it. It is suspected that they either exploit the pandemic or even drew up a battle plan and are now implementing it to their advantage and to the detriment of the population. The critics of the measures also accuse the elites of destroying the foundations of the social order. Already in the beginning, the protesters hinted at the vague suspicion that Corona was to serve as a scapegoat for an already collapsing financial system, combined with the vague fear of totalitarian Chinese-style surveillance states governed by the interests of the pharmaceutical and technology industries, whose business model consists of regular compulsory vaccinations. This stance gained ever clearer contours in the course of the year, and the threat was given a name: The Great Reset. In the summer, the World Economic Forum first published videos under this title, and a little later, its founder and chairman KLAUS SCHWAB published an eponymous book (2020). Its thesis is that the world needs a new start due to man-made problems and that Corona offers the opportunity to shape a major social upheaval. What appears in the videos and the book as a utopia of a more ecological, sustainable, and just world is understood by many demonstrators as a dystopia, *i.e.*, as the realization of what has been associated in “conspiracy culture” for decades with the establishment of a New World Order.

The book thus serves as the basis of a “super-conspiracy theory” (cf. BARKUN 2003) that unites all current conspiracy theories in the idea that the different interests and powers of the elites converge in the planned Great Reset, that a complete takeover of politics by unelected and unaccountable corporations is imminent, and that, given today’s technical possibilities, this threat dwarfs even Orwellian totalitarianism. In these suspicions, the classic poison theme also comes to the fore in the form of vaccinations, because the protest scene often perceives the danger of vaccination damages as greater than that posed by the virus, and vaccinations are sometimes even interpreted as a potential vehicle for population reduction.

Bill Gates is probably one of the best-known persons who come into focus through conspiracy theories’ typical personalization of crises, conflicts, and their causes. He attracts slogans such as: “Don’t give Gates a chance!” or “Kill Bill!” But



for the most part, the group of people accused is broadened and the persecutory character becomes even clearer. This year, for example, at the large nationwide-organized demonstrations in Berlin, a group of people could regularly be seen with posters showing not only Bill Gates but also politicians and scientists such as Chancellor Angela Merkel, Health Minister Jens Spahn, SPD Member of the Bundestag Karl Lauterbach, or government-advising virologist Christian Drosten, dressed in convict clothes and stamped “Guilty!” The corollary is “No to lockdown. Yes to lock them up!”, as could be read on a banner at a Berlin demonstration on November 18—a demand, however, that many people I spoke to reject as too “PEGIDA-like”.

But what is special about the current situation is that the persecuted elites are theoretically in the minority, but in practice the accusing persecutors are also in the minority, because they are confronted with a majority of supporters of the measures, who, with the measures, also protect those elites and in doing so produce new collective accusations that lead the persecutors to see themselves as persecuted, as well. From the perspective of the supporters of the measures, the group of critics are looking for a scapegoat in a rich elite. But from the perspective of the critics, it is the supporters who have found their scapegoat in the minority of critics and have blamed them, as super-spreaders and pandemic-drivers, for the course of the pandemic. Accordingly, the protest scene in social networks repeatedly shares quotes from politicians in which they declare the protesters outlaws. While I am writing this text, Angela Merkel is quoted as saying that China is outperforming Germany economically because they do not have so many *Querdenker* demonstrations there (ASCHMONEIT 2020a).

What I already heard from an acquaintance at the end of October, namely that we wouldn't need a second lockdown now if all the critics of the measures had worn their “fucking masks” during the summer, is repeated a little later in a similar way by Katja Kipping from the party *Die Linke* [The Left], when she posts on Twitter on December 9:

If the #Lockdown has to be tightened or extended, it's also due to #Querdenken. They are to blame for the rise in the number of infections, because

with their call for recklessness they tear down what millions work out in everyday life with consideration (ASCHMONEIT 2020b).

The accusation is also that the *Querdenker* destroy social cohesion: those who deliberately ignore essential measures to protect against infections are said to be acting irresponsibly and without solidarity. The counter-demonstrators at a Corona demonstration in Leipzig at the end of May said that one should not respond to the pandemic in a Social Darwinist way, but only in solidarity. And also in December, Angela Merkel spoke of the protests as an “attack on our entire way of life” (ASCHMONEIT 2020c). However, instead of the poison issue, these accusations are primarily based on witchcraft. Based on the assumption that the viral load of asymptomatic people can be sufficient to infect others, every person potentially carries, as with the evil eye, a damaging and possibly lethal force, the outbreak of which can be prevented only by avoiding contact. While the supporters of the measures view the relativization of the virus' danger and the fear of vaccinations as superstition, the measures' critics view the assumption of a danger of asymptomatic infection as the actual superstition. This fits with the critics' self-identification as enlightened people, which is expressed in associations such as “Doctors for Enlightenment”, “Psychotherapists for Enlightenment”, “Lawyers for Enlightenment”, etc. This emphasizes the innocence of those who, in their view, are unjustly segregated by quarantine or—for example children—stigmatized as a potential threat, and makes the protest scene as a whole appear like an anti-witchcraft movement against the state.

A crucial question about conspiracy theories is that of their truth. There are two approaches to this question: one assumes that conspiracy theories stem from pure belief and are thus fundamentally false (e.g., BAKUN 2003; BUTTER 2018). ANDREAS ANTON & ALAN SCHINK (2019), on the other hand, use MICHAEL BUTTER (2018) as an example to question the suitability of this assumption, since this postulate can only become entangled in contradictions, and they refer to GEOFFREY CUBITT's (1989) definition, with the help of which inappropriate or “false” conspiracy theories can be justifiably distinguished from appropriate

ones, since there have always been conspiracy theories in the past that in retrospect proved to be true in such or such a similar way. JARON HARAMBAM (2020b), too, argues for a more differentiated view, since “providing uniform explanations for conspiracy theories fails to seriously consider their contents or underlying concerns”. However, the general stigmatization of conspiracy theories in the public sphere does not mean that every conspiracy theory is stigmatized, because regardless of their truth content, there are legitimate and illegitimate conspiracy theories, as SCHINK (2020: 191–219), for example, illustrates using the reporting by the news magazine *Der Spiegel*. A homogenizing view of “conspiracy culture” also obscures the observation that a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate conspiracy theories can also be found within this culture, and sometimes even the postulate that conspiracy theories are to be equated with a “false” belief.

The auto-ethnographic work of SCHINK (2020) provides acute insight into the recent past of the “conspiracy culture” in Germany, a thoroughly heterogeneous culture that divides itself into different factions: into political left and right, into secular and esoteric/religious, into male and female; and against the background of the interviews presented in the following, we can add the categories East and West. It is a culture in which these distinctions are cultivated, on the one hand, and repeatedly undermined, on the other, and that in a flexible and changing way makes any kind of combinatorics of these elements possible: first, within one person, and second—perhaps due to the marginalization of conspiracy theories and a feeling of loneliness and bitterness that often goes along with it for their adherents—it allows a great openness to other combinations of these elements to emerge, for instance at gatherings like street protests. The common ground is the tabooed doubt about the official “narratives”, the suspicion that various interests are hidden behind certain, mainly political events, to the detriment of the populations, and that these need to be uncovered and fought against—a goal against which, depending on the perceived urgency of the danger, other political differences fade into the background and so-called third positions [*Querfronten*] are accepted or even propagated. Outside observers are usually perplexed by this tolerance toward the most

diverse combinations of the aforementioned elements, which in the context of the Corona protests are often expressed by such phrases as “human family” or “openness to the right”. And apparently in this perplexity and against the background of the “anti-conspiracy culture’s” frequent equation of conspiracy theories with open or structural anti-Semitism, many observers tend to reduce the complexity and heterogeneity of this scene to a combination of the characteristics “right-wing” and “esoteric”, although a first non-representative study shows that a significant portion of the protesters come from the political green-left spectrum (NACHTWEY, SCHÄFER & FREI 2020). It is precisely this discrepancy of perceptions that has also confused many of the protesters’ own conventional categorizations, expressed for many in a lack of clarity “since Corona” about their own political location.

STEF AUPERS & JARON HARAMBAM point to other hybrid features of “conspiracy culture”. They describe it as “an unstable, multi-faced phenomenon that is situated at the intersection of three discourses: secular skepticism, popular sociology, and spiritual salvation” (2018: 64). Although it may be worth taking a closer look at whether these criteria do not also apply in part to political science, sociological, and other academic writings, they sum up: “Mixing up secular science and spiritual salvation and simultaneously assessing how the world ‘is’ and how it ‘ought’ to be, may be a horror to academics; for conspiracy theorists it is having the best of both worlds” (2018: 65). Thus, conspiracy theories can also be understood as a “boundary object” (STAR & GRIESEMER 1989) between skepticism, belief in salvation, and a social analysis shared with the majority which makes it comprehensible why, for AUPERS & HARAMBAM, the dismissive judgment of conspiracy theories, especially in academic writings, is explainable as “boundary work” (GIERYN 1983). What remains underdetermined in this boundary object is agency in the course of history. This can be attributed to one or more transcendent good or evil or ambivalent beings, to an abstract and anonymous structure or society of whatever kind, or to human beings and here to a chaotic cooperation or opposition or to a planned action of one or more good or evil or ambivalent individuals.

In the course of the Corona protests, numerous people have rapidly grown into the described “conspiracy culture” without prior association with it; they speak about their awakening experiences, about having woken up and stepped behind the mirror. A good example of this is Bodo Schiffmann, a doctor who became a protagonist of the Corona protests early on.<sup>18</sup> At the beginning of the pandemic, he began to warn in one of his YouTube videos about the work of his “vertigo outpatient clinic” that overly alarmist reporting on Covid-19 could turn the feared overload of hospitals into a self-fulfilling prophecy by inducing too many people with unspecific symptoms to go to the hospitals. Then he came across more and more inconsistencies in the pandemic response, went from being a vaccination advocate to a vaccination opponent, and now, after a good seven months, has started talking about QAnon and seems to hope that “Trump and his troops” will save us all from a worldwide health dictatorship.

The awareness of being stigmatized leads many actors in the scene to a reflexivity that enables them to see in two ways. Corona becomes a *Vexierbild* [an ambiguously shifting image] in which most of the stigmatized, unlike most in mainstream society, are able to see both images, the “official narrative” and the alternative one hidden behind it. And many leave the two interpretations in suspension, as in fantastic literature; and behind the ordinary appearance, whose perception is shared with most, lies the horror of a terrible grimace (TODOROV 1970)—an element that, with the ambivalence of defense and desire, of detective search (cf. BOLTANSKI 2014) and creepy fright, may constitute an attraction of that scene.

Such an asymmetry of perception also affects the polarization between opponents and supporters. The asymmetry of perception reveals itself in the way that the “classical” public media of the majority society do not or hardly reflect on their own handling of polarization; at least in their publications they do not or hardly deal with the role they themselves play in polarization and that every invocation tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This contrasts with the ostracized, who, as can be seen in the following, are often quite capable of dealing “reflexively” with their career and can also speak and comment on it accordingly. And it is precisely this discrepancy between public non-

reflexivity and private reflexivity that contributes significantly to the polarization of the two camps, i.e., many protesters polarize themselves, among other things, because they are excluded and feel excluded, combined with a stereotypical and erroneous, because unempirical, attribution as being irrational, right-wingers, or right-wing esotericists.

When one is confronted as a tabooed minority with a tabooed majority (with state apparatus), there are not many possibilities for a “counter-asymmetry”. Turning stigma into privilege is a common procedure among minorities (cf. e.g. GOFFMAN 1963; VOSS 2013). And thus it is only a small step from the experience of one’s own stigmatization and tabooization to counter-attribution. Science and rationality are claimed as one’s own values and, by tabooing the position of the critics of the measure, the proponents’ irrationality and unscientificness is revealed to the critics. The accusations against the minority cited above are returned by the minority to the majority, which also tends to be constructed as a homogeneous unit: the majority is in the same way stupid, irrational, egoistic, irresponsible, unhealthy, lacking solidarity, and hostile to science, does not listen to facts, follows a faith reminiscent of religiosity, pursues financial interests, masks itself, hides a political agenda or at least allows itself to be harnessed by political ideologues or economic interests, and is obedient to authority, undemocratic, fascist, deadly. The minority, too, reacts by creatively insulting the majority to make their contempt known, calling them for example “conspiracy deniers”, “coronazis”, “Corona’s witnesses”, “systemlings”, and “sheeple” or reacts with the rhetorical question: “Who are the real covid-its?”<sup>19</sup>

In this respect, from an anthropological point of view, the social dynamics that result from the Corona protests are initially not unusual and are quite expectable. On this issue, however, that in one way or another engulfs all of society, in which one group’s utopia becomes another’s dystopia, in which groups are identified that others perceive as a mortal threat, and thus in which for many the attitude of the counterpart becomes a matter of life and death, an increasing polarization into “conspiracy and unreason” on the one hand and “science and reason” on the other runs the risk of

leading to a profound social divide, that in many cases actually seems to be based on a common ground of values.

Anthropology cannot promise a solution to these conflicts, but it can at least promise not to fuel the conflicts further, by neither joining in with any of the accusations in the field nor adding new accusations to the field. In this way, it can avoid deepening the rift between the positions by avoiding giving the impression that even the sciences are ignorant and uncomprehending.

The following is a first approach to document the “natives’ points of view” of critics of the German Corona policies, based on descriptions of street protests as well as in-depth interviews with two participants in demonstrations against the Corona measures in Leipzig conducted in German at the end of October and the beginning of November 2020. In the interviews, they explore the situation against the background of their socialization in the German Democratic Republic, making this text not only a commentary on the pandemic year 2020, but at the same time one on the 30th anniversary of German reunification. I already knew both interview partners before the protests and conducted tape-recorded narrative interviews with them. For this text, I sorted some of the statements by rearranging their content and slightly smoothed some of the sentences to make them more readable, but made sure that they retained their oral character. Both interview partners have agreed to an anonymized publication of the interviews. The descriptions of the observed scenarios at various demonstrations are meant to display a dystopia expected by many demonstrators, while the conclusion illustrates a dystopia of hopeless communication between supporters and opponents of the Corona policy that may have already occurred.

This approach is a matter of local snapshots and thus a small, but for this purpose detailed excerpt from a very heterogeneous movement, which, on the one hand, cannot be representative and, on the other hand, is probably already due for revision at the time of its publication, because it reports on a social event that is in full motion and of which no one yet knows what will develop from it and therefore what the present situation will once have been. But this is exactly why it is important to record moments of its course in

detail, because in retrospect hardly anyone will be able or like to remember these states, or these states will then only be reconstructable with difficulty and with the knowledge and under the conditions of the future, which is still unknown at the moment.

**“Whatever left-wing and right-wing mean nowadays.” Annett**

Born and raised in a small town in the *Land* [state] of Saxony-Anhalt as the daughter of a design engineer and a department head in a state-owned enterprise (VEB), Annett has lived in Leipzig since the early 1990s and works there as an educator. She is in her late 40s, has been divorced for several years, and has four children, two of whom are still living with her. The following statements are taken from an interview we conducted in Leipzig on October 22, 2020.

It took a relatively long time for her to *wake up*—until Easter 2020, approximately. When it all started with Corona, she still took it all very seriously: *the pictures from Bergamo and so on, the usual stuff*. She had been interested in Iran for a long time and had seen terrible pictures from there. In retrospect, however, she is now asking herself what kind of pictures they actually were and what really happened there. She had always said that before a lockdown was implemented in Germany like it was in China, before they closed the schools in Germany, the third world war would have to come. *And when the school closures started, I thought: “Oh shit, this is getting serious!” So, I didn’t research the facts at all, but simply had trust. In my rather left-wing circle of friends, everyone was of the same opinion, except for maybe one or two who were very esoteric. At that time, I still looked down on them a bit, like: “Well, you can’t just feel, you also have to look at the facts.” It was around April 20, when the lockdown was supposed to be over and Angela Merkel stood up and declared that suddenly the decisive criterion was no longer “Flatten the Curve”, but the reproduction rate. And I thought: that’s strange somehow. And then I started to do some research. An acquaintance had sent me a link to an interview by Ken Jebsen with Sucharit Bakhdi<sup>20</sup> with the comment: “Here, this made me think a lot, take a look at it.” I really had to overcome my prejudices to do that. Watching a video by Ken Jebsen—that just isn’t done! Because I come*

from the left spectrum and also my children are totally left-wing and it was clear that Ken Jebsen is somehow right-wing. Whatever left-wing and right-wing mean nowadays. I remember very well that I said to myself beforehand: "This is a memorable moment! Yes, I'll watch it now, but basically nothing can happen. I still have my brain to judge everything and that can tell me whether this is right or wrong." I watched that interview and found myself in agreement with it all. That was the beginning. And then I searched further and informed myself and found a lot. The critical stuff that I had previously received from others was more from some astrologers and who knows, so no facts. They were critical, but everything was somehow intangible. I couldn't get anything out of that. But what Bakhti said in the interview and in his open letter with five questions to Ms. Merkel at the time, I thought it all had a lot of substance. And yes, why doesn't the man get an answer? Something is fishy here.

Well, and then I thought: that's actually not possible. I really had the feeling that my brain was restructuring itself, that I could no longer think clearly, and that I could no longer get my everyday life in order because, for example, my right-left thinking pattern was completely shaken. I had the feeling that my former world had crumbled. And I thought, I have to dig deeper now and get more information, and I need time for that because it's so important. I was feeling really bad, and I took sick leave for a week, and I used that week intensively to get informed. I kept looking at the figures from the Robert Koch Institute and then came across the videos by Bodo Schiffmann,<sup>21</sup> among others, who put it all into a different perspective. Or if any names came up, "the renowned whoever", I would look up and see who that was. Some Ioannidis from Stanford University for example, well, those names that are always circulating. And of course: Wolfgang Wodarg.<sup>22</sup> At first, I thought, what kind of a nutcase is that? Then I looked at CORRECTIV<sup>23</sup> or something else, and they refuted what he said, then I looked at Wodarg again, and it went back and forth, and in the end I thought: yes, for me at least, Wodarg and the other critics of the measures are actually right.

But I also watched other things that weren't about Corona, for example a lecture by Daniele Ganser<sup>24</sup>, which was about propaganda, that is, how propaganda works. I also read up on Ken Jebsen, because they always say he's a Holocaust denier. Yes, well, of course, I'm still not quite sure, but for example this sentence that they always hang on him, that the Holocaust is a

PR stunt: this interview, in which he said something like that, went on, and then I thought, this criticism is really a bit cheap. I mean, his way, okay, he's already an agitator somehow, I don't like that either, but that doesn't mean that everything he says is to be condemned. But I think that's what I used to do.

So, in the past, some people could have said whatever truths they wanted, and I wouldn't have listened to them. Also "Rubikon", this magazine: I was firmly convinced that it was right-wing, without ever having read through it. I knew it before only in the negative sense. Now I find "Rubikon" SUPER interesting, I mean, the contributions.<sup>25</sup> Until Corona, I always made it easy for myself with my classification. With Daniele Ganser, however, I had already begun thinking. He is Swiss, and years ago Swiss friends recommended him and said that he is considered right-wing, but that's total nonsense, he is not right-wing. And I listened to him back then and thought, yes, that's right, he's not right-wing. Well, you're already right-wing if you question the official narrative of 9/11.

In the course of the week, I have in any case gained absolute clarity [...] that the measures are not based on scientific findings. To order a lockdown when it was actually clear from the start that it would do more harm than good is absolutely criminal in my eyes. At first, I thought they were stupid or didn't know any better. But no, they could have known that, definitely. Specifically, every measure that is still in place now bothers me. The measures are just not justified, there's no reason. It's nothing different than other years: people die, yes, as always. They always pretend that the opponents of the measures are idiots, but actually they have many more facts to offer than the government.

And then, on a very personal level, I simply hate being disciplined; already when I was a child, that was always a problem at school: if a teacher wanted to dictate something to me and I was of the opinion, no, he's not right. Somehow, I can't get rid of that; that I am so quick to contradict what I'm told. When I know exactly that something is bullshit, that I have to wear this fucking mask, that I'm being forced to do something that not only doesn't help, but is even harmful: I just can't stand all that. [...] And that's just the way I am: once I've recognized something as the truth, I don't take it back, and I can't just keep it to myself in the closet. And when I found out at some point that there were demonstrations in Leipzig, I said to myself: Okay, go! I didn't expect that it would cause such a family rift. That was such a punch in the face. That happened

afterwards, within two or three weeks. I don't remember what the first demo was, but in any case, on May 1 I went with a friend. There was a lot going on in the city, there were several events of leftists in general, for example, free teachers, that they are paid shit, but directly against the Corona policy I found nothing.

I then went back home. But another friend was at Simsonplatz that day, where there was a demo with an open microphone, as they called it, where anyone could speak. She told me that the Antifa was there right away, especially Irena Rudolph-Kokot [the second chairwoman of the Leipzig Social Democratic Party], who really disturbed and insulted the people at the microphone, that they were structurally anti-Semitic, that they were worse than Holocaust deniers and so on. My friend is really left-wing; her grandfather was persecuted under National Socialism and sentenced to death. And what Irena Rudolph-Kokot said really hurt her. Afterwards, she went to her and said: "How dare you insult people here like that?" But I don't think that got through to her. When my friend told me that story, I thought: Damn! I didn't understand it. I mean, I think that people who think a little bit and are critical may not come to the same conclusion as I did, but they don't have the right to insult others because of that. I was still a bit naive back then, I think.

My personal meltdown was then a little later at a rally on Wilhelm-Leuschner-Platz. I didn't like this rally at all. At that time, as I said, there was still an open microphone and everyone who spoke at the front was really kind of Reichsbürger-like or just plain weird. There was maybe one contribution out of ten that I thought was good. I didn't clap for any of them. And I thought: Next time, you won't join that group anymore; it wasn't really my cup of tea. That evening, my oldest son called me, "Mother, do you have something to say to me?" I said, "No, not that I know of." He, "Well, I saw you in a video. Who was the girl next to you?" "Well," I said, "I think that's none of your business, but she's a friend." Well, and then he was like, "You are demonstrating together with Nazis—that's not acceptable at all." I felt like a child caught in the act. I was forced to justify myself, but at the same time I thought, why do I have to justify myself at all? I hadn't expected anything like that. And the last thing he said was, "Well, you live in Connewitz<sup>26</sup>..." I asked, "What are you trying to say?" And he's like, "Well, maybe others have seen you, too. Not that there's going to be a tit-for-tat response." And then we hung

up and I was in shock: my own son literally threatened me.

I drank a bottle and a half of wine that evening and just cried. Well, the world really collapsed for me. We then stopped talking to each other for the time being. Actually, there is no contact at the moment. He no longer lives at home, he is 24, and we saw each other rather sporadically before, so I am able to mostly suppress that issue. Sometime later, we met again, on the marketplace at a demo: he stood on one side, I on the other. And then they shouted "Nazis out!" in our direction. That was really hard. [...]

With my other son, the 17-year-old, it also came to an argument. At some point, I made an ironic remark about the mask obligation, and he said, "Ey, I'm totally disappointed in you. At the beginning, you took the issue seriously, I was really proud of you, and now...—you're endangering people's lives," and blablabla. I was like, "What?" and tried to argue. And he said, "If you think like that, then you're a murderer!" And at some point I got so angry and said, I won't let him call me a murderer in my apartment, and I talked him down. Then we had one or two days of silence and then, well, we could at least discuss things a bit more objectively. I mean, in the end I think: my God, he is 17, he has no life experience. [...]

My youngest daughter is 14, she butts out. Only once, when we both were on the road together and I ranted something about masks, she said, "Well, I think masks are a good thing." Annett then said nothing, because her daughter would have her reasons and as long as she did not attack her, that was okay for Annett. In everyday life, they left the subject out. Annett also never explicitly talked about Corona with her older daughter, who lives in southern Germany and who also had not had any intensive contact with her before. But when she was in Leipzig the other day, we were in a kebab restaurant, and when we entered, she didn't have a scarf with her, and then she pulled her T-shirt up over her mouth and nose, and I said to her, "Oh, come on, you can leave that off." And she said, "No, I believe in it." For me I thought, yes, you said something right, "I believe in it." Because it's true: it doesn't matter at all whether you put the thing on or not. But it's not about the factual correctness, it's almost like a religion. Since then, I haven't heard from her. I wrote to her once, no answer. It's been two months now. I am not imposing myself. She had only seen that she had her Facebook profile picture with a mask on and therefore

assumed that her daughter was avoiding contact in order to avoid arguments.

She just wants the kids not to think badly of her only because of how she thinks. *And that's not too much to ask. I mean, I'm their mother and they know that I'm not a Nazi. We used to go to the same demonstrations together, whenever it was about xenophobia, against Legida<sup>27</sup>, or when Mr. Poggenburg [until 2018 a politician from Saxony-Anhalt who belonged to the right-wing "wing" of the AfD, now independent] marched through Connewitz. We have always demonstrated together against right-wingers and they know that I am one of the "good guys", that I want the good—well, of course they all say that. [...]* When she thinks about the problem her children actually have, she thinks that for her family, it was just a total taboo to stand together with Nazis at a demonstration. That was not acceptable and could not be excused; one simply does not do that, no matter what the argument is. *Then I should organize something on my own, a demo where there are no right-wingers. But I mean, I can't prevent that either.* She also is bothered that there are right-wingers at these demonstrations. *But as long as nothing comes from the left against the Corona measures, then I have two options: either I stay at home, but then I do not know how I should protest there, or I stand there and bite the bullet that "they" are there too. [...]*

*I then realized that I was not the only one who had this problem.* For example, her mother's boyfriend, who comes from a left-wing Christian family, also criticizes the Corona measures, and his children don't understand the world anymore, with their father making common cause with right-wingers. And at a demonstration, she once heard from an organizer that his children had broken off contact with him because he was involved in the protests.

She thinks that the fact that so many young people can't relate to the demonstrations is perhaps because at the beginning there was always an appeal for solidarity and mutual consideration. *At the beginning, I also believed in that and took it totally seriously. And most young people want to be the good guys and want to show: we take responsibility, we care about the elderly, and so on. And that's why they find those who question the measures irresponsible, just like my children find me irresponsible now: we don't want to have anything to do with these egoists who don't want to accept the measures.* Annett assumes that they simply lack a bit of life experience, that

not everything is black or white or good or bad, and that people who question the measures are therefore not automatically bad. Perhaps it was also group conformity that made them not allow any doubt. *I think that wearing a mask also serves as a statement. It allows me to show the outside world that I am in solidarity, that I protect you, that I am a lifesaver.*

Perhaps something else also played a role, which she had already noticed in herself. *Sometimes you are in the mood of not wanting to be seen or just want to be left alone, and this mask in front of your face is then also an "Oh, no one can see me", for example in the big department store, which is then almost like hiding behind the mask. And sometimes I think, 14, 15 is a tough age, where you often like to sink into the ground, maybe that also suits some people a bit. I don't think that's reflected, but I can imagine that it plays a subconscious role. But it's just an idea.*

To this day, she wonders what being right-wing or left-wing actually has to do with questioning the Corona measures. *For me, that actually has nothing to do with being right-wing or left-wing. It's so idiotic. So, if I look around on the Internet, then I'm probably "New Right" now if I question the official Corona narrative. Yesterday or today I saw a video by a Naomi Seibt, who dismantled the PCR test and I thought, super-interesting, super-researched, and then I researched the name Naomi Seibt, and then yes: she questions climate change, is a member of the New Right, and so on. And then I thought: oh my God! Well, I've pretty much abandoned this left/right distinction, these terms are just stupid. If someone is xenophobic, then he's xenophobic, and I don't mind if they're also called right-wing. But what all is labeled right-wing nowadays, it's just ridiculous.*

*Some people, and in the meantime I count my older kids among them, are so far to the left that they're already to the right. That may be a stupid saying, but what I mean is that some people are just so absolutely intolerant.* And they had no idea what they were talking about. When she tells her children that they should at least take a look at this or that, they reply that it's a waste of time. And when she tells her younger son, for example, about the power of the pharmaceutical industry, he says that's not true. She simply hopes that her children will eventually understand why she thinks and acts the way she does. Not only for herself, but also for them. She would like her children to question more, to

inform themselves in many different ways and not always only from one side.

*What I still don't understand is that these super-, super-leftists always dutifully do what the government wants! I just don't get it: supposedly so critical. And that made my world collapse a bit. [...] These slogans that are always shouted at the counter-demos by the Antifa, something like, "Where, where, where are your masks?" or something like that, you always stood there and thought, "Wow, where the hell am I now?!" On the other hand, I somehow understood that, because I was on their side myself before. I mean, we shouted: "Where, where, where were you in Heidenau?"<sup>28</sup> Towards the police, though. [...] I first had to figure out why they were calling us anti-Semites. In her self-understanding, she is actually criticizing capitalism. She criticizes that some people have so much money and thus so much power that they can buy entire governments. The name Bill Gates always comes up, but there are others who simply have so much money, so unimaginably much money, which makes something like that quite possible. She took the criticism of her as meaning that terms like financial elite used to be attributed to Jews, and if you use this image, then you are anti-Semitic. But I mean, I don't give a shit whether he is a Jew or an atheist or whatever. Such criticism makes me think, YOU are the ones who are harping about it all the time. But if you do not even think about whether that is a Jew or not, then you cannot accuse anyone of being an anti-Semite. [...] Is this to divert attention from something? I don't know. Or a Mr. Soros, who is obviously Jewish, am I not allowed to criticize him now, just because he is Jewish? With that, I don't take Jewish people seriously anymore. Of course, I am also allowed to criticize Jews. But not because he is Jewish, but for his behavior. But no, I'm structurally anti-Semitic and that makes me the lowest category, and that's why they don't talk to me anymore. [...]*

*I already once thought, maybe the reaction of Mrs. Merkel back then in the refugee crisis was just a move to get the left behind her. I remember thinking at the time that when she said, "Yes, open the borders, we'll take in all these people," I didn't really believe her when she said that this was really a matter of the heart. But I didn't question it any further, because I also thought that if no one lets them in, they'll die somewhere, that's not possible, Christian charity and all that. At the time, I said to myself, "Wow, this is the first time I've ever liked anything Angela Merkel has*

*said." And that was a bit of a consensus among my friends: we wouldn't have thought that. Gosh, hats off to Angela, she's standing up to all the critics. And those who criticized Angela Merkel at the time were the right-wingers. This has given Angela Merkel a kind of saintly status. And if you criticize Angela Merkel now, it is interpreted as if you are on the side of the right-wingers. Even though one thing has nothing to do with the other. But that, too, is just one attempt at an explanation.*

*In any case, she says, she is sure that the measures are not primarily about health. I think it's an interplay. I think that it is no coincidence that the same thing is happening everywhere globally. There is a plan by whoever and however. What they want to achieve with it, I have my suspicions. I assume that the people behind it are those who have the power and a lot of money. At school, we were taught Karl Marx: capitalism only works if everything keeps growing and growing, and I think they've come up with some way to increase their wealth even more or to eliminate competition. At the beginning, I always asked myself: what do they get out of it if the companies all go bankrupt now? But then I understood that companies go bankrupt, but the market segment remains. And people will take it over. We already know that: Amazon has made so much more in this time, and all these giants are profiting and the others are going bankrupt. And actually, that's what Karl Marx already said: monopoly capitalism and so on. I assume that this is the case. That's quite frightening. There is no endless growth, and capitalism only works if there is repeatedly a crash, for example due to a war. I think this time it is not a war, but simply a worldwide lockdown. Many things will be broken, shut down, and then there will be growth again. But only a few will grow, the others will go bankrupt. Well, and since there would have been a stock market crash this year or next year anyway, like in 2008, there are people who have calculated that, and they needed something to cover it up with. Now they can blame everything on a virus. Then it's not the capitalist system itself that's to blame, but due to the virus, we had to implement a lockdown to protect you. Something like that.*

*In the meantime, it is no longer just a few individual physicians who are calling for an end to the lockdown; even the WHO is now saying that a lockdown is nonsense. Or this head of the Bavarian health authority, who said, "Even if I now risk my career as a civil servant, what Mr. Söder [the Bavarian prime min-*



ister] says is bullshit!"<sup>29</sup> So, criticism is coming from many sides in the meantime, and still they're doing their thing, the politicians. So, either they have nothing left to lose or they feel so secure and have some kind of ace up their sleeve, I don't know, but it's a bit weird somehow. And that reminds you quite fatally of the GDR [German Democratic Republic]. I mean, no one was interested in the GDR anymore, well, no one is not right, but the mass of people just smiled at what the government did and they still did their thing. So really completely detached and disconnected from the ordinary population. That's exactly how it is now. But if you say something like that, people immediately say, "No, you can't compare that, for God's sake, we have a democracy!" Of course, you can speak out that you think the government's measures are moronic. You'll just be looked at like an idiot. But depending on your position, you can also get into real trouble. Well, you can't deny that. There are now people who have become unemployed because they took part in such demonstrations.

And I think that being with other people feels the same as it did back then. Well, I know many people who see the measures the way I do, but they would never say that out loud. I mean, apart from my left-wing Connewitz acquaintances, who all agree with the measures. But at work, for example, where, let's put it this way, there are quite ordinary people, not left-wing, not right-wing: people now make fun of the mask obligation and the government, but they would never say that openly or go to a demo. They just swallow that. I think, okay, what else has to happen for them to take to the streets like they did in '89—where, by the way, many right-wingers were present, too, and they should stop pretending that this is something new and unusual. This opportunism, it's like back then. I think that's the way it is in every society: a certain percentage is against something, demonstrates on the street, risks their necks, and a large proportion also sees it that way, but yes, as long as I can still drive a car and the TV is on and there's beer on the table, everything's fine. And well, then there are always those who don't get it or profit from it.

And what is also like in GDR times: that people hang medals on each other. Now for example the Bundesverdienstkreuz [Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany] to Drosten<sup>30</sup>, or these three policemen in front of the Reichstag. I thought, well, it couldn't get any more ridiculous. So, this whole show there with the Reichstag, and the so-called "storm"

at the end of August: that there were no policemen in front of the Reichstag, although it was announced that it will be stormed. I thought, how stupid do they think people are? Well, there should have been hundreds of police officers, if they are warned that the Reichstag will be stormed. But no, there are only three policemen and they get a medal afterwards. Or the one who got a medal at the same time as Drosten got it, a YouTuber, maiLab, I had seen her picture before.<sup>31</sup> She had recently dismantled Bhakdi's book<sup>32</sup>. She pretends to be so scientific, but doesn't prove scientifically what's bad about the book. And then I looked further and found that, for example, her husband works at Merck and thought: okay, so somehow the same squad again—congratulations on your medal! In GDR times, the old men also always gave each other medals. The people laughed their heads off. And yes, it's a bit like that now, too. Well, it's actually ridiculous, if it weren't so bad...

When she looks at how the reporting on Corona is done and how one-sidedly the scientific opinions are presented and how dubious the whole thing is, she starts to ask herself whether the same happens other areas. About climate change, for example, she only knows what can be read in the newspaper about what science supposedly says about it. On the climate issue, I never expected a capitalist government to actually do anything about it. So, it's just superficial, pro forma, window dressing. Well, now electric cars are being totally propagated, and I've always wondered how that works. Okay, they are charged with electricity, so it would at least have to be green electricity for that to make any sense. But no, it doesn't matter which electricity. And then I think, that can't be the solution either, that now all cars with combustion engines have to disappear and instead thousands of millions of e-cars are produced. Behind this, there are again certain interests. The car-makers are now sensing their chance. I mean, anyone can buy an e-car if they want, but that's like throwing out a working refrigerator to buy a more efficient one. In the long run, electric cars may be a solution, but only if the electricity is produced in an environmentally friendly way. And although this is now subsidized with thousands of euros, she herself cannot afford a new car.

I just don't think the government is doing anything out of idealism. Well, the government as a whole. Individual members of parliament might. But the e-cars are not about saving our climate. Sorry, that's like

when Klöckner [the Federal Minister of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection] said the other day how harmful vitamin D is, high doses and so on. And then I thought, I just don't believe that you're interested in that. Then implement a "traffic light" nutrition label, that already exists in other countries, but not here. So just start somewhere else! Do they want to bullshit us or what? I assume that the pharmaceutical industry is behind such actions. Also this denigration of homeopathy for years, I mean, just let people take their globules as they like. But I think that has become competition for the pharmaceutical industry and so it has to be fought. And then they make an all-round attack, everything that is naturopathy is from and for idiots. If you propagate naturopathy, you are already a new-right-winger in the meantime. I am so annoyed about my children that they adopt this image so unreflectively. I feel attacked by this, too. I don't know how this is connected, the new right and naturopathy. Everything is lumped together. At the beginning, my daughter sent me an article by someone from the party "Die Partei"<sup>73</sup>. There was still no mask obligation back then and the article started with masks and that in Asia people who are sick wear a mask to protect others, and that's actually solidarity but is always ridiculed here and so. That was okay as far as it went. And then the author got upset about the argument that Corona only affects old people, as if the old are not worth anything and so on. I could still go along with that. But then a sentence followed like: that the German Michel sits at home in the evening, reads his newspaper and throws in his white globules. All in one breath, in one sentence. And then I thought, what does one have to do with the other, you can't explain that at all. But it is thrown together more and more without any reason. And that has become so normal in the meantime, especially in left-wing circles. That really gets me down, because that's so stupid and ignorant. But the leftists are totally going after homeopathy now. Well, it's just stupid.

In the beginning, she used to think that maybe she would wake up in the morning and everything would turn out to be a bad dream, but she rarely has that hope anymore. In the beginning, she felt extremely alone, as if she was sitting on the fence, and she thought she would die old and lonely. Today, she knows that she is not alone. Fortunately, she can also talk about all these things with her mother and her sister and some of her friends, who see things the same way she does.

Thank goodness! At her work in the kindergarten, she says, masks are the main issue. So, the parents have to wear masks at our place, on the whole premises even in the garden. Then it is said that only one parent should come, so that there is no crowding in the dressing room. And then there was the question about siblings, because one mother said, I won't leave my 8-year-old standing outside alone. Okay, then they were allowed in too, but in this case, they have to wear masks too. Which, if you think about it, is insane, because they come from the same household as the younger siblings they're picking up.

And there was the situation: we were in the garden, which is relatively large, I was sitting with two colleagues relatively far back and then one of them said: look, there comes the mother with her two older children and they don't have a mask on, who's going to talk to them? And I said, well, I'm not going to, because I totally reject masks on children, no matter how old, I don't see why. And then one of us left, I didn't pursue it any further. And the next day, the other colleague came to me and said, "I wanted to let you know that I thought it was totally uncooperative of you to just make an exception of yourself. That's simply an order and we all have to go through it." And I said, "Well, I explained that to you yesterday: order or not, I reject that, that's not possible for me, and I can't reconcile that with my conscience."

Well, then the deputy boss came along, but she thinks the same as I do, and then we got to talking and it was okay. A third colleague came along and said, "But well, it's simply an order and we have to follow it." And I said, "No, we don't have to." And then I say, "Where is YOUR red line? I don't know, maybe next week they'll say that our kindergarten kids have to wear a mask. Do you then also still say, "It's an order!?" She looked at me, she didn't understand at all what I was talking about. This obedience to authority, wow, that can't be true, I can't believe that. So, that's why I also have discussions at work. But I'm good at debating.

However, it depends on how serious it is. If it is somehow about protecting children, I wouldn't shut up. But the other day I had an organizational team meeting, and our boss said that the business office had sent a new letter telling us to make sure that the children weren't so crowded, and we sat there and no one said anything. We also knew that our boss was initially very concerned about ensuring that the measures were followed. And then our boss said, "Well, we don't

have to debate the sense of it now..." That's when I noticed how some people looked up, "That's what the boss said?" But even I didn't dare to say, "This letter is just bullshit." I'm sure there would have been no consequences, they won't kick us out, because they're looking for kindergarten teachers. And I thought, next time you'll say something, because if you say something, others will join in. But very few dare to take the first step. But actually, yes, I can do that, that doesn't bother me that much. [...]

The moment when I realized that there was a rift through our family and that my children nearly hated me, I got really angry, not at my children, but at the government and the media, who created all this. So, I can't forgive them for that. It's somehow, maybe not intentional, but at least accepted that society is divided, that families, that circles of friends are divided, and that's actually really, really bad. [...] So what I would like to see is a Mrs. Merkel, a Mr. Söder, a Mr. Spahn stand up and say, "I think we messed it up, this and that was wrong and as a consequence we resign and leave". But not only that, in addition there should be an open discussion on the state and district level and that people on this level also leave." And that perhaps a platform is created where people can say this and that happened to me and that wasn't nice. A kind of working through things. Simply resigning is actually not enough. So many bad things have happened, that's definitely not enough. My case is still no big deal in this respect. I mean, just think of the people who died alone. I have a colleague who wasn't allowed to be with her father when he died. That's so bad for her, she was really knocked out for two weeks. I don't know how you can make up for that. At least you need an open discourse. I don't know, maybe I'm exaggerating, but I was just thinking that there was a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, that people really sit down at a round table and see how they can get back together. Yes, that would be good.

**"Just google Klaus Schwab, Agenda 2030, and project ID2020 and you will know what is waiting for us!"** *The Great Reset*

On German Unity Day 2020 on the market square in Leipzig, the *Bewegung Leipzig*, which is now called *Bewegung Leipzig/Querdenken 341*, has called for another of the regular demonstrations for peace and freedom. Around 150 demonstrators are present; today there is no counter-demon-

stration. When I arrive, a doctor in her 50s talks on the microphone about her childhood in the GDR, where she was always very ill with asthma, allergies, and a constant susceptibility to infections: In the mid-1980s, she began to study Medicine in Leipzig and fled with her family in September 1989, shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall, via Hungary to West Germany, where she still lives today and runs a medical clinic. She then treated her illnesses mainly homeopathically, with very good results. Today she assumes that her health problems resulted from the vaccinations, which were compulsory in the German Democratic Republic. She has treated thousands of patients, 80-90 percent of them children, and the children who have not been vaccinated, who have been breastfed for a long time, who have been fed naturally, and who have received a lot of love, are almost never ill and do not have to be afraid of any viruses or bacteria. When in November 2019 the German Bundestag decided to make measles vaccinations compulsory, she and others took to the streets for months beforehand because measles was suddenly elevated to a dangerous disease that should be avoided at all costs. Many of the older people, she says, who are standing here on the market square probably still went through measles as a completely normal illness and saw, okay, there's a high fever, you're sensitive to light, you lie down in a dark room, and if you don't suppress the fever and the rash comes out well, the whole thing is over after a few days. But suddenly it was suggested to us for months that measles was a very, very bad disease. And that a compulsory vaccination was absolutely necessary, with about 500-700 cases and a maximum of one measles death in Germany, whereby these deaths are mostly to be traced back to preexisting illnesses. She thought it would be impossible to get a mandatory measles vaccination passed in the Bundestag. But this is what happened. Nevertheless, she and the other protesters continued to take on the streets until the end of February 2020; at the beginning of March, the compulsory vaccination came into force. And then the Corona thing started. And she thought, "Oh my God, what's next? Are they really going to succeed this time with what they failed to do with MERS, with SARS, with bird flu, with swine flu, which is to scare us with a deadly pandemic?" And then it got worse day by day and they switched

from the anti-vaccine demonstrations directly to the anti-Corona demonstrations in Hanover. More and more people are realizing that we are dealing with a test pandemic with the help of an unvalidated test by Mr. Drosten that is meaningless. And it is clear that the pandemic will never end if we keep testing, testing, testing. Sometimes she feels the need to escape, but where are you going to go when the whole world has gone crazy. So she continues to stay. She talks about the euphoric experience of the August 1 demonstration in Berlin and her not so euphoric arrest at the August 29 demonstration. This reminds her of what it was like in the German Democratic Republic. When people are defamed and arrested just for speaking their mind and when doctors who provide mask exemption certificates or certificates that people cannot get vaccinated have their homes and medical practices searched, as has happened several times in the meantime, and when they are threatened with professional bans, then this is no longer democracy, then we have to do something about it. Even if the protest movement has achieved nothing so far, it is important to take to the streets as a human family for medical self-determination, a free vaccination decision, and the end of the measures to stop this nightmare, this science fiction movie. She reports on a demonstration in Hanover where they all properly adhered to the hygiene rules and yet were not allowed to demonstrate as planned. And when their leader complained to a police officer, he said that he knew that everyone was following the rules here, but they still weren't allowed to let them march because it was a decision from the very top not to let them demonstrate, it was a political decision, that now has nothing to do with the police on site anymore. And if that's the case, then we're living in a dictatorship. In addition, there's all the denunciation that's coming up again, it's like in Stasi times, people are looking if the neighbors don't have too many people sitting in the garden or the distance isn't kept correctly or the mask isn't worn. And all this will become even worse. Mr. Spahn will not get his hands dirty with the mandatory vaccination here in Germany, because the European vaccination passport has already been in the planning stage in Brussels since 2018. And in this European vaccination passport, there will be 10-12 compulsory vaccinations. They are currently waiting for the Corona vaccine to be

ready. And then we all will be forced to take the vaccinations. Without vaccinations, we won't be able to go to the supermarket or to the swimming pool. We are no longer allowed to travel anyway, everything is even worse than in GDR times, at least you could still travel to Warsaw Pact countries, but now we are not allowed to travel to 160 countries at all. Yesterday she read that, in Berlin, risk areas have been declared even within the city and that you can be quarantined if you leave this area. The Leipzig lawyer Ralf Ludwig always says they will not find any vaccine, they only want to coerce and blackmail us and to extend the measures endlessly. But with the money that has already been spent by the EU, they will definitely produce a vaccine and we will be the laboratory rats and guinea pigs who are forced to try it out; no matter if the vaccine is ineffective or if it only protects for two or three months, they will force it on us! Just like now with the masking obligation, this slave mask is only there to prove how obedient we are and what we are willing to put up with. Because masks don't make sense, we don't save a single life with them, we just breathe in carbon dioxide all the time, which we were told was dangerous just a few months ago. And if we have been cowed and we no longer dare to do anything, then they can easily coerce and blackmail us by preventing us from participating in public life under threat of losing our jobs. And they will get away with it. Most people will let themselves be blackmailed. But she won't. She keeps going. Otherwise, the only thing to do would be going underground. The powers that be won't get her, she ends.

Another speaker who is in his 30s refers to his last speech at the past demonstration, in which he compared the current legislation to the Reichstag Fire Decree of 1933. Meanwhile, the Nazi state seems to be becoming a greater and greater inspiration for our government. Because on August 29, for the second time in history, an attack on the Reichstag was staged to incite against a political movement. Why reinvent the wheel when it worked so well back then, he concludes.

On the sidelines, I join a conversation between an older woman, 70 years old as it turns out, without a mask, and two young people in their early 20s, wearing masks and dressed all in black, which is why I initially assume that they are from the Antifa, who want to argue with the protesters. But as

it turns out, they are visiting Leipzig and just happened to be passing by. The older woman had engaged the two in conversation, she says. The woman says that it doesn't feel right somehow when you look at the statistics, the way the infection and mortality rates are presented, it seems that the government is stirring up a panic that is not reflected in the statistics from the Robert Koch Institute. One of the two young people asks: *Why should a government do that, if it is not necessary, what interest could be behind it?* The woman answers that she thinks it's all about vaccinations, that vaccinations should be sold and that we have to get vaccinated whether we want to or not, that it's going to be like in the GDR.

The one young woman: *But who says that, has any official authority ever said that compulsory vaccination is planned?* A couple without masks, who also turn out to be 70 years old, joins the conversation. The man intervenes: There need not even be compulsory vaccination, it will be like this: if he wants to go to the *Gewandhaus* concert hall, he will have to show his ticket and his vaccination certificate, and if he isn't vaccinated, he won't get in, that's how it is going to work. There is no need for compulsory vaccination to force everyone to be vaccinated.

The young woman asks why they believe that vaccination is not good. Because the vaccine against Corona has not been tested enough, answers the older woman. And the older man says that he doesn't like vaccinations in general, that they are quite dangerous and that he has heard of many cases of vaccine damage. The young woman asks the older woman if she is not afraid of Corona. No, she is not afraid of the virus; it can be bad, yes, if you have preexisting conditions, which she also has, diabetes, but she actually does not think that the situation in general is that bad. If you look at the figures from the Robert Koch Institute, hardly any people die from it, and no one is in the hospitals anymore. That's why there's no need for these measures, which are in addition totally confusing, because people everywhere come up with their own rules and you have to look everywhere first to see exactly how you have to behave.

The young man replies that the low death rate is correct, but the fact that there are hardly any deaths is due to the measures. And that's how democracy works: if there is a social consensus that

the virus is dangerous and the majority considers measures such as vaccinations to be right, then that's the way things are done. The older woman says she doesn't see it that way, she wants to decide about her health herself. The young woman replies: but she believes in science, and if that is scientific knowledge, then so be it.

The 70-year-old intervenes in support of the older woman and also doubts the sense of measures and vaccinations. He says he doesn't wear a mask, it doesn't do him any good, and he also thinks it's useless. He also refers to "the numbers" and the low mortality rate. Besides, everyone has to die someday. The young woman says to the older man that if he doesn't wear a mask, then he's endangering others, because the masks are for the protection of others and that means that her mask is protecting him right now, because she herself is wearing a mask, but he's not protecting her because he's not wearing one.

He replies that when he goes to a store, he wears a mask because he wants something from those guys, not because he thinks it will do any good; the masks will keep out bacteria, but not viruses. And if we were outdoors here at the market place for example and had enough distance, as we do now, we need it even less. Why are they wearing masks outdoors right now, he asks the two young people. The young woman says that she wants to show that they don't belong to the people over there. She points to the demonstration. Ah, just as a political statement, sums up the 70-year-old. The young woman: yes; here outdoors, she doesn't think it's absolutely necessary either. Indoors, however, it is. And if you save only one person from death with the mask, then it already made sense. And what was so disturbing about simply putting on a mask in the supermarket? The 70-year-old asks the two if they actually know what all these measures mean for their lives. He actually couldn't care less, he might only have five years to live, although he does care about his children and grandchildren. The measures would ruin the economy, worldwide, and with it our entire social security system; what did they think their future would look like. The young man: well, everything is slowly being restarted again. The 70-year-old: and yet we are being made to fear all the time that things will change again and that there will possibly be another lockdown. The consequences of

this are unforeseeable; in any case, he does not see a promising future for the young generation under these circumstances.

On November 7, 2020, the third large nationwide-organized demonstration against the Corona measures will take place in Leipzig after the two previous demonstrations in early and late August in Berlin. In Berlin, the information on the number of participants at the first demonstration varied between first 17,000, later 40,000 as estimated by the police and up to 1.3 million by the organizers. At the second demonstration, there was talk of 38,000 participants. In Leipzig, the figures for this Saturday vary between 20,000 and 45,000 participants.

The night before, I cycle to Leipzig's Augustusplatz, where the stage is being set up, and meet a couple in their 50s from Lower Saxony. Demonstrations are not tourism, which is why it was difficult to find a hotel, because they are not allowed to rent rooms to tourists, but he was able to book one through his company. He works as a salesman in the computer industry, she in the youth social sector. So far, they have been to all the demonstrations in Berlin, Hamburg, and Hanover. After she had been at the first big demonstration in Berlin and her boss had heard about it, she had been allowed to walk around for two weeks only masked and with social distance. On the way to Leipzig, they listened to Paul Schreyer's *Chronicle of an Announced Crisis* as an audiobook, and it was frightening to think how long they had been planning what was going on now. The fight against terror had not really worked and should now be replaced by the fight against viruses, so one could perfectly restrict democracy and basic rights and gain control over all people. At the beginning the two were also afraid of Corona and liked Merkel's speech to the nation very much.<sup>34</sup> But then, from April on, it slowly became clear to them that this was obviously intentional. And the so-called conspiracy theorists had already predicted all along everything that has happened until today, so you have to fear that all other predictions will also come true.

In addition to his work, the man is training as a *Heilpraktiker* [an alternative medicine practitioner] and there he has learned what can be done against Corona and other viruses, including how to strengthen his immune system and prevent a severe course of the disease. *But instead, vacci-*



**Fig. 4** Announcement. "Show your face! Rally for The Peaceful Revolution 2.0". November 2020. Leipzig.

*nation is presented to us as the only way out. That is an excellent business model. The goal seems to be that we'll be vaccinated against new viruses every year. But they are both unsure whether vaccination will actually be compulsory. Health Minister Spahn had said that there would be no compulsory vaccination, but he had formulated it in such a way that there would be no compulsory vaccination in THIS pandemic. And according to Paul Schreyer's book, it looks as if we will have to prepare ourselves for new pandemics being continuously declared in the future. It would be enough, as is always said, if 55% of the population were vaccinated, but that would probably not be the case. Because even everyone they know who supports the Corona measures said they don't want to be vaccinated. Presumably, there would rather be an indirect vaccination obligation, i.e., the non-vaccinated would get more and more disadvantages until they would finally get vaccinated, because otherwise they would no longer receive social welfare or would no longer be able to go shopping or ride the bus.*



**Fig. 5** Counter-announcement. “Solidarity instead of *Querdenken*”. November 2020. Leipzig.



**Fig. 6** Counter-announcement II. “Death to fascism—attack *Querdenken* demo”. November 2020. Leipzig.

But what is really incomprehensible for them is how it all works. And that most people just let it happen to them. Her circle of friends has almost completely dissolved and there is a deep split in their family. When she posts something informative on social media, she immediately gets extremely harsh responses. And again and again, they ask themselves why the politicians participate in this, whether they were perhaps being blackmailed, perhaps they were being threatened: we have an even more severe virus up our sleeve here, if you don't go along with everything now, we'll let it out. She assumes that I know the video where Bill and Melinda Gates were sitting on the sofa talking about how the next virus is going to be bad and “really gets attention”, grinning

to themselves. *I mean, if everything is so bad, then you are concerned from the heart. But not like that, with such a grin.* And it was indeed strange that the critic of the measures, Vice President of the Bundestag Thomas Oppermann, at the age of 66, suddenly collapsed dead shortly before a live TV interview the other day. And that the president of the German *Mittelstand* [mid-sized enterprises], Mario Ohoven, drove off the highway in his car on a straight stretch of road and thus died shortly after announcing a lawsuit against the Corona measures and a second lockdown.

On the way back, I pass the market square, where a group of music-playing protesters is facing a group of counter-demonstrators. The medical doctor Perin Dinekli from Offenburg, already familiar to me from YouTube videos, sings in German rhymes:

*Enough of the myth  
that vaccination is sacred  
You think we are stupid  
and believe your ruse  
Tell it to someone else  
that you only care about us  
You only want to earn  
and it is power that guides you!*

*You powerful and rich  
you are never interested in  
300,000 corpses  
by the wrong therapy  
and 6 million children  
who die every year  
and because of your coldness  
starve and freeze to death...*

*You should be ashamed of yourselves,  
pretending that  
you care about the elderly  
go away with your praise  
for tired nurses  
whom you have been harassing  
and have been exploiting for years  
and whom you are suddenly courting...*

*What kind of people are you?  
What shameless betrayal  
What is with VW  
and also with glyphosate?  
You don't give a shit  
if someone dies from it  
as long as the industry  
sufficiently woos you!*

*Do not play the Samaritans  
who, full of compassion,  
want vaccination for all of us  
This is an evil game  
You give all our money  
to the richest people in this world  
who do everything to ensure that it  
deteriorates from year to year!*

*We will protest,  
as long as we like  
We believe in freedom  
and a better world  
Corona brings us together  
in spite of social distancing... and  
we are peacefully becoming more and more  
and do not keep our mouths shut*

The woman next to me says that the counter-demonstrator from the Antifa over there are all so young and have no idea about life at all, and she adds ironically, *Forgive them, for they know not what they do.* She is a physiotherapist, around 50, and has come here all the way from Freiburg in Southern Germany. It is always said that the *Querdenker* are right-wing, but it seems to her that these *children from the Antifa* are actually the new right-wingers, so uneducated, intolerant and aggressive. The whole thing is not rocket science; you don't have to be a virologist to understand that positive PCR tests without consideration of CT value or disease symptoms cannot be equated with "cases" and you don't need to have studied statistics to realize that the portrayal of the pandemic by politicians and in the media is tendentious and alarmist and that the whole thing could be depicted in a completely different and much less dramatic way. Another problem with the measures is that no goal is set at all, and there is no criterion at all for when the whole thing will be over again. And she doesn't understand why everyone is only focusing on Corona now. *We have enough other diseases that we have to deal with. But it's only about the sacred cow Corona. And how long is this going to go on? Covid-19, -20, -21, -22 ... 30,000 and a new vaccination every year? We have to learn to live with this virus, just like with all the other 80 million viruses. Very few people seem to realize that.*

While I move on, a group from Cologne sings a modification of a famous German hit from the 1960s whose lyrics with the original word "love-sickness" they have replaced with "Corona anxi-





**Fig. 7** “711 (=Querdenken) Fuck off!” Leipzig near Augustusplatz. November 7, 2020.

**Fig. 8** Augustusplatz. Leipzig. November 7, 2020.



ety” and “your heart” that already tomorrow will laugh again with “another virus”:

*Corona-Angst, die lohnt sich nicht, my Darling  
Schade um die Tränen in der Nacht,  
Corona-Angst, die lohnt sich nicht, my Darling  
Weil schon morgen ein anderes Virus lacht.*

[Corona anxiety, it's not worth it, my darling  
Pity about the tears in the night,  
Corona anxiety, it's not worth it, my darling  
Because already tomorrow another virus laughs.]

The next day, the sun is shining and the mood among the demonstrators is good, although the conversations do not really offer any reason for this. For example, I get into a conversation with someone around 50 years old from Baden-Wuerttemberg, now living in Berlin, who is handing out flyers for the party *Widerstand 2020* [Resistance 2020], which was founded in the course of the protests. His style of dress would probably be described as alternative. In the meantime, the party has split up and now there is also *Die Basis* [the base]; he thinks both approaches are good, but he stayed with *Widerstand 2020* because he used to watch the YouTube videos of the party found-

**Fig. 9** “What if the covidiot’s are right?”  
Leipzig, November 7, 2020.

er Bodo Schiffmann a lot. He has been studying the financial system for 12 years now. It’s all about money and power, he says, and what we’re experiencing right now is a big robbery. The fact that people still believe that Corona is a terrible natural disaster and do not see what is destroyed by the measures is so blatant, he says. The leftists believed and celebrated that, supposedly for the first time, the economy was no longer given priority over politics. But the people simply have no idea about economics. Since after all, it’s the other way around. Everything had been said: Warren Buffet has said that there is a class war, but it is his class of the rich that is waging war, and they will win. And Bill Gates, too, has already said how he expects things to work out as he wants: first four years of measures, then 10 years of reconstruction! And, of course, the reconstruction would be carried out in accordance with the demands of the rich. We would then no longer be able to afford a



**Fig. 10** “Waken up, start anew!”  
Leipzig, November 7, 2020.





**Fig. 11** The medical doctor and critic of the Corona policy Bodo Schiffmann stops on his bus tour through Germany near Augustplatz, Leipzig, November 7, 2020.

**Fig. 12** "Corona-GDR". Leipzig, November 7, 2020.



welfare state. Buffet recently said in *Managermagazin* that he would like to buy the German *Mittelstand* [the mid-sized enterprises], but unfortunately, it is not for sale. It was already clear that there will definitely be new lockdowns in the winter. After a second lockdown, he says, Buffet won't be far from fulfilling his wish, because after a second lockdown, the *Mittelstand* will be definitely ruined and for sale. And that is certainly the goal of it all. And if many leftists believed that socialism would finally prevail, they are sadly fundamentally deluded, because instead the whole thing will probably lead to an oligarchy.

Later in the afternoon, a large black travel bus of the "Corona Info Tour" stops at the edge of the demonstration next to the Grassi Museum. For weeks now, the ear, nose, and throat specialist Bodo Schiffmann, the entrepreneur Samuel Eckert, and the lawyer Ralf Ludwig, who belong to the celebrities of the protest movement, have been traveling through Germany like itinerant preachers. They stop in several places during the day and inform the people gathered on site and on live stream about what they regard as Corona's harmlessness and the measures' dangerousness. Shortly after they start speaking to the surrounding 200 or so people, the demonstration on the Augustusplatz is disbanded due to general hygiene rules violations. Next to me stands Rhada, she is in her mid-40s, very well-groomed, conservatively dressed, and wearing a white mouth-and-nose protection previously distributed to those present by Bodo Schiffmann, on which the word "Diktatur" [dictatorship] is printed in black. She is a dentist from Hamburg and has taken part in demonstrations against the measures regularly since Easter. Her relationship was ruined by their different attitudes toward the measures and toward demonstrating together with right-wingers. She came to Leipzig with a few relatives and friends, most of them physicians, and wanted to meet a group of doctors who had written an open letter demanding an immediate end to all Corona measures and had arranged to meet here.

A passing older woman without a mask speaks to Rhada, slightly provocatively, as it seems to me, and asks why she is standing here with such a mask on which dictatorship is written. Rhada takes off her mask and speaks with a surprisingly kind and calm matter-of-factness and as if she

had only been waiting for this question: *We are standing here to protest against the dictatorship that is being established. It is planned to abolish all property of the people by 2030. To do this, everything we have at the moment must first be destroyed. Only the companies with an annual turnover of more than five billion will survive. Cash will be abolished and there will be a basic income for everyone and you will only be able to borrow everything from the big companies. But you will have access to this only if you behave socially, politically, and hygienically correctly. All this will be controlled by digital surveillance systems, with biometric recognition and probably also microchips or other markers inserted into the body for identification; privacy will then of course no longer exist, because that means total surveillance, control, and steering of the populations. In roughly the same way as it already works in many parts of China. But then it will be worldwide. This is not a conspiracy theory, it has all been announced. Just google Klaus Schwab, Agenda 2030, and Project ID2020, then you know what is waiting for us! Or simply Great Reset!*

The older woman tries to remember, asks again, but then follows her companion, who visibly impatiently demands that she moves on. Rhada gets laughing applause from the bystanders. *Wow, I haven't seen the whole thing in this clarity before, that's really COVID-1984, you can get really scared, says a woman, that reminds me on a banner I saw the other day, "We urgently need new conspiracy theories, our old ones have all come true!"* Rhada says with a smile, *Yes, and we are sold this as a green kingdom of happiness. I have stopped trying to convince people. Either they want to know, then they can read about it themselves, or they just don't do it. Everything else is pointless.*

**"Now we have had 30 years of the new system, and now it reminds me of the old system."**

*Manja*

Manja is in her late forties, lives in Leipzig with her teenage daughter, and works as a physiotherapist. Our interview takes place two days after the nationwide-organized Leipzig demonstration. She says she is still very impressed by the large crowd of demonstrators and that it was really very diverse. It was interesting to talk to the people, who had come from all over the country and included everything: from people with AfD

jackets to people who looked as if they could also have been at the Antifa counter-demonstration. And all classes and all generations. It was quite different at the end of August in Berlin, the only demonstration she had been to before. There, she had the feeling that it was mainly the old West German hippie generation that was on the road. *When I came back, I said I didn't see anyone with only two teeth, I didn't see much of the common people walking around, I saw a few poor and simple people, but the main picture was of people with a decent level of education.* In Leipzig, all generations were present, whereas in Berlin it was mainly people over 40, she thinks. And the police were much nicer in Leipzig than in Berlin. She only liked the speeches better in Berlin, which were really good, whereas in Leipzig they had a bit too much of an entertainment character.

When the police disbanded the demonstration in Leipzig after a few hours because of violations of the hygiene regulations, she had stood with a group from Dresden. *And these Osis [colloquial term for people from the former East Germany] then said: "I don't believe it, now they're all going home! If we had asked in '89 what we were allowed to do, nothing would ever have happened! Since when do we always have to get permits and comply with everything everywhere! What's wrong with them?" They were stunned.* Since she felt frozen and her daughter was waiting alone at home, she left before the demonstrators broke through the police line in the evening and illegally marched across the Leipziger Ring [the roadway that encircles Leipzig's city center] as they had done in 1989.

*The disillusioning scenario in the media was to be expected, but it's always a new shock. Just images of fire, smoke everywhere, burning barricades.* And then Radio Leipzig had the cheek to suggest that the massive riots in the Connewitz district on the evening of the demonstration, where the police used water cannons and so on, had something to do with the demonstration against the measures on the Augustusplatz. Some people say that the media are controlled and that journalists are not allowed to report differently, but she had just treated a patient who had worked for the media for a long time, who said that there were no orders, but that everyone still reported in this way. *He said that if someone would have the courage they could report differently. But that's not happening. And that is actual-*

*ly frightening.* She assumes that this is the case, on the one hand, because most people want to think like the majority and they notice what the majority wants to hear, and, on the other hand, because people do not dare to stand up because they are afraid.

She experiences the same thing with her daughter. Due to the mask obligation in school, she no longer drinks or eats anything, because to do so you have to take off the mask. You are allowed to go outside and take a breath, but who would actually do that, because that would be a sign of weakness. If you go by occupational health and safety guidelines, then it should actually be obligatory to remove the mask regularly, but that is not taken into account at all in the current regulations. Her daughter is doing very badly due to the lack of oxygen, but she does not want a mask exemption because she fears being bullied at school. *Young people today are growing up with these shitstorms, and they know that if I stick my head out somewhere, I'm screwed, and I'm screwed big time. It is completely different for them from what it was for us. Now everything is verifiable and someone has found something and can forward it. Back then, someone told us something, but whether it was true, whether he was really at the demonstration, that was all questionable. And today you can strip people naked in no time, among friends, in school. They know that, and maybe that's why they're so scared and don't dare to do anything. I noticed years ago that they were all so uniform. The girls all had almost the same length of hair, and their clothes were all very similar.* And with regard to the Corona demonstrations, it was probably similar. *Society is so divided on this issue, and since modern youth today tends to be pushed to the left, definitely at least those in the city, the Antifa is not far away. And if Antifa demonstrate against these people, then these people must be bad.* And then, of course, they held back. Her daughter, for example, would certainly not tell anyone that her mother had been at the demonstration. *That's how bad it is today. [...]*

*And for us, that's like our childhood in the GDR. Because we knew exactly that there are things that we are not allowed to say. And our teachers, too, knew that they had to teach us things that were not true or that were not their opinion. And many, not all, made us question what they were saying. In a very clever way. By standing up and saying: Well, we can discuss that. You can see it this way and that way.*

*What would the point of view from the other side look like? [...] We knew that if we had classmates whose parents were completely red, or completely loyal Party comrades, or even in the Stasi, we knew exactly that you simply don't say certain things in their presence. But that was a minority. In retrospect, of course, it turned out that many more had such parents. But it didn't matter for their personal experience as children, because they didn't know that at the time. That made it more relaxed for them than it is today. We knew whom we were dealing with, the enemy wasn't lurking in no-man's-land. But at the moment, that's the way it is.*

She knows current owners of mid-sized enterprises who would have liked to go to the big demonstration in Leipzig a few days ago, but didn't dare for fear of suddenly being shown on TV or in the newspaper and suffering disadvantages. However, such fear of expressing oneself politically existed even before Corona. She has heard reports from patients and friends who have made critical comments and attracted political attention. For example, in one case in a small village when someone said that he did not want to have more asylum seekers than inhabitants in the village and that the people coming here were not families and that there were attacks and acts of violence: *People said, they don't want that, and shortly thereafter the tax office and the tax audit came after them. Not verifiable, but strange. I think we East Germans are simply shaped by our experience and know that such things are possible and that there are people who know more about us than we think. We knew as children that we were being wiretapped; we grew up with that. I meet a lot of people who don't think such things are possible because they think they are so unimportant on a global scale, so no one cares. But I know that we all have cell phones, I know that it's possible to use cameras and microphones remotely, and I think that someone knows what I'm saying to patients. And if they do, that's the way it is. I do that consciously. I'll notice if they're going to do something with that knowledge and when I'm at the point where I'm dangerous, I'll find out in time, but I'm consciously exposing myself to that. Therefore, to refrain from everything now would be the last thing I'd do.*

She was born and raised with her two siblings in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. Her mother worked as a physician in a managerial position. *That was actually almost non-existent without party affili-*

*ation. But she got the job without it and received a lot of humiliation and teasing for it, but she made up for it professionally in such a way that no one could mess with her. It was the same with her father: He had worked in an executive position in a chemical plant, also without party affiliation. My report cards always said that my attitude toward the socialist state left something to be desired. It was written every year. One little statement was enough. But as a child, I didn't care. Even though no one in her family had seen their own Stasi file, it came out after the fall of the Wall that a good friend of her brother had worked for the Stasi. And he had been in and out of their house from an early age. That was quite a shock, and her mother had always talked openly with him about her political views. But she herself did not condemn him. That's what she learned from her mother: to let others be who they are and to ask for their reasons. People were put under a lot of pressure, and if they didn't have a strong character, they just gave in. That would work the same way again today.*

At that time, one could not have imagined how much the Stasi knew. Even during the protests in 1989, they were informed about everything. If people had known that, most of them would probably have stayed at home. The fact that she had crossed out her ballot in May 89, the last elections in the GDR, was also certainly recognized. *That was the revolution par excellence.* What works today with technology, worked back then with people; apartments were bugged, neighbors interviewed, and everything written down. *They knew everything and knew a weak point in everyone, with which they could blackmail you if necessary. And people did it for a good purpose, for the common good; they thought it was all right. That's how they were won over. Just like now.*

She had not wanted to continue school after 10th grade, but had started working in agriculture. Then she changed her mind and wanted to become a health and social care worker. To be able to do this, she first had to do a one-year internship in a children's hospital. That was in the time shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall. She was 17 years old at the time when the first demonstrations against the government took place. *When I was at the Corona demonstration in Berlin, I was immediately reminded of the demonstrations of that time. I haven't had that for years—decades, I can say*

now. And how it must feel to those for whom this scenery last Saturday in Leipzig, with such crowds of people, is familiar from back then?

Today, of course, many things are different. She still remembers exactly how it was back then: *What it's like to stand there, look into the eyes of the police, and know that they're going to hurt us. And they have no scruples. And there's no one to protect us, not even after the fact.* The memory of this propensity to violence came up again. Of course, that was quite different last weekend in Leipzig. *They were as gentle as a lamb.* In Berlin, however, she felt differently. She had seen how the police had already blocked the Brandenburg Gate in the morning and how they had lined up there, with what faces, it had been terrible. In her opinion, they were very much out to provoke. But the situation today is nevertheless quite different from what it was back then, because people's lives are not in danger at demonstrations today. *For the most part, I know what I'm getting into at such a demonstration. And if I don't behave in an extremely conspicuous manner and transgress boundaries, nothing will actually happen to me there, unless I get caught between fronts that are no longer manageable when something escalates. But nothing will happen to me there on the part of the state if I behave in a normal manner. And that was different in GDR times. But the crowds and the mood of change, that we can create something good, that's similar today. At the demo, I don't necessarily feel threatened by the police, but what I want to avert is much worse than what existed in GDR times. Because from my point of view, what we are threatened with is extremely inhumane. And that didn't exist back then.*

Turmoil had started after the last elections in the German Democratic Republic. She remembers only with difficulty the exact dates, she still remembers how they had learned at some point what had happened in China on Tiananmen Square. *We didn't learn that from the media, and it crystallized over time that you only hear and make such statements in the church. The fact that they dare to say things and call for prayers made it a central place where it was allowed to talk about things, they had an open door, even though I wasn't raised in the Church like most people there. Then, through my former classmates, I got involved in one of the church's student groups. [...] At that time, we had the shelter of the church; today there is no shelter.*

In September 1989, the situation became worse, there were the first demonstrations, to which they went with candles, and there were miserable attempts to massively suppress the turmoil. People were taken away from demonstrations in trucks, you did not know when they would ever see them again, and you heard terrible things about what was done to them. *From today's perspective, I am amazed. Because it was so brave. Because we didn't know if we would win. It's like today. The feeling that it's actually hopeless. It's just a drop in the bucket and they'll do what they want anyway. But at least we show them that we know. And for us it was clear at that time that things would not work out well. Nevertheless, it could not be tolerated any other way. [...]*

Most of her friends came to the 1989 demonstrations later, when there were already so many people at them. *It's the same now: who was in Berlin, and how many might be there in the future. And now people are also saying, "Oh, if you go, then I'll go, too."* And then, at some point, completely different people came to the 1989 demonstrations. *Then it was no longer these people who had put some thought into it and had ideas and actually wanted a different country. We wanted certain values to be realized; the goals that the GDR conveyed all the time with their nevertheless honorable communism. To this day, I still think that the values they taught us are not wrong. But they didn't live according to the values they claimed to espouse. They had completely different opportunities, I mean, the government and the high circles, all the people who belonged there, all those who had a function in the Party, they could travel as they liked and get everything, were supplied differently, got other goods, and so on. They always got the better things, the people got the worse. That was pretty awful.*

At some point, the direction of the protest movement changed. *I remember very well that in all these choruses there was always only the call: "We are THE people!" And all of a sudden, it was: "We are ONE people!" I remember exactly where I was standing, because that was the moment when I thought, "Eh? What have I just heard?" And from then on, it only went in a certain direction. For me, there were so many question marks. I also noticed that the people who had previously forbidden me to go to the demonstrations or who asked, "Are you crazy, what do you want there?"; or who made sure that my work schedule didn't allow me to go there on Mondays, were*

*exactly the people who suddenly showed up at the demonstrations! That's when I lost faith. Then I thought, I have no reason to be here anymore, because they want something completely different than I do. Whereas before I had the feeling that people were thinking things the same as I was. It's going in the same direction. That was the experience of the plebs, as my mother would say. I never went back; by November, I wasn't part of that movement anymore. [...] The fall of the Wall didn't interest me at all anymore. I don't even remember looking at any of the pictures on television; I think I actually never even looked at them. That was no longer anything of interest for me. It turned out differently than expected. People were silenced. It was actually the idea to create something good.*

*And I always tell the people who are so disappointed today: Can't you remember? That's exactly what we learned about capitalism! Have you forgotten that? We all learned that in school! We actually know exactly how it works. And we always knew that this wasn't right. And we have never questioned that. What else they tell us and how they spin history is another thing, but we have always known that capitalism works that way! And so how can we be surprised now! And back then I really felt that the whole thing was going in a completely different direction and that there was as a bud with a really good core that had completely vanished. And then came this mass hysteria. It was really horrible. I lost faith, because people were only concerned with bananas and West German money. And I thought, are these your fellow human beings? That's not normal. Where do they want to go? What do they want? What is that supposed to be?*

*She then once went to visit a friend in the West who had left the East shortly before the fall of the Wall. And she enthusiastically showed me the supermarkets and so on and I just thought, why do I need 20 kinds of yogurt; that totally knocked me out. I really stood there as if they had taken me out of the jungle and I asked myself, what's all this about? I still don't understand it today. But at that time, I felt that very strongly and could not understand that they want all this.*

*In 1990, she went to the West once again for an internship. By train. I got into conversation with quite a few people. They always told us that you must have known about it, and you poor people, everything is really bad, and you couldn't do anything, and we can do everything here, and if you want, you can organize yourself here, you can found an animal protec-*

*tion association, an environmental protection association, and so on. And then I always looked at them and said, "What are you dreaming of? You can't really believe that you can change only one thing." And then I realized that they believe what they read in the newspaper. We, in contrast, grew up knowing that the newspaper wasn't telling the truth. I was completely annoyed. And then I had smart people in front of me who were studying some kind of thing and thought the world was open to them, and they really believed what was written there in the newspapers.*

*And they also believed everything they were told about the GDR. Then I thought: You are totally uncritical! In retrospect, I understand that. I mean, you grow up one way or another. It's weird to feel that. You're the same age and then you realize that they're totally convinced that they have absolute freedom. And I've experienced from the very beginning that that's not true. Anyone who tries to say that the highway won't be built here will be stalled until they have no more money, and then in the end it will be built anyway. Whether that's in 10 years or in 15, it doesn't matter for shit. And it doesn't matter if they find a bat or a frog. They have more staying power. The fact that the West Germans all believe in their freedom surprised me. That was such an aha experience.*

*But even among people who grew up in the GDR, many people have an uncritical attitude towards Corona, especially among the older generation. For the West, I can't say anything about the differences in the generations. I only know that our people, a certain generation, who grew up differently, who probably had this idea of reconstruction after the war, who went to school in the '50s and '60s, cannot imagine that a government does not want the best for a people. Especially not now that we are in the West. The others have only cheated us and enriched themselves. But not them. And then they had witnessed people like Chancellor Schmidt and Chancellor Kohl, and they always thought that they were all trusted people, that everything had to be completely reliable. And I just talked to a patient today who has a daughter who is the same age as me and she said, "My daughter says exactly the same thing as you, but somehow I still cannot believe that it's really that way. I can't imagine that and I don't know why." I say, "I can imagine why. Even back then you found it difficult to understand that the government is not telling the truth." I didn't notice it that time, but years later I read that it was almost only young people and young adults at the*



initial demonstrations, so there were no people who were 35, 40, 50 years old. [...] I don't think there were many who joined the Party but didn't believe in the socialist project. [...] That's probably why there was this big personal breakdown in '89 for many people, which I can't confirm for my family, because they weren't disappointed by anything at all, because they knew exactly that it was crap. They were more disappointed by what came afterwards.

Because then came this hype that now, finally, we got what we wanted. They all took to the streets because they wanted West German money, and then all of a sudden they were all unemployed. Within a very short time. That was the time when I was already working as a physiotherapist and had a lot of contact to people. And many of them took early retirement in their early 50s. What did they do with their lives then? Now they could all travel, but on what money? I can still hear myself saying, in my early 20s, "That's what you guys all have learned in school, that's capitalism! That's where we are now, that's where you wanted to go, that's why everyone was on the market square or everyone was on the ring [the street that encircles Leipzig's city center] and we demonstrated for it. I don't understand that you are so surprised now." And they said, yes, but they didn't imagine that it would really be like that.

We had super-functioning companies here, which they all crushed in a very nasty way, via the Treuhand [the "Trust" that was instituted to privatize East German state companies]—there are enough stories about that. And brands that were world leaders were just unerringly loused up. And this system of maximum supply in the GDR, this securing of basic needs and this goal that everyone has a role in society and wants to have it. I can remember, for example, that the farmers I worked with were alcoholics who already had a "decent level" at 7 in the morning, and that was the only way they could operate their vehicles, but they all worked. Today I have the alcoholics on the street and they never work. They can't work anymore, they have no job and no social integration. Things have developed enormously in the other direction. In the GDR, the structure was much better. It was all about optimizing everything, work routes as short as possible, school routes as short as possible, child care, everything connected. There was nothing to complain about. No one had to pay. Large families got free meals at school. No one questioned that at all. [...]

Now we have 30 years of the new system, and now it reminds me of the old system. Above all, this obedience of the people, this: The main thing is that I have my nest feathered, I still have my work, so everything is fine, and the whole thing will pass somehow. So, just don't look past your nose. And not wanting to admit that something bad is happening. And all this against the background of the history of this Germany, where we have simply already experienced these things, or rather I have only read about it and heard about it from my parents. As a child, you always asked yourself, "Who does something like that?" [...] A patient has just told me that she was massively insulted by another woman, how could she go to this demonstration against the measures, it was someone from her circle of friends, how selfish that is and that you infect others. And then someone else told me today that a friend who lives in the West and saw pictures from Leipzig called him and said, "For God's sake, what's going on here? Are they all out of their minds?" Nobody asks why you're doing this, but judges you right away. And that this friend doesn't say, "Well, actually I know you, if you do something like that, you must have a reason, I'd like to hear it." And that was the same in the GDR: in certain situations, just not questioning anything and just doing what was expected and not to wanting to hear that anything was wrong.

But many things are wrong: What is not okay right now is that facts are being twisted, that we are only getting a small spectrum of information, and not what we should actually have available. And, from my point of view, fear is being deliberately stirred up, and the pretended interest in the health of the people has not yet shown itself anywhere else. To me, it's bad when a state fails to ban glyphosate, and now thinks we need to use a death rate lower than one percent as a reason to take such measures. Everywhere we know things contain harmful substances: that could be easily controlled, but is not controlled. Drugs that are clearly helpful are taken off the market, and those that clearly cause side effects are put on the market. This is evident time and time again. Medicine that can't make money should not be produced and should not be put on the market. The whole campaign against homeopathy and so on, it has been going on for a long time, that's not new to me.

I have been critical of the state from the very beginning; I have never been its friend. That's why I'm not shocked by the situation now. Only perhaps about the extent of what's happening. I have always calmed

down those who are now so very shocked: if we are honest, we have always known it on a small scale and now we have simply looked one step further behind the scenes. And now we are shocked, but we should have known that. I mean it was well camouflaged under the big democracy thing. We are not familiar with that, since we didn't have the possibility to vote at all. Well, we did vote, but there was only one party to vote for. Your cross belongs in the only existing box, and that's it. And then suddenly you have a choice and feel totally liberated, and at some point, you have to realize that we actually don't have a choice. They manipulate even that. And many people don't want to experience that disappointment. They have the feeling that everything is better than it was back then, and that's why it must be good. But if the general idea behind it is not good, then it can't be good in detail either. If I actually want to get rich at the expense of other people, nothing good can ever come out of it, because then I don't want the same for everyone. Then I want what capitalism wants. Then I want power, then I want territory, then I want capital, and that cannot be reconciled with anything else. [...]

She has the feeling that a loss of values is affecting society: You only have to look out the window to see what that means: that everyone only cares about themselves and you no longer have to adhere to a certain moral code, that you can always do what you want. You are told: "It's all about you and you are not accountable to anyone!" That has certainly happened with the removal of compulsion, that there is such a feeling of freedom: I can move how I want, I can dress how I want, I can just do what I want. I think that has something to do with that attitude. Limitations disappear and then it becomes unstable. The same happens in education: many say it doesn't work that way anymore, the children need rules nonetheless, otherwise it won't work with the children, otherwise they'll become bullies and just stand on their heads and they won't get healthy either. But nobody has shown us how it works without enforced respect. And that's on the small scale like it's in the whole society. [...] We also see that in terms of what's going on with the climate all over the world. And also with some wars, where they tell us that they are taking place somewhere and that they have to send weapons and how in the end everything is intertwined and interwoven and everybody earns something from it and nobody has any interest at all that something runs peacefully. That's really unbearable. [...]

Last year, when we had no inkling of this situation in 2020—well, some people already had a kind of premonition—I kept saying that I had the feeling that we were heading for an abyss at breakneck speed. We're all sitting in a car and we know the abyss is coming and the crash is coming and we can't imagine at all what it's going to be like, but it has to come. There's no other way. And we had not imagined that a few months later it would have a name, this thing. In that respect, I'm a bit relieved, actually. That it's now the way it is. Because this state from before, with this feeling that everything is going down the drain, that's also unbearable. Now I have at least a spark of hope. [...]

I can remember that the first critical thinking about Corona happened in an exchange with my mother, who is 84, when there was the first Corona case at Lake Starnberg in Germany, and the reactions that followed. My mother, as a GDR doctor, said, "We would have reacted differently, we would have immediately done epidemic control. There is something very dangerous, there are tough measures, they were all well-rehearsed, and everybody knows how it has to work. And that would have worked. It can be prevented." I was on winter vacation myself and, because I was feeling very bad that day, I had time to watch TV and saw what was going on in China, because I don't usually watch TV. It really frightened me, as all those who have a bit of medical knowledge, because they know what can happen with viruses. And then the first case appeared in Italy, when we just happened to be in Italy and I knew exactly: now it's going to start there. And I had the feeling that now something big is coming, and we are at the mercy of it and we can't change it anymore. But the measures were not appropriate. I mean, the measures in Italy were: the areas were sealed off and so on—for me completely understandable and logical. But not at all in Germany. They let Carnival take place, which I absolutely didn't understand at that moment. Well, then I thought, that's capitalism: I still have to earn a little money somehow, fuck how it will turn out afterwards, we'll do that now. At that time, I still believed that it was just money interests, but at some point I thought, "Wait a minute, I mean if I really want to protect the population and know how serious the situation is, then I can't afford another blunder now." And then still nothing happened. There were still no restrictions. That ran until the middle of March, that was four weeks! And then they pat themselves on their

backs and say that we acted much faster than the Italians and that's why our figures are not so high. But in Italy, they closed down immediately, which we didn't do. And that's when I started thinking something was wrong here. [...]

What also made me skeptical were the pictures from China, where people suddenly fall down one after the other, on the street, in the bank, and who knows where. That impressed me, too. But I never saw that again. I waited for such cases in Italy, I didn't see them. I waited for them in Germany, and I didn't see them. And then I asked myself, what did they show us? And who wanted that? The Chinese? Or the others who report on it? They scared people with these pictures, since they didn't have any pictures of intensive care units yet, that was just starting. That was also strange. [...] And then there was simply a lack of sick people. I heard reports from nurses who worked here in Leipzig in the hospital, and they said that the sick people who were flown in from Italy at that time, because here in Saxony we hardly had any cases, were all seriously ill, they die of any virus, it can also be a norovirus or any other virus that is currently circulating. [...]

In addition, the question of what other reasons there may have been. Then I was interested in the research on why this might have become so bad in Italy. This thing that there were these big vaccination campaigns and the people had all been vaccinated against meningococcus shortly before and what that does to an immune system, how stressful that is and so on. Interesting questions where you say to yourself, I don't have an answer now, but I'll think about it. [...]

Her brother lives in the western part of Germany. They were more affected and had already had more contacts and knew that the virus definitely exists. There are people who have cold symptoms, do not feel well, and have been diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2. That's it. But there were no seriously ill people there, either. And then I thought, okay, if it develops like this now, then we can be lucky that now more and more sunlight comes through, this wintertime passes, and people start exercising more again.

Nevertheless, the whole thing did not stop and she started to look into PCR tests. It was surprising that only absolute infection figures were presented. And then the question as to what percentage of the tests carried out these incidence figures are, it took ages before this was ever mentioned. She then looked up the data and calculated it herself and

concluded that only 0.6 or 0.7 percent of the tests were positive. And then they ramp up the testing to 1.5 million and now we ramp it back down to show that the lockdown is working. It's so simple that you don't have to be very smart. So, I'm assuming that it's being done on purpose.

She then talked to her mother, who insisted that the virus was dangerous anyway. Funnily enough, as an 84-year-old smoker, she did not see herself as a risk group. She doesn't want to hug me to protect ME. She always has ideas about how to do better with virus control, but doesn't question the whole thing, even though she is very interested in politics. But she didn't want to believe it was that bad. In the meantime, I think she is ready. The last week and all the political events must have convinced her, now she has woken up. Now she sees that logical steps that should be taken by the government are not being taken. And I think maybe what tipped the scales was my report from Berlin at the end of August. She didn't know I was going there, I deliberately didn't want to tell her. [...] Afterwards, she sent her mother pictures and her mother let her tell how it was, read all kinds of reports from different sides and probably realized that something wasn't true here at all. Especially the thing with the so-called storm on the Reichstag. The demo in front of the Reichstag had nothing to do with the *Querdenken* demo in front of the Siegessäule. On the way back to the train station, she had passed that demonstration, and a lot of police had cordoned off the area of that demonstration, but not the Reichstag. And then a woman with dreadlocks promoted the event and said that they would need them later in front of the Reichstag. That seemed strange to her: *That wasn't authentic. But that was not the woman who later gave that speech about Trump being in town and saving us and we had to take our house back: that was completely bizarre!* [...] *That demonstration was obviously organized by some Reichsbürger, so I wonder who authorized it. It was like putting the ball in front of the goal and now only someone needs to accidentally fall on it and it's a goal. And that's how it happened.*

She had been looking for a way to protest against the Corona policy for a long time. *In the beginning, I said to my friend, who is a doctor, "You have to speak up now, you're the only ones anyone listens to. If you were to say now, "That is not true!" Or, "The measures are dangerous to health!" If you were heard, then perhaps a question mark would be*

*put behind the whole thing. Where are all the doctors? This just can't be!" And then she said that it was very difficult, because everyone was so hesitant and didn't trust themselves. Because the government and the experts who had been consulted had pushed ahead so quickly. They were so unsettled, since they saw things differently, and they couldn't even find each other. And then I often said, "We have to do something about this. Actually, effective protest can only come from doctors and lawyers. Who else is supposed to have any power here, except the whole people, but the people obviously doesn't recognize the problem."*

For a long time she did not notice the small demonstrations against the Corona politics in Leipzig. She forgot how she heard about the first nationwide-organized demonstration on August 1 in Berlin. She had actually wanted to participate, but had been on vacation. *And the question was: Do I now travel from the Baltic Sea to Berlin and then leave my child there alone, without knowing what will happen at the demo? That's what I blamed them for back then, that they didn't go to the demos in '89, but when I later had a little child myself, I also thought, I'm not going anywhere now! And apparently, that's still the case if you have teenage kids.* But then she went to the second nationwide-organized demonstration on August 28—even if she was very skeptically, because she had heard that the *Querdenken* movement had been founded in the West. *And I've never had the feeling that West Germans are very critical of the system as such. That is much more common in the East. One of my patients, who also comes from the West, was very upset because she had been feverishly anxious day and night that Trump shouldn't win these elections, and then I asked her what she thought was so bad about that. She said that Trump can simply do everything he wants, and that the people are not even asked, and then I asked, "Is it different here?" And she said, "Yes, because we can elect the parliament."* Manja had noticed that this West German woman had a completely different feeling about the state than she did. And then she told her patient about how she had once observed an election in our current system and then came across the fact that there was a column for losses, through which votes could simply be manipulated, and that she did not believe in elections. The patient had then asked what she would change. *That was a good question. I said I would take the money out. No politician should earn so much money that personal*

*interest can become more important than the interest of the people. [...] The argument she then brought up, that politicians had to earn so much because otherwise they would go into private business or so that they wouldn't become corrupt, was still based on the acceptance of this money system. If it were generally not necessary to buy things, then corrupt politicians would not be a problem either.*

*The money must also be taken out of the health sector. I have physicians as patients here who are pensioners and they are appalled that doctors today just do a job and no longer look at whether it is still in the best interest of the patient. If the ward has to perform so and so many hip operations per year to get its money for the next year, then five more hip operations will be performed, regardless of whether the patients need them or not. And our doctors wouldn't have done that because they were raised differently. [...] Maybe that's the difference, because my West German patient grew up in the money system and doesn't question it, just as we from the East took it for granted that we had social security, because we didn't know it any other way. [...]*

*We just see that earning money has no upper limits. They don't just want to have a fancy limousine and a great house, in addition, there have to be vacation homes here and there and another yacht and another investment and I don't know what else they have to have, it just doesn't stop. That is the system. And that's why, when I saw this West German *Querdenker* movement, I actually thought it couldn't be a good thing. They probably won't criticize the important issues. I was totally astonished that this was exactly what was being addressed at that Berlin demonstration, that the only solution to the world conflict lies in every detail in exactly this point: in the capitalist system that functions in such a way that it ruins so many people and things in order to enrich so few individuals. [...] Our prosperity is the poverty of the other. That is the insight that completes the circle. And I was amazed to hear this at the demo. I thought it was much more narrow-minded. I was afraid that they would just stick to the masks issue. In addition, she was surprised at the number of West Germans at the demonstration; she had actually expected to find mainly East Germans there. *That was really a big thing. And to experience that there were so many nationalities; that really impressed me. I saw Balkan people there, Czechs, Russians, Turks. And all of them with this enthusiasm. [...] We are all together here, [...] we are all one, we are tolerant, we accept every culture.**

*That's how we grew up as children, for us these were the images of peace.*

Apart from demonstrations, she sees her role in showing her critical patients that they are not alone. *I can't do anything else right now. It can't be a coincidence that they come to me and talk openly about that issue. Even if, of course, this is a selective place. So, what anesthesiologists report about seriously ill Corona patients is obvious, because they don't see anyone else. And I also have a certain selection of patients who take more responsibility for themselves than others, who look exactly at what is good for them, or what they invest their little money in, what really gets them ahead. That goes through all generations, well, the younger ones maybe not so much, they are not quite that critical. She guesses 80 percent of her patients are critical of the official narrative. Maybe not in all details, maybe they don't want to admit the final consequences, but basically, they ask themselves a lot of questions, are very attentive, do a lot of research, evaluate the media and come up with ideas themselves. But most still assumed that these were simply mistakes, and that the government was just misadvised. Many still don't want to believe the big idea that all this is happening deliberately. Thankfully, because otherwise that would make them all sick. Because that's hardly bearable. Most would already recognize the problem with the orders: Now people are wearing masks, even though many scientists say that this is unhealthy. Common sense already tells me that it's unhealthy, and I don't have to be a trained physician to see that. We all know that we need oxygen and we all know that it's not good to breathe your own air, especially for such a long time. And most people already knew in March that all the disinfectant stuff on the shopping carts and the hands was going to backfire, because within two weeks they had cracked skin, and I said, "Great, that's the entry point for our virus, isn't it? What's going to happen now?" Now we all have inflamed skin and the skin is tearing and bursting everywhere, which is actually the worst thing that can happen to us. That is no longer healthy. Just like restricting people in their exercise and everything that's good for their health, actually everybody knows that. And that's what they've taught us for decades, what you have to do to stay healthy, and that's not mentioned at all anymore. That's being massively cut. That can only be on purpose. Otherwise, it would be discussed differently. Otherwise, people would ask, what else can be done? [...] We can get infected at any*

*time and our immune system depends on so many factors and also so many mental factors, so we get sick especially in fear, especially under stress, that's obvious. Anybody who just wants to understand that can experience it in their own body. And it's crazy that this isn't being addressed.*

*She thinks the measures served to create fear. To make us compliant for what they have in mind: to restructure, perhaps to kill several problems with one stone in the end. Obviously, this is not about a single government, because things are similar in many countries. No matter where we look. So, it must be something bigger behind it, whatever. But that it has to do with money... what else? So, just power alone doesn't work. It doesn't work without money. And I think that's where the main interest lies. We destroy everything, then we can buy up everything, companies for example. And we can make whole countries dependent with loans and so on. So, everything that is possible in this financial economy, which I never wanted to know before because I never thought much about money. I have friends who watch the financial system very closely and come up with the scariest scenarios, and then I always say, "Please leave me alone, I don't want to bear that right now!" Because in the end I don't care. I lived with nothing before and I can live with nothing again. I don't have much to lose. I don't have a house with a loan that I have to pay off and three big cars in front of the door.*

*Of course, I have something to lose, but not these material values, I can live well without them. But if somehow something like that happens, then we lose more than that. Then we lose freedom. And in some form self-determination. And possibly health. In this regard, she has heard the worst scenarios. Then it gets really creepy, you don't want to imagine that. But the interests can only lead in this direction. There is no other conclusion. And all my patients are like: But how is this supposed to make sense? And then I say, we can twist and turn the puzzle now; it only fits in one direction. And in my opinion, only in this one. I haven't found another one yet. And I don't have to read up on it or anything. I'm just a type of person who tries to figure it out on my own, because everything else can always be wrong, I don't trust anyone, not even books, while others always read this and that. First of all, I don't have the time for that, when I'm exercising I can't read up on things. And second, my feeling tells me that this is the way things are. [...]*



**Fig. 13** “1933: ‘Decree for the Protection of the People and the State’ - 2020: ‘Act on the Protection of the Population’”. Berlin. November 18, 2020.

**Fig. 14** “Guilty”. Berlin. November 18, 2020.





Fig. 15 No. Heart. Consciousness. AfD. Berlin. November 18, 2020.

Fig. 16 Water cannons against the protesters. Berlin. November 18, 2020.



*For me, it's just interesting how things develop, and whether they manage to get the people to solve the matter among themselves, so to speak, through those in the population who are now ranting so vehemently about the demonstrators, or whether even more people will wake up and rise up. This morning on Radio Leipzig, the moderator in the news said about the demonstrators, "What an irresponsible bunch of weirdoes this is, why can't you just ban these demonstrations?" He was stunned. And the other moderator, the only female, there were three of them, said very carefully, "Well, listen, that's not possible, we have a democracy and everyone has to be able to speak their mind!" But that was immediately totally destroyed by the two men. "Germany, stay at home!" I think the problem is that there are so many people out there who still think we'll just hold our breath until it's over again.*

**"Did you say he is a virologist?"** *The Great Confusion*

On November 18, 2020, the German Bundestag passes the third version of the Infection Protection Act, which many in the protest movement compare to the Enabling Act of 1933 that gave the Nazis unlimited power. As one of the more than 10,000 demonstrators in front of the Brandenburg Gate on that day tells me: *It seems to me as if the government is just staging a coup against itself. The current and any future government can now suspend all civil rights at any time at the push of a button by arbitrarily declaring an infection alert based on a vaguely formulated 'threatening' situation, deploy the military inside the country, and suppress any protest, and even more any uprising, with ease. And they can pick up the last stubborn people from their homes to carry out forced vaccinations by military doctors as a supposed protective measure.* Accordingly, one demonstrator carries a self-written cardboard sign with the inscription: "Forever state of emergency", and another had a poster with a photo of Willy Brandt and a sentence with which, as Foreign Minister and Vice-Chancellor, he commented on the German Emergency Acts of 1968: "Whoever should once play with the state of emergency to restrict freedom will find my friends and me on the barricades in defense of democracy, and this is meant quite literally." In passing, I hear someone say that he had quit his last friendship today, that people

just didn't want to look and see what was happening, that he couldn't bear it and couldn't accept it anymore.

In Leipzig, three days later, another smaller demonstration against the Corona measures is being held with about 500 participants. After the police declared this one terminated due to violations of the hygiene requirements, groups of Corona demonstrators, counter-demonstrators, and city visitors on shopping tours mingle everywhere in the city. In some cases, it comes to scuffles and fights between demonstrators and counter-demonstrators. At Brühl, I come across an Antifa demonstration. I speak to a young woman who explains to me that some of the demonstrators are surrounded by Antifa further up the street, and that the police are keeping the two groups apart. We get into a conversation, she says that, since we are in a pandemic, the demonstrators endanger other people by their behavior and furthermore, on the one hand, they pretend that they want to protect their children from the measures, and on the other hand, they take their children to such demonstrations. In her opinion, it is okay to criticize the measures, but not together with Nazis. And that some of the protesters accuse Antifa, which is fighting against fascism, of fascism, is of course complete nonsense.

On the market square, I come across a group of seven people, four men and three women, all around 20 years old, dressed in Antifa style and wearing masks. In front of them is an alternatively dressed couple around 50 years old without masks, who apparently belong to the demonstration against the Corona measures. The atmosphere is aggressive.

The female Corona demonstrator asks the group:

*Why are you wearing a mask?*

Male Counter-demonstrator 1: *To protect you.*

Female Corona demonstrator: *Well, do you know the size of a virus?*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *Yes, a bit bigger than your brain.*

Female Corona demonstrator (unperturbed): *It's so small, your balaclava won't help at all.*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *Oh man, ey, put on your mask when you talk to us, otherwise I won't talk to you anymore!*

The whole group chants: *Mask on! Mask on! Mask on!*



Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *Come on, get lost, ey!*

Female Corona demonstrator: *You don't want to hear that? Democracy lives from different opinions, ever heard of it?*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *But in a democracy there are also rules, and one of these rules is to wear a mask. Besides, I thought you didn't think we lived in a democracy.*

Female Corona demonstrator: *Yes, that's true, not since Wednesday.*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *I think you have to make up your mind: Do we live in a democracy or not?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *On Wednesday a law was passed, since then we no longer live in a democracy, from now on a state of emergency can always be declared without us having our basic rights, do you even know that?*

Male Counter-demonstrator 3: *That's not true!*

Female Corona demonstrator (ironically): *Really? Why not?*

Male Counter-demonstrator 3: *The parliament always has to decide first whether such a state of emergency exists and it has to be justified, and besides, it's always only temporary. That's why it's democratic.*

Male Counter-demonstrator 2: *Oh come on, get lost, ey!*

When the Corona demonstrator turns away, she encounters another group. As it turns out, they are pupils. Here, too, the atmosphere is aggressive. Someone from the group asks her why she didn't put on a mask.

Female Corona demonstrator: *Because it's pointless. That's even written on every package: these guys don't protect against viruses. Moreover, they make you sick. The kids have to wear them all day at school.*

Schoolgirl 1: *I also go to school.*

Female Corona demonstrator: *And because the mask dehumanizes, look at yourselves. Why do you wear a mask?*

Schoolgirl 2: *Hey, we're protecting you, don't you understand?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *You don't need to protect me, thank you. I have an autoimmune disease and I've been to so many demos and I'm still fine.*

Schoolboy 1: *The hospitals are full.*



**Fig. 17** "Love wins!" Leipzig near Augustusplatz. November 21, 2020.

Female Corona demonstrator: *What nonsense, take a look at the website of the Robert Koch Institute.*

Schoolboy 1: *Paris!*

Schoolboy 2: *Hey, I had Corona and was in the hospital for two weeks.*

Female Corona demonstrator: *With an ordinary flu, you also feel bad for two weeks.*

Schoolgirl 1: *Do you actually know how many dead people there are?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *Well, how many? Do you know?*

Schoolgirl 1: *Millions!*

Female Corona demonstrator (ironically): *Oh, millions, well, who says that?*

Schoolgirl 1: *The people who have finished their occupational training.*

Female Corona demonstrator: *That's worldwide, man, and not millions, but one million. In Germany we have just 10,000, that's much fewer than during an ordinary flu.*

Schoolboy 1 to schoolgirl 1: *Come on, stop it, they have an answer for everything and don't change their minds anyway.*

Schoolgirl 2: *But that the virus exists, you believe, right?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *At least it hasn't been proven. Dr. Fuellermich is preparing a lawsuit against Dr. Drosten and Merkel because of the PCR test.*

Schoolgirl 2 (takes out her cell phone): *What's his name again?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *Dr. Fuellermich.*

Schoolgirl 2: *Ah, I found him: Fuellmich. Did you say he's a virologist?*

Female Corona demonstrator: *No, I didn't say that.*

Schoolgirl 2 (triumphantly): *Do you know what he is? He's a lawyer!*

Female Corona demonstrator: *Yes, he is a lawyer, google him and see what he says!*

Schoolgirl 2 (turns away to follow her departing group, but then turns around again): *I just did, he's a lawyer! But you don't have a clue, he's not a doctor at all, oh man, you really don't get it!*

Female Corona demonstrator (also walking away, shouting): *Yes, he is a lawyer and works with Doctors without Borders!*

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## Notes

**1** The law passed with the votes of the CDU/CSU [Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union in Bavaria], SPD [Social Democratic Party], FDP [Free Democratic Party], and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen [Alliance 90/The Greens] parties and the abstention of the far-right AfD [Alternative for Germany] and Die Linke [The Left]. It was modified twice: on May 19, 2020 and on November 18, 2020.

**2** In German: Freiheit, Gleichheit, Geschwisterlichkeit!

**3** GG is the abbreviation for the *Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* [Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany].

**4** Reichsbürger means “citizens of the Reich”; the term refers to a movement rejecting the legitimacy of today's German republic.

**5** Christian Drosten (\*1972) is a German virologist who has been a professor at the Charité hospital and research institute in Berlin since 2017 and is also head of the virology department of Europe's largest commercial clinic laboratory, Labor Berlin—Charité Vivantes Services GmbH. He was involved in the development of the world's first test for the diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 and became known in Germany through his advisory activities for the government and his weekly podcast “Corona Update”, which has been broadcast by the radio station Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) since the end of February 2020.

**6** The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) is a research institute under the authority of the Federal Ministry of Health and headquartered in Berlin with public health care as its central task.

**7** He refers to the book *Propaganda* by Edward L. Bernays from 1928.

**8** Sucharit Bhakdi (\*1946) is a German specialist in microbiology and infectious disease epidemiology who was Professor at the Institute of Medical Microbiology and Hygiene at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany, from 1991 until his retirement in 2012. Together with his wife, the German biochemist Karina Reiß (\*1974), in 2016 he published the book *Schreckgespenst Infektionen. Mythen, Wahn und Wirklichkeit* [Bogeyman Infections. Myths, Delusion, and Reality], which critically examined the fear of viruses. In March 2020, he published several videos in which he relativized the danger posed by SARS-CoV-2 and warned against scaremongering. In June 2020, he and his wife published the book *Corona Fehlalarm? Daten, Fakten, Hintergründe* (translated as *Corona, False Alarm? Facts and Figures*), in which he argues against the federal government's Corona policy and novel vaccines against SARS-CoV-2. The German-language book was number one on *Der Spiegel* magazine's bestseller list for weeks and reached number one on the bestseller lists in Austria and Switzerland. The book and his videos have become a widely cited reference in the protest movement, but are mostly criticized and dismissed by the established media outlets, which the protesters usually refer to as “mainstream media”.

**9** Wolfgang Wodarg (\*1947) is a German physician. From 1994 to 2010, he was a member of the German Bundestag for the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe responsible primarily for security, medical, and health issues. He was the initiator of the Council of Europe's investigations into pandemic H1N1 2009/10 and the role of the pharmaceutical industry and WHO. Along with Sucharit Bhakdi, he was one of the first to speak out critically, mostly on various YouTube channels and on his website wodarg.com, against the measures taken by the German government to contain SARS-CoV-2. In his view, the virus was no more danger-

ous than other coronaviruses, the reporting was scare-mongering, and the measures were disproportionate; just as with swine flu, the main aim was apparently to sell vaccines. Wolfgang Wodarg thus also became a leading figure in the protest scene and at the same time was strongly criticized in the official media and institutions. Among other things, Transparency International, of which Wolfgang Wodarg was a board member, distanced itself from him and suspended his membership. Later, he became part of the *Stiftung Corona-Ausschuss* [Corona Committee Foundation] founded by lawyers Antonia Fischer, Viviane Fischer, Justus Hoffmann, and Reiner Fuellmich, who have been providing critical commentary on corona policy since July 2020 in the form of live sessions lasting several hours, broadcast on YouTube, during which they invite and interview numerous guests. These “committee meetings” also have a great impact on the protest scene (cf. <https://corona-ausschuss.de>).

**10** This refers to the report *Coronakrise 2020 aus Sicht des Schutzes Kritischer Infrastrukturen. Auswertung der bisherigen Bewältigungsstrategie und Handlungsempfehlungen* [Corona Crisis 2020 from a Critical Infrastructure Protection Perspective. Evaluation of the Coping Strategy to Date and Recommendations for Action] by Stephan Kohn (\*1962), a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and senior government advisor in the KM 4 Department of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior. He worked in the Department of Crisis Management and Civil Protection, where he was an advisor in the area of critical infrastructures. His May 7, 2020 report takes a critical look at the measures taken to protect the spread of SARS-CoV-2. According to the report, the Robert Koch Institute is not producing a valid database, the pandemic is a false alarm, and the “collateral damage” of the measures exceed the damage caused by the virus. The report was designed as an internal document, but was made public by the right-wing online magazine *Tichys Einblick*. The Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Government distanced themselves from the report, saying it was the private opinion of an employee who had acted without a mandate. Kohn was subsequently relieved of his duties with the argument that, by using the Ministry’s letterhead, he had created the false appearance that his private opinion reflected the official view of the authority (Cf. *BUNDESMINISTERIUM DES INNERN, FÜR BAU UND HEIMAT 2020*; KOHN 2020).

**11** This slogan refers to the *Gib AIDS keine Chance* [Don’t give AIDS a chance] campaign, which was initiated by the German Federal Center for Health Education in 1987 and ran until 2016 to raise awareness among the population about the dangers of HIV infection.

**12** Legida is the abbreviation for *Leipzig gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* [Leipzig Against the Islamization of the Occident]. Legida is an offshoot of the political movement Pegida, which is the abbreviation for *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* [Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident]. This movement began with demonstrations in Dresden at the end of 2014 and has formed nu-

merous offshoots with modified names in various cities besides Leipzig.

**13** Bodo Schiffmann, a physician who became very well known due to his early criticism of the Corona policy (cf. footnote 14), reacted in his YouTube videos to the designation of the critics as “tin foil hats” with the call to make small balls out of aluminum foil and to use them as a sign and expression of protest. At the beginning of the movement, many protesters did this.

**14** Bodo Schiffmann (\*1968) is a German ear, nose, and throat specialist, specialized in the treatment of vertigo. In this role, he runs the YouTube channel *Schwindelambulanz Sinsheim Dr. Bodo Schiffmann* with advice for patients. Shortly after the pandemic was declared, he began to critically examine the government’s protective measures in the videos and later opened the YouTube channel *Alles außer Mainstream*, where he regularly commented on the current situation. In the protest scene, his assessments became an important reference. He was a co-founder of the party *Widerstand 2020* [Resistance 2020], which was established in the course of the protests. He left the party a short time later and co-founded the party *Wir 2020* [We 2020], from which he also left a short time later.

**15** KenFM.de is a web portal, launched in 2012, of a journalist with the pseudonym Ken Jebesen (\*1966). Jebesen also runs a YouTube channel of the same name that already focused intensely on conspiracy theories long before Corona.

**16** In German: mit alten Begriffen wie Verschwörungstheoretiker, -erzähler oder -ideologen, Nazis, Faschisten, Antisemiten, Esoteriker, Schwurbler, Impfspinner und Aluhuträger oder mit neuen Begriffen wie Covidioten und Corona-Leugner, nicht selten und zunehmend auch als Radikale, Extremisten, Kriminelle, Gefährder, Terroristen oder Mörder.

**17** Surprisingly, the current situation is only rarely compared to the old Federal Republic and the protests against the Notstandsgesetze [German Emergency Acts] in Western Germany in 1968.

**18** See footnote 14.

**19** In German: *Verschwörungslügner\*innen, Coronazis, Zeugen Coronas, Systemlinge oder Schlafschafe*. The English version of *Schlafschafe* is *sheep*, a portmanteau of “sheep” and “people” that refers to people who tend to blindly follow the crowd.

**20** See footnote 8 and 15.

**21** See footnote 14.

**22** See footnote 9.

**23** *CORRECTIV. Recherchen für die Gesellschaft* [Research for Society] is a foundation-funded journalism project in Germany that started in 2014 and, according to its website, currently has 45 employees. It describes its goal as to “conduct long-term investigations in the public interest and uncover systematic abuses, corruption and unethical behavior. Our investigations are characterized by depth and factual accuracy. This is more important than ever in a digital society and today’s globalized world. Whether it is tax fraud, illegal party financing or intentional fake news—we want to make visible where power is being abused. In doing so, we always keep an eye on the global dimensions of corrup-

tion, exploitation and the undermining of democratic processes. With our investigations, we bring important issues into public discourse” (cf. <https://correctiv.org/en/about-us/>). Correctiv is thus one of the so-called “fact checkers” and, among other things, has been working with Facebook since 2017, checking posts that users have reported as fake news.

**24** Daniele Ganser (\*1972) is a Swiss historian who in 2001 published his doctoral thesis on *NATO's Secret Armies. Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe*. He works as a freelance author and is a much-cited reference in German conspiracy culture, especially with regard to his texts and lectures on the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. He has also been critical of the Corona measures.

**25** *Rubikon* is a donation-funded website from Germany, founded by Jens Wernecke (\*1977) in 2017, that publishes contributions from various authors mostly on current political events. Sorted by the keywords Facade Democracy & Deep State, Media & Ideology Criticism, War & Peace, Poor & Rich, Education & Welfare, Nature & Environment, Hope & Utopia, the contributions have been widely cited in what is called here conspiracy culture (cf. <https://rubikon.news/>).

**26** Connewitz is a traditionally left-wing district of Leipzig.

**27** See footnote 12.

**28** Heidenau, a town of 16,000 people in Saxony near Dresden, was the scene of riots against asylum seekers in 2015.

**29** Friedrich Pürner, as head of the public health department in the Bavarian district of Aichach-Friedberg, has criticized the Corona measures and the statements from Prime Minister Markus Söder several times, including publicly, and was subsequently transferred to the Landesamt für Gesundheitsamt und Lebensmittelsicherheit [State Office of Public Health and Food Safety] (LGL) in the fall of 2020. Pürner himself interpreted the transfer as punitive (SEBALD 2020).

**30** See footnote 5.

**31** *maiLab* is a multiply award-winning YouTube channel founded in 2016 by the German chemist Mai Thi Nguyen-Kim (\*1987). In collaboration with an editorial team, she regularly covers topics from the field of natural sciences. The channel is produced by “Funk”, a “content network” of the German public broadcasters ARD and ZDF, which is designed to appeal to young people aged 14-29 (cf. <https://funk.net/>). She was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany on October 1, 2020 for her work in communicating science, which extends beyond the YouTube channel to podcasts, books, and television appearances.

**32** See footnote 8.

**33** *Die Partei* [The Party] is a party founded by members of the German satirical magazine *Titanic* in 2004, whose actual name is *Die Partei für Arbeit, Rechtsstaat, Tierschutz, Elitenförderung und Basisdemokratische Initiative* [The Party for Labor, the Rule of Law, Animal Protection, Elite Promotion, and Grassroots Democratic Initiative].

**34** On March 18, Federal Chancellor Angelika Merkel gave a speech on television in which she forcefully tried

to make clear to all citizens the seriousness of the situation. Among other things, she said the sentences that were widely quoted afterwards: “This is serious. Since German reunification, no, since the Second World War, there has not been a challenge for our country in which action in a spirit of solidarity on our part was so important.” Getting the coronavirus epidemic under control was “a historic task—and it can only be mastered if we face it together”(MERKEL 2020).

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