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## **Gender, fear, and right-wing populism: A study of Facebook representations of female leaders in the context of femonationalism**

### **Highlights**

- The study illustrates the concept of femonationalism through a Discourse-Historical Approach of the Facebook posts of right-wing populist female leaders.
- The analysis shows how Alice Weidel and Riikka Purra reference feminist arguments while promoting anti-migration policies.
- The concept of calculated ambivalence helps to describe the strategic balancing of the different political positions in their self-representation.
- The study examines social media communication to identify strategic patterns in the use of gender narratives.

## Abstract

The concept of femonationalism refers to the strategic appropriation of feminist ideals for anti-Muslim and anti-immigration politics. This article analyzes how right-wing populist leaders Alice Weidel (Alternative für Deutschland, Germany) and Riikka Purra (The Finns Party, Finland) employ the femonationalist rhetoric in their Facebook posts between 2022 and 2025. Using the Discourse-Historical Approach, the study examines how gendered narratives are used to legitimize nationalist and exclusionary agendas. A qualitative analysis of the Facebook posts identifies three categories: criticism of feminism, threat narratives about Muslim men, and personal positioning. The analysis shows how the politicians combine rejection of feminism with selective appeals to women's rights. This rhetorical strategy is described as calculated ambivalence, enabling right-wing populist actors to reject feminist positions while simultaneously invoking gender equality – thereby legitimizing exclusionary policies. The findings reveal how femonationalism functions as a persuasive and affectively charged strategy in digital right-wing populist communication.

**Keywords:** femonationalism, calculated ambivalence, right-wing populism, gender

## 1 Introduction

Right-wing populist (RWP) parties generally promote an anti-feminist worldview in which women are discriminated against (see Cullen 2021). The parties themselves are considered androcentric or even as “men’s parties” (Spierings et al. 2015: 3–5; Reisigl 2020: 204, 209). However, recent research highlights that this anti-feminism often coexists with selective appeals to women’s rights, producing an ambivalent stance. Reisigl (2020: 213; see Appendix 2, ex. 1) explicitly describes this strategic ambiguity: “We see, therefore, that while right-wing populism overall exhibits a clear bias toward gender discrimination, there are also strategic statements aimed at opposing the discrimination of women.”<sup>1</sup> This observation captures the rhetorical double-bind of RWP gender politics; while promoting traditional gender roles and opposing feminism, these actors simultaneously present themselves as defenders of women’s rights. This tension is central for the rhetorical pattern analyzed in this study and connects directly to the concept of femonationalism.

Dietze (2022: 278) argues that family and women’s politics in RWP parties frequently appropriate feminist frames that are stripped of their emancipatory content and transformed via “frame co-optation” (Cullen 2021) into a “pro-women against-feminists” stance. This strategic reframing is central to the femonationalist rhetoric examined

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1 All translations in this paper were carried out by the author. If text has been omitted from the quoted material, the symbol “[...]” is used to denote this. Text added to the quoted material is written within square brackets. The original versions of the literature and Facebook posts are provided in the appendices.

in this study. In this context, the increasing visibility of female leaders in RWP parties is particularly noteworthy. In the cases of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Finnish Finns Party (*Perussuomalaiset* in Finnish), women have risen to party leadership (Alice Weidel together with Tino Chrupalla since 2022, and Riikka Purra since 2021) and are by no means an exception at the European level.

Prompted by the work of Sarah Farris (2017), the concept of femonationalism was coined “to describe the co-optation of feminist concerns (and individual feminist activists) for nationalist and neoliberal campaigns against Islam and immigration” (Henninger 2020: 17; see Appendix 2, ex. 2). The femonationalist rhetoric thus allows female leaders to perform a dual role: as empowered political actors and as vulnerable female bodies requiring protection. The present study examines how such contradictory gendered self-representations function as discursive strategies in the Facebook posts of Alice Weidel and Riikka Purra. It investigates how the femonationalist narratives are constructed linguistically and visually and how calculated ambivalence enables the legitimization of exclusionary policies while maintaining a pro-women appearance.

Against this background, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How is the image of women presented in the personal Facebook posts of the party leaders Alice Weidel and Riikka Purra, and to what extent does the concept of calculated ambivalence manifest in these portrayals?
2. Which communicative strategies in the Facebook posts reflect the femonationalist rhetoric?

While the author previously analyzed both party programs of AfD and the Finns Party as well as Facebook posts of Weidel and Purra in an earlier study (Niedling 2024), this article develops an independent, discourse-analytical perspective focusing on Facebook posts. This shift allows for a more concentrated examination of the portrayal of these leaders as women and as figures of authority<sup>2</sup>. In this framework, the ambivalence of the femonationalist rhetoric becomes particularly visible. Female RWP leaders like Weidel and Purra embody a dual role: they present themselves as politically empowered women while simultaneously emphasizing their vulnerability as women in the context of migration and Islam. This tension is well described by Dietze (2018: 39; see Appendix 2, ex. 3):

The female leader represents both – on the one hand, ‘emancipation’, as she would not have become a party leader otherwise, and on the other hand, through the visibility of her female body, a personal vulnerability, which can, for example, be used to argue for the necessity of xenophobic security policies.

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2 The author thanks the reviewers and editors for their valuable comments and suggestions.

The quote captures the rhetorical double-bind of the femonationalist discourse: the female leader symbolizes liberal gender progress while simultaneously legitimizing exclusionary, often anti-Muslim, policies. It is precisely this strategic ambivalence that this study traces in the Facebook posts of Weidel and Purra. Covering activity from 2022 through early 2025, the multimodal approach includes both verbal and visual elements. This multimodal approach enables the identification of subtle persuasive strategies central to contemporary RWP discourse. In the meantime, the AfD has been officially classified as a “confirmed far-right extremist” organization by the German domestic intelligence agency (BfV). Reasons cited include “xenophobic, anti-minority, and Islamophobic” rhetoric (cf. Janjevic 2025). The party is thus a threat to the liberal-democratic order, underlining the societal relevance of the topic. This underlines the societal relevance of investigating how exclusionary ideologies are discursively produced and legitimized. By focusing on rhetorical and discursive strategies, the present study contributes to the understanding of how gendered narratives are used to normalize far-right positions.

## 2 Femonationalism and right-wing populism

The term femonationalism was coined through the works of Sarah Farris. Femonationalism refers to:

both to the exploitation of feminist themes by nationalists and neoliberals in anti-Islam (but, as I will show, also anti-immigration) campaigns and to the participation of certain feminists and femocrats in the stigmatization of Muslim men under the banner of gender equality. Femonationalism thus describes [...] the attempts of western European right-wing parties and neoliberals to advance xenophobic and racist politics through the touting of gender equality [...] (Farris 2017: 4).

The principle described by femonationalism can be applied to capture paradoxes and ambivalences in the programmatic positions and actions of RWP parties at the intersection of gender, women’s rights, and Islamophobia (for a discussion of the classification of the Finns Party and the AfD as populist parties, see Jakonen et al. 2025 and Hiller 2024). According to Reisiigl (2020: 210–213), the key features of (oppositional) right-wing populism manifest in the form of several antagonisms. Right-wing populists present themselves as advocates of “the people.” As Reisiigl puts it: “Populists refer affirmatively and in a justificatory manner to the people, which they claim must be represented” (Reisiigl 2020: 212; see Appendix 2, ex. 4). They construct internal enemies along two primary axes: on a vertical axis, they oppose elites “above” common people (cf. Engesser et al. 2017: 1282–1286); on a horizontal axis, they target feminists, LGBTQ+ activists, and the political left (Reisiigl 2020: 212–213). External enemies in this schematic worldview are foreigners, particularly those with

a Muslim background (Reisigl 2020: 212–213). A third, diagonal axis of antagonism – cutting across the previous ideological dimensions – contrasts forward-looking and backward-looking orientations (Reisigl 2020: 212–213). Right-wing populism is situated here as anti-modernist and oriented towards tradition (*ibid.*). This results in a biologicistic conception of gender (Reisigl 2020: 212–213). Gender equality is affirmed as supposedly achieved in Western societies, while feminism and sexual minorities are rejected (Reisigl 2020: 212–213). Sexism is ethnicized, focusing on the alleged oppression of women by Muslim migrants (Reisigl 2020: 212–213).

A concept closely related to femonationalism is Dietze's Islam-Sexuality-Emancipation Nexus, which refers to the programmatic tensions of RWP groups that simultaneously oppose "genderization," claim to stand against misogynistic ideologies and Muslim gender norms, and advocate for women's sexual self-determination (see Dietze 2018: 36). Van Raemdonck et al. (2022) show that while gender studies critically analyze gender as a social and political construct, right-wing actors increasingly instrumentalize notions of gender equality to promote anti-immigration and Islamophobic agendas. This strategic use of the gender discourses appropriates the feminist rhetoric while simultaneously undermining the academic and political legitimacy of gender studies.

### 3 Methodology

This study examines the Facebook posts of Alice Weidel and Riikka Purra from 2022 to January 2025, focusing on how they construct narratives related to gender, feminism, and national identity. By a narrative, we mean recurring linguistic patterns that organize events and actors into coherent storylines and serve as tools of meaning-making in discourse (see Mell & Gredel 2018). In this study, the focus lies on the femonationalist narratives as discursive tools that structure RWP representations of gender and threat.

A key concept guiding this analysis is calculated ambivalence. According to Klein (1996: 206), calculated ambivalence aims to "present two potentially irreconcilable positions as compatible," for instance by affirming opposing views without highlighting their contradiction. In the context of RWP gender discourse, Gadinger and Simon (2019: 206) show how such narratives "operate with a calculated ambivalence in their engagement with normative criteria." This is exemplified by the AfD's simultaneous rejection of same-sex marriage and its professed support for both homosexuals and sexual autonomy (*cf.* Gadinger & Simon 2019: 43–47). Such ambivalence enables seemingly progressive claims (e.g., promoting women's rights and individual freedom) while discrediting feminist concerns as excessive or dangerous (see also Reisigl 2020: 210–213). These findings underline the necessity of a linguistic perspective: calculated ambivalence manifests itself in strategic language use, which

calls for discursive analysis. The analysis applies a content analysis informed by the Discourse-Historical Approach (Reisigl 2018), focusing on five discursive strategies as outlined by Reisigl (2018: 52). First, nomination refers to the linguistic construction of social actors, processes, or phenomena; for example, how persons are named. Second, predication assigns specific characteristics or qualities to these actors or phenomena. Third, argumentation analyzes the arguments used in discourse and how they aim to persuade the audience. Fourth, perspectivization denotes the way speakers position themselves in relation to their statements, for example by expressing involvement or distance. Finally, intensification and mitigation refer to rhetorical amplification or softening of statements. The approach thus enables the identification of the patterns in how Weidel and Purra communicate gender-related topics while exploiting ideological contradictions.

## 4 Data collection and corpus

The dataset consists of all publicly available Facebook posts published by Weidel and Purra between January 2022 and January 2025. In total, 601 posts by Weidel and 509 posts by Purra were collected. From this full dataset, 66 posts were selected for analysis based on their thematic relevance to gender discourse and femonationalist narratives – for instance, explicit references to feminism, gender equality, Muslim men, or women’s rights in the context of immigration.

During this period, Weidel was elected as the co-leader of the AfD (together with Tino Chrupalla) in June 2022, and the Finns Party (*Perussuomalaiset*) transitioned from opposition to government in June 2023. In the case of the Finns Party, this timeframe includes a shift from oppositional to governmental populism, which can significantly influence rhetorical positioning (see Reisigl 2020: 211; Bauer et al. 2023). One example of this shift can be seen in Purra’s so-called “defense statement” posts (July 2023), where she adopts a tone of justification while reaffirming the key identity-based positions such as cultural differences (see below: Personal Narratives, [62-66]).

Within this total, 40 cases appear in Weidel’s posts (approximately 6.6% of all the posts) and 26 in Purra’s posts (approximately 5.1% of all the posts), which were identified and analyzed in relation to gender equality and femonationalism. While the absolute number of the Facebook posts can be clearly determined, the selection of the thematic posts in the Facebook appearances was based on a decision made by the author. The selection process combined manual screening with a keyword-based approach. Posts were pre-selected if they included terms such as *feminism*, *gender*, *women’s rights*, *Islam*, or *immigrants*, or contained related visual or narrative elements. Each post was then reviewed to assess whether it substantively contributed to one of the three analytical categories described below. The process was qualitative in nature, guided by both lexical

indicators and the communicative intent of each post. A review of the material led to a corpus-induced categorization, and it aligns with the research questions.

The initial categories were informed by the theoretical framework discussed above – particularly research on femonationalism, gender discourse, and right-wing populism (Dietze 2018; Reisigl 2020), and the rhetorical strategy of calculated ambivalence. To structure the corpus, a theory-driven categorization was combined with corpus-induced refinement. While the categories can be interpreted as results in terms of content, they were methodologically pre-structured by the theoretical framework and inductively refined through engagement with the material. For the categorization of the posts, the Discourse-Historical Approach (Reisigl 2018: 51–53) was followed, and its set of discursive strategies —nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation—were used as markers.

These markers indicated thematic orientation and were used to select posts to one of the following categories:

1. **Feminism/Gender Roles** – This category builds on the notion of antifeminism as a central node of right-wing identity politics (e.g., Reisigl 2020; Dietze 2018). Posts in this category are marked by the nomination of abstract opponents such as *(gender) ideology, quota or feminism*, predication such as *discriminatory, woke madness*, and argumentation invoking topoi of threat to family values or loss of tradition.
2. **Threat of Muslim Men/Islamism** – This category draws on the concept of femonationalism (Farris 2017), in which references to women’s rights are mobilized to legitimize anti-Muslim and anti-immigration discourse. Relevant posts included markers such as *Muslim men, immigrants* or references to *(primitive) habits*, with predication involving descriptions of the type *violent, dangerous* and argumentation based on topoi of protection and cultural clash. Intensification was often realized through emotionally charged phrases such as *brutal attacks or systemic failure*.
3. **Personal Narratives** – This category is informed by personal or affective elements that are used to legitimize discriminatory discourse. The posts were identified by perspectivization (e.g., first-person accounts such as *I experienced...*), and contrasts such as *these people*, often combined with argumentation strategies that frame biographical experience as morally or politically authoritative.

In summary, Categories 1–3 represent the core thematic dimensions of the femonationalist rhetoric—anti-feminism, anti-Muslim narratives, and gendered self-representation—which guided the corpus selection and continued to inform the strategy-based analysis. The distribution of the included posts is presented in Table 1 (N.B.: When a post displayed features of multiple categories, its classification was based on its dominant

argumentative function and communicative intent. For example, reference [15] was assigned to category 1, but it also displays clear features of category 2).

TABLE 1. Facebook posts by Weidel and Purra related to femonationalism. (The individual posts are listed and numbered in square brackets in Appendix 3. The number in parentheses under each year indicates the total number of posts published [2025: January only]).

Contents of the Facebook Posts	Weidel				Purra			
	2022 (268)	2023 (140)	2024 (177)	2025 (16)	2022 (214)	2023 (146)	2024 (134)	2025 (15)
(1) <b>Feminism/ Gender Roles</b>	7 [1-7]	5 [8-12]	2 [13-14]	2 [15-16]	2 [17-18]	4 [19-22]	5 [23-27]	1 [28]
(2) <b>Threat of Muslim Men/ Islamism</b>	3 [29-31]	7 [32-38]	9 [39-47]	1 [48]	3 [49-51]	2 [52-53]	3 [54-56]	1 [57]
(3) <b>Personal Narratives</b>	1 [58]	2 [59-60]	1 [61]			5 [62-66]		

## 5 Analysis: Femonationalism in the Facebook posts of Weidel and Purra

While the thematic categories introduced in section 4 (*Feminism and Gender Roles*, *Threat of Muslim Men/Islamism*, and *Personal Narratives*) guided the selection of the relevant posts, this section shifts the focus to discursive form. The discursive strategies of the Discourse-Historical Approach – nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation – are used to analyze how the femonationalist rhetoric and calculated ambivalence manifest in the Facebook posts of Alice Weidel and Riikka Purra. The strategy-based analysis aims to answer the research questions by showing how communicative strategies support exclusionary political messages while maintaining a pro-women appearance.

### 5.1 Nomination

Nomination refers to the linguistic categorization of social actors through naming. The following examples illustrate how it creates polarized identities.

In her post from January 13, 2022 [1], Alice Weidel opposes the EU Commission’s proposal for a 40% gender quota in corporate boardrooms. The image accompanying

the post features Weidel in a medium close-up next to the headline *EU Women's Quota: Discriminatory and Unnecessary – Ursula von der Leyen Pushes for 40% Quota in Corporate Boardrooms* (Figure 1). The accompanying text (see Appendix 1, ex. 1) nominates von der Leyen as a *self-proclaimed quota woman*, while Weidel positions herself as an authentic, hard-working woman. The term *nanny state* further reinforces this contrast by nominalizing the government as overprotective and paternalistic.



FIGURE 1. Image included in Alice Weidel's Facebook post opposing an EU women's quota (January 13, 2022 [1]; © Alice Weidel, Facebook; accessed February 14, 2025).

A further example of nomination is taken from Alice Weidel's video post from September 17, 2023 [36] (see Appendix 1, ex. 2), where she recounts the removal of a statue from a refugee shelter at a large-scale event:

In one of them [refugee shelter], a statue of a naked woman had to be taken down because [...] we had to prevent the young men – all refugees from Muslim-majority societies – from losing their minds at the sight of a naked woman. [...] What I actually want to say – it sounds so absurd that it's almost funny – but it's tragic that these people, the ones responsible for these policies, the ones in government, disgracefully betray their own values and their own country for people like this. That's why we say: close the borders.

In this post, refugees are categorized as *young men from Muslim-majority societies*, constructing them as a homogeneous, culturally alien group incompatible with the Western norms. The phrase *people like this* intensifies the othering, turning individuals into a threatening collective. Weidel also refers to those *responsible for these policies, the ones in government*, exemplifying the vertical axis of right-wing populism (see Reisigl 2020), which contrasts a misguided elite with the people. Nomination thus marks both refugees and elites as deviant. Similar logic appears in the posts where Weidel labels alleged perpetrators as *Muslim, Syrian, Afghan, or Iraqi* (e.g., [32, 40, 43]). These nominations serve not as neutral identifiers but as discursive markers of threat, using ethnicity and religion to signal danger. References to *non-citizens* in public crime contexts (e.g., [33, 35]) reinforce this link, associating Islamic background with violence and constructing a generalized image of a threatening Other (e.g., *rapists, murderers*; see [34, 38, 41, 42, 46, 48]).

In her posts, Riikka Purra similarly constructs threatening Others via naming strategies rooted in cultural and geopolitical identifiers. In her post from October 28, 2024 [54] (see Appendix 1, ex. 3), she writes:

When we look at things in terms of equality and non-discrimination, not all cultures and lifestyles are equal. For example, there are countless cultures [...] where women are not equal to men [...].

While the main rhetorical aim is to emphasize inequality, the nomination of *cultures where women are not equal to men* creates a category of implicitly inferior societies. These are not named directly in this post but are clearly defined by contrast to a Western or Finnish norm of equality. On January 22, 2025 [57] (see Appendix 1, ex. 4), Purra makes the reference more explicit by commenting on a law passed in Iraq:

In Iraq, a law has been passed that effectively legalizes marriages with girls as young as 9 years old, giving Islamic interpretations of the law an increasing power. Conservative Shiite lawmakers in particular backed the amendment in order to 'adapt the law to Islamic principles' and to 'reduce the influence of the West on Iraqi culture.' Think of the monstrosity. Legislation to allow the marrying of little girls! And some people think that cultures or religions should not be judged against each other!

In this post, the term *Islamic principles* functions as a discursive nomination for the culture being criticized. By linking early child marriage to these principles and by referring to specific political actors as *Shiite lawmakers*, Purra constructs a coherent and ideologically alien Other. This Other is not only incompatible with the Finnish values but is also portrayed as hostile to the West, thereby justifying moral distancing. Further examples of nomination appear in Purra's post from April 13, 2022 [50] (see Appendix 1, ex. 5), in which she responds to a viral video showing the humiliation of a Finnish youth by *a group of youths (of foreign background)*. She states:

But this is about mass migration from the developing world and the descendants of immigrants. People arriving from the Middle East and Africa, on average, do not integrate into Western societies. Finland has people who shouldn't be here.

The nomination of people *from the Middle East and Africa* and *descendants of immigrants* constructs a collective group defined by origin and failed integration. These labels act as shorthand for civilizational incompatibility. The phrase *people who shouldn't be here* exemplifies exclusionary categorization that legitimizes xenophobic assumptions and prepares the ground for restrictive policy.

Taken together, these examples illustrate how nomination functions under the guise of gender equality, cultural integrity, and national security. This nominal polarization exemplifies the calculated ambivalence of femonationalism: by nominating Muslim men as threats, Purra and Weidel can simultaneously position themselves as defenders of women's rights while advancing exclusionary policies. The nomination strategies discussed above are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Nomination strategies in the Facebook posts by Weidel and Purra (based on the examples discussed in the text).

Actor/Group	Nomination	Discursive Function	Example (Post)
<b>Ursula von der Leyen</b>	<i>self-proclaimed quota woman</i>	Delegitimization of feminist policy; contrast to "authentic" women	Weidel [1] (January 13, 2022)
<b>Refugees</b>	<i>young men from Muslim-majority societies</i>	Homogenization as a culturally alien and threatening group	Weidel [36] (September 17, 2023)
<b>Political decision-makers</b>	<i>the ones in government</i>	Populist vertical differentiation ("the people" vs. the elite)	Weidel [36] (September 17, 2023)
<b>Non-Western cultures</b>	<i>cultures where women are not equal to men</i>	Civilizational devaluation; justification for exclusionary migration policies	Purra [54] (October 28, 2024)
<b>Iraqi lawmakers</b>	<i>Shiite lawmakers, Islamic principles</i>	Religious othering; argument for cultural opposition ("clash of civilizations")	Purra [57] (January 22, 2025)
<b>Immigrants (in Finland)</b>	<i>people who shouldn't be here</i>	Rhetoric of exclusion; naturalization of foreignness	Purra [50] (April 13, 2022)

## 5.2 Predication

Predication assigns attributes to social actors, enabling the reinforcement of ideological positions. In the Facebook posts analyzed, both Weidel and Purra use predication to frame ideological opponents, cultural others, or political actors in pejorative terms, thereby creating emotional distance and moral disqualification (see Table 3).

A prominent example of negative predication appears in Purra's Facebook post from October 29, 2023 [22] (see Appendix 1, ex. 6), where she shares Point 32 of the Bild-Zeitung's *Manifesto for Germany*, affirming women's right to self-determination. She shifts focus, however, by warning against *anti-freedom and primitive habits* from *certain cultural circles and regions*. These pejorative labels characterize foreign customs as regressive and incompatible with the Western values. By presenting non-Western cultures as *primitive* while endorsing gender equality, Purra exemplifies the calculated ambivalence of femonationalism – using progressive values to legitimize exclusionary nationalism.

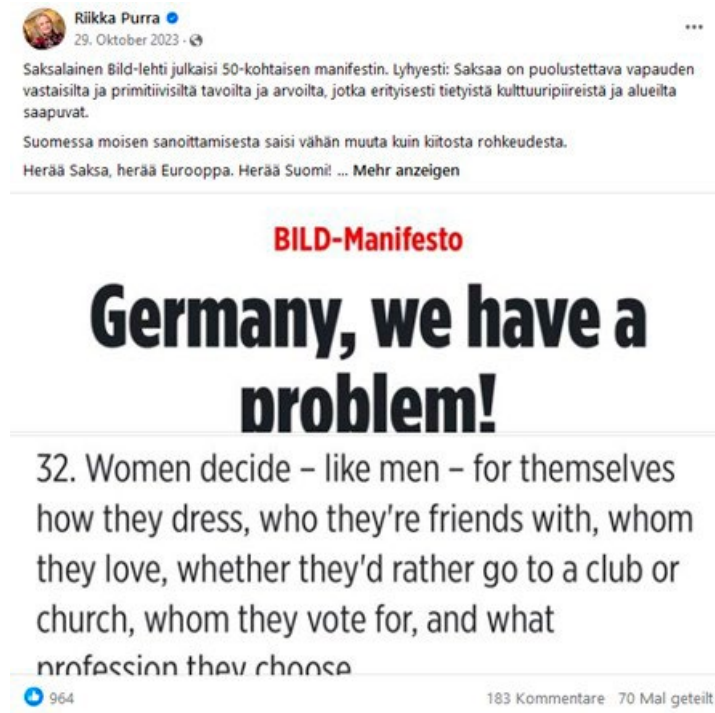


FIGURE 2. Excerpt from Riikka Purra's Facebook post on the *Bild Manifesto* (October 29, 2023 [22]); © Riikka Purra, Facebook; accessed February 14, 2025).

On January 5, 2025 [28] (see Appendix 1, ex. 7), Purra posts a pixelated image of the female German foreign minister in Syria (Figure 3), commenting:

EU dignitaries travelled to Syria to meet the new regime. On the agenda, believe it or not, was a discussion on women's rights. It started badly. The new Syrian leader did not shake hands with Germany's female foreign minister, and the whole person was even pixelated from news footage. It is as if she does not exist.

The evaluative phrase *as if she does not exist* delegitimizes the Syrian leadership as systemically misogynistic, reinforcing a civilizational dichotomy that is central to the femonationalist rhetoric.



Kuvamontaasi pikselöityistä valokuvista Annalena Baerbockista Syyrian uuden johdon kanssa heidän Damaskoksen-vierailunsa aikana © Kuvakaappaus: Telegram/Almharar

FIGURE 3. Excerpt from Riikka Purra's Facebook post (January 5, 2025 [28]; © Riikka Purra, Facebook; accessed February 14, 2025).

In opposition to what she perceives as unrealistic feminist ideals, Weidel posts on March 8, 2022 [3] (International Women's Day, Figure 4), an image of a partially sliced loaf of bread with the headline: *Feminism doesn't put food on the table!* Instead of addressing real problems, the government is accused of being *ideologically blinded [...] by gender-neutral language and quotas* (see Appendix, 1 ex. 8). The image implicitly reinforces this accusation by pointing to the high cost of living. This post frames feminist policies as irrational, illustrating how predication prepares exclusionary arguments under the cover of pragmatism.



FIGURE 4. Excerpt from Alice Weidel’s Facebook post on the “Ideological Misuse of International Women’s Day” (March 8, 2022 [3]; © Alice Weidel, Facebook; accessed February 14, 2025).

In sum, the strategy of predication enables Weidel and Purra to frame ideological opponents and cultural Others in delegitimizing terms, reinforcing binary worldviews and supporting exclusionary claims under the guise of pragmatism and gender equality.

TABLE 3. Predication strategies in the Facebook posts by Weidel and Purra (based on the examples discussed in the text).

Target	Predication	Discursive Function	Example (Post)
<b>Feminist Policies</b>	<i>Ideologically blinded [...] by gender-neutral language</i>	Delegitimizes feminism as irrational	Weidel [3] (April 8, 2022)
<b>Economic Impact</b>	<i>Doesn't put food on the table</i>	Frames feminism as materially irrelevant	Weidel [3] (April 8, 2022)
<b>Non-Western Cultures</b>	<i>Anti-freedom and primitive habits</i>	Othering through cultural backwardness	Purra [22] (October 29, 2023)
<b>Syrian Leadership</b>	<i>As if she does not exist</i>	Characterizes as systematically misogynistic	Purra [28] (January 5, 2025)

### 5.3 Argumentation

Argumentation refers to how speakers aim to persuade audiences using culturally and ideologically coded topoi. Building on this, two layers of argumentative practice can be distinguished in the femonationalist rhetoric: topoi that resonate with shared values and formal logical fallacies that mimic rational argumentation while lacking empirical grounding (see Tindale 2007). Weidel's and Purra's posts strategically combine both layers to legitimize exclusionary politics while maintaining a facade of rationality and moral superiority.

A key pattern in their argumentation is the use of topoi of threat and decline, often combined with slippery slope reasoning. For example, Purra's critique of drag queen storytelling at the Oodi library in Helsinki on June 17, 2022 [17] (see Appendix 1, ex. 9) uses a topos of harm by constructing an unsubstantiated link between gender nonconformity and the mental health crisis.

A few drag fairy tales to set the mood, glitter, makeup, beards – everything colorful and fun. [...] Maybe the question arises – are there even women, men, mothers, and fathers? Why stick to binarity? [...] Drag Auntie/Uncle/Person shares their experiences [...] This is not a dystopia. This is daily reality. And then politicians are asked: What can be done about the skyrocketing numbers of mental health disorders? Well. How about we finally stop messing with the heads of our children and youth?

This slippery slope argument transforms cultural pluralism into an existential threat, pathologizing queer visibility as societal decay while avoiding evidence-based discussion.

Similarly, in a Facebook video post from January 11, 2025 [16] (see Appendix 1, ex. 10), Weidel employs a topos of educational decline, framing academic fields as ideological indoctrination rather than legitimate scholarship:

We will shut down all Gender Studies departments and fire these professors!  
That's it! Our children, our youth, young people need to learn something substantial again at universities and schools!

This straw man fallacy reduces complex disciplines to something entirely unnecessary while appealing to the nostalgic ideals of "real" education. The radical solution – firing professors – appears justified through this distorted representation.

Both speakers frequently combine such fallacies with moral outrage to bypass rational scrutiny. Purra's commentary on Iraqi child marriage laws [57] – *Think of the monstrosity* – exemplifies this. While invoking a legitimate human rights issue, she employs a topos of cultural threat to construct a civilizational binary, in which moral condemnation substitutes for nuanced analysis. The term *monstrosity* emotionally charges the argument while obscuring its homogenizing portrayal of Islamic societies.

These argumentative strategies reflect the calculated ambivalence of femonationalism. When Weidel claims that *these people [...] disgracefully betray their own values* by accommodating refugees [36], she merges a topos of betrayal with nationalist protection rhetoric. This allows her to present herself simultaneously as a defender of women’s rights (against “misogynistic” Muslim men) and of national sovereignty (against “betraying” elites) – a dual appeal that masks the argument’s circular logic and lack of empirical support.

The posts also reveal a nostalgic framing. On October 29, 2024 [26] (see Appendix 1, ex. 11), Purra responds to the accusations of her party’s backwardness by stating:

Back in the 1980s, men didn’t give birth, and I don’t think anyone saw that as a particularly bad thing. Women certainly gave birth more than they do now.

This stance activates a topos of natural order, idealizing a past of stable gender roles and societal health. This romanticized contrast functions as argumentative shorthand against feminist progress, implying, without empirical basis, that contemporary gender politics disrupt biological and social harmony.

Three recurring patterns emerge from these examples. First, Weidel’s and Purra’s rhetoric draws on topoi that resonate with cultural anxieties while avoiding engagement with the counterarguments. Second, these topoi are amplified through fallacies such as slippery slope reasoning, straw man arguments, or hasty generalizations, all of which simulate logic while masking ideological aims. Third, this strategy supports ambivalent self-positioning: Weidel and Purra are presenting themselves as defenders of women’s rights while promoting exclusionary nationalism.

By grounding their claims in topoi of fear and decline and reinforcing them through fallacious reasoning, Weidel and Purra construct an argumentative framework where exclusion appears as common-sense protection (see Table 4). This rhetorical strategy contributes to the normalization of the far-right populist discourse.

TABLE 4. Argumentation strategies in the Facebook posts by Weidel and Purra (based on the examples discussed in the text).

Fallacy	Topos	Argumentative Function	Discursive Effect	Example (Post)
<b>Slippery Slope</b>	Topos of harm	Links drag events to psychological damage without evidence	Pathologizes gender diversity as societal threat	Purra [17] (June 17, 2022)
<b>Straw man</b>	Topos of educational decline	Caricatures gender studies as “ideological nonsense”	Justifies censorship as protection of “real” knowledge	Weidel [16] (January 11, 2025)

Fallacy	Topos	Argumentative Function	Discursive Effect	Example (Post)
<b>Appeal to emotion</b>	Topos of cultural threat	Uses isolated cases to generalize the Islamic culture as oppressive	Fuels civilizational dichotomy (“West vs. others”)	Purra [57] (January 22, 2025)
<b>Circular reasoning</b>	Topos of betrayal	Assumes elite betrayal a priori to justify border closures	Reinforces populist “people vs. traitors” narrative	Weidel [36] (September 17, 2023)
<b>Hasty generalization</b>	Topos of natural order	Idealizes the 1980s gender roles as a normative benchmark	Nostalgic framing positions feminism as disruptive	Purra [26] (October 29, 2024)

#### 5.4 Perspectivization and intensification/mitigation

The discursive strategies of perspectivization and intensification/mitigation work together in the femonationalist rhetoric to construct speaker positioning and shape how strongly or mildly messages are conveyed. While analytically distinct, their functional interdependence becomes clear in practice: perspectivization establishes the speaker’s standpoint (e.g., as a victim or authority), while intensification/mitigation adjusts the affective impact of that positioning through rhetorical amplification or softening. Together, these strategies enable the characteristic calculated ambivalence of right-wing populist gender discourse, allowing speakers to shift strategically between vulnerability and dominance.

An example emerges from Alice Weidel’s interview with Nius (November 16, 2023 [60]; see Appendix 1, ex. 12), where she employs autobiographical perspectivization to authenticate her anti-immigration stance.

As a girl, as a teenager, I experienced firsthand what it means to be at a public swimming pool; what we are now seeing happening on a massive scale – the insults from Muslim boys my age. Even back then, I found it misogynistic and repulsive.

By recalling how Muslim boys allegedly harassed her at a public pool, she draws a direct line between her personal experience and her political stance. This narrative positioning grounds ideological claims in embodied authenticity, intensifies through visceral predication (*misogynistic and repulsive*), and mitigates the potential critiques of xenophobia by framing the speaker as a credible witness. In the same video, Weidel uses her homosexuality as proof for personal threat:

These people [referring to Muslim men], who import this crime onto our streets – they are a threat to women’s rights and also to me as a lesbian woman, as a homosexual woman... I have no interest in being thrown off a rooftop with a sack over my head under Sharia law in a future Muslim-majority society.

The hyperbolic escalation – imagining *being thrown off a rooftop* under Sharia law – exemplifies a dramatic intensification that substitutes for evidentiary argumentation.

Riikka Purra’s defense statement, which she shared on Facebook (July 27, 2023 [64]; see Appendix 1, ex. 13) demonstrates the multimodal dimensions of these strategies. In a blog post, Purra justifies her past statements by referring to sexual harassment. She accuses the media of distorting the context by using the plural instead of the singular:

Had the sexual harassment been explicitly mentioned, the media wouldn’t have had to mock other points. When I called an audacious, sexually harassing man a ‘Turkish monkey,’ some media outlets reported that I was referring to Turkish people in general as monkeys – completely ignoring the harassment situation. Hesari [*Helsingin Sanomat*; a Finnish newspaper] from the very beginning used the plural ‘Turkish monkeys,’ even though I was specifically referring to the harasser in question, not to all people of that background.

Her linguistic mitigation of the *Turkish monkey* slur – narrowing it to a specific harasser rather than the whole ethnic group – combines with the visual symbolism of a white water lily (Figure 5) to create dissonance. The flower, evoking purity and vulnerability, functions as a visual mitigator that softens her extremist history through traditional femininity.



FIGURE 5. Excerpt from Riikka Purra’s Facebook post linking to her defense statement entry (July 27, 2023 [64]; © Riikka Purra, Facebook; accessed February 14, 2025).

These examples reveal the key rhetorical patterns in the strategic use of perspectivization and intensification/mitigation in the femonationalist discourse. First, personal narratives – such as Weidel’s recollection of her youth or Purra’s defense of her past statements – serve to legitimize ideological claims through biographical authenticity. Second, both politicians shape the emotional tone by combining hyperbolic intensification (e.g., Weidel’s *thrown off a rooftop*) with visual or stylistic mitigation (e.g., Purra’s symbolic use of the white water lily). Third, their ability to shift between positions of victimhood and moral authority – particularly in Purra’s self-presentation as both wronged and righteous – supports the construction of ambivalent subject positions central to the femonationalist rhetoric, as summarized in Table 5.

TABLE 5. Perspectivization and intensification/mitigation in the Facebook posts by Weidel and Purra (based on the examples discussed in the text).

Strategy	Example	Effect	Example (Post)
<b>(Autobiographical) perspectivization</b>	<i>I experienced firsthand ...</i>	“Authenticates” cultural threat narrative	Weidel [60] (November 16, 2023)
<b>Mitigation + visual framing</b>	<i>Turkish monkey defense + lily photo</i>	Softens extremism + evokes victimhood	Purra [64] (July 27, 2023)

## 6 Conclusion

This study has examined the Facebook posts of the right-wing populist (RWP) leaders Alice Weidel (AfD, Germany) and Riikka Purra (the Finns Party, Finland) from 2022 to early 2025, analyzing how they employ the femonationalist rhetoric through calculated ambivalence. Rather than identifying contrasting styles, the Discourse-Historical Approach reveals shared rhetorical strategies that blend anti-feminist positions with selective appeals to women’s rights. The analysis focused on five discursive strategies (see Reisigl 2018): nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation, showing how these interact to construct persuasive yet contradictory messages about gender, threat, and national belonging.

As part of the analytical process, 66 thematically relevant Facebook posts were identified and classified into three categories: (1) Feminism/Gender Roles, (2) Threat of Muslim Men/Islamism, and (3) Personal Narratives. While the first two categories reflect the core dimensions of the femonationalist rhetoric (namely anti-feminism and anti-Muslim narratives), the third category captures a distinct rhetorical feature of the two female party leaders. These autobiographically grounded posts do not

constitute a general element of the femonationalist discourse but rather illustrate how gendered self-representation can function as a personalized extension of the broader strategy. Together, these categories provided the thematic foundation for the subsequent strategy-based discourse analysis.

A central finding is the strategic use of nomination and predication to construct Muslim men as a homogeneous threat (*young men from Muslim-majority societies*) while delegitimizing feminist policies as irrational or ideological (*woke madness, nanny state mentality*). These dual framings enable performative contradiction: the ability to appear as defenders of women's rights while advancing exclusionary politics. Argumentation strategies frequently combine culturally resonant topoi (e.g., protection, decline, betrayal) with rhetorical fallacies. Examples include Purra's slippery slope argument, in which she links drag queen storytelling to an alleged mental health crisis, and Weidel's straw man reduction of gender studies to ideological indoctrination. These arguments are emotionally charged yet lack empirical grounding.

Such claims gain credibility through perspectivization, particularly in terms of autobiographical references. Personal narratives – such as Weidel's recollection of harassment in public spaces or Purra's defense of her past statements – authenticate ideological claims by anchoring them in lived experience. These accounts are further amplified through intensification (*being thrown off a rooftop*) or visually mitigated, as in Purra's symbolic use of the white water lily. Together, these discursive moves create a calculated ambiguity that allows the speakers to shift fluidly between the roles of emancipated leaders and women under threat.

The findings contribute to three key scholarly debates. First, they refine the concept of femonationalism (Farris 2017; Dietze 2022) by operationalizing it through discourse-analytical categories, showing how gender equality is instrumentalized for nationalist aims. Second, they offer insights into the gendered dimensions of right-wing populism (Spierings et al. 2015; Dietze 2018) by demonstrating how female leadership enables specific forms of identity performance that may appear progressive while promoting exclusion. Third, the analysis illustrates how calculated ambivalence functions as a strategic resource in political communication (Gadinger & Simon 2019; Reisigl 2020): contradiction does not weaken the message but enhances its adaptability and emotional appeal in digital contexts.

At the same time, this study has limitations. It focuses on curated Facebook posts and does not include user interactions, cross-platform dynamics, or longitudinal changes in rhetorical framing. Future research could extend the scope by comparing the rhetorical strategies on platforms such as TikTok or YouTube, examining shifts when parties move from opposition to government, or analyzing similar actors in other national settings (e.g., Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni).

Ethically, the analysis points to a central tension: while the posts address real concerns such as gender-based violence, they do so through reductive and xenophobic framings that present migration as the core threat. This instrumentalization

of feminist concerns demands critical scrutiny. A challenge for researchers and civil society alike is to acknowledge the legitimate concerns without reinforcing the exclusionary narratives that co-opt them. Legal gender equality, while foundational, remains incomplete and should not be misused to justify illiberal agendas.

Ultimately, the study shows how femonationalism operates as a sophisticated digital discourse strategy. In the Facebook posts analyzed, gender is not treated as a substantive policy issue but as a flexible rhetorical resource – one whose contradictions serve to legitimize exclusionary politics. By unpacking these strategies, the analysis contributes to critical discourse research and highlights the urgency of understanding how right-wing populist narratives normalize themselves through the language of equality, security, and authenticity.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1. Facebook posts in the original language

Example (Ex).	Source Reference	Original Quotation
Ex. 1	Weidel 2022, January 13	“EU-Kommissionspräsidentin Ursula von der Leyen will [...] eine EU-weite Frauenquote von 40 Prozent in den Aufsichtsräten großer Unternehmen durchsetzen. Statt sich um die echten Probleme in Europa zu kümmern, reitet Frau von der Leyen wieder die ewig gleichen ideologischen Steckenpferde. Ihre Frauenquote [...] ist diskriminierend und überflüssig. Von der Leyens Frauenquote ist zudem ein Schlag ins Gesicht all jener Frauen, die sich ihre berufliche Position ganz ohne Nanny-Staat aus eigener Kraft und Leistung erarbeitet haben. [...] Die bekennende “Quotenfrau” Ursula von der Leyen liefert [...] ein weiteres Zeugnis ihrer Überforderung [...] ab.”
Ex. 2	Weidel 2023, September 17	“In einem [Flüchtlingsheim] musste eine Frauenstatue, ‘ne nackte Frau, musste abgebaut werden, weil man musste ja verhindern, dass die jungen Männer, sind ja alles Flüchtlinge aus muslimisch geprägten Gesellschaften, dass denen nicht irgendwie die Tassen aus dem Schrank fallen, wenn die ‘ne nackte Frau sehen. Darum musste das weg. Was ich damit eigentlich sagen will - es klingt so lustig und absurd - es ist so traurig, dass diese Menschen, die für diese Politik verantwortlich sind, die in der Regierung sind, die eigenen Werte, das eigene Land, so schändlich verraten für solche Leute. Darum sagen wir: Grenzen dicht.”
Ex. 3	Purra 2024, October 28	“Kun arvioimme asioita tasa-arvon ja syrjimättömyyden kautta, eivät kaikki kulttuurit ja elämäntavat ole yhtä hyviä. [...] on esimerkiksi lukemattomasti kulttuureita, joissa naiset eivät ole tasa-arvoisia miehen kanssa [...]”
Ex. 4	Purra 2025, January 22	“Irakissa on uutisten mukaan hyväksytty laki, joka käytännössä laillistaa avioliitot jopa 9-vuotiaiden tyttöjen kanssa antaessaan islamilaisille oikeustulkinnolle yhä enemmän valtaa. Erityisesti konservatiiviset shiialaiset lainsäätäjät kannattivat muutosta, jotta laki voidaan “mukauttaa islamilaisiin periaatteisiin” ja jotta voidaan “vähentää lännen vaikutusta irakilaiseen kulttuuriin”. Ajatelkaa, mitä hirviömyyttä. Pikkutyttöjen naittamista mahdollistava lainsäädäntö! Ja joidenkin mielestä kulttuureita tai uskontoja ei saisi arvottaa toisiaan vastaan!”
Ex. 5	Purra 2022, April 13	“Mutta kyse on kehityksistä saapuvasta massasiirtolaisuudesta ja maahanmuuttajien jälkeläisistä. Lähi-idästä ja Afrikasta saapuvat henkilöt eivät keskimäärin kotoudu minnekään läntiseen maailmaan. Kyse ei ole kotoutumisen epäonnistumisesta, poliisien resursseista tai koronasta. Kyse on siitä, että Suomessa on ihmisiä, joiden ei pitäisi olla täällä.”

Example (Ex).	Source Reference	Original Quotation
Ex. 6	Purra 2023, October 29	"Saksaa on puolustettava vapauden vastaisilta ja primitiivisiltä tavoilta ja arvoilta, jotka erityisesti tietyistä kulttuuripiireistä ja alueilta saapuvat."
Ex. 7	Purra 2025, January 5	"EU-maiden korkeat vieraat matkasivat Syyriaan uutta hallintoa tapamaan. Agendalla oli, uskokaa tai älkää, naisten oikeuksista keskustelamista. Huonosti alkoi. Syyrian uusi johtaja ei kätellyt Saksan naispuolista ulkoministeriä, ja koko henkilö jopa pikselöitiin uutiskuvista. Häntä ei ikään kuin ole olemassa."
Ex. 8	Weidel 2022, March 8	"Feminismus bringt kein Essen auf den Tisch! [...] Ideologisch verblendet werden mit dem internationalen Frauentag hauptsächlich die Bereiche Gendern und Quote verbunden, während sich die Ampel-Regierung den wirklichen Problemen der Frauen in Deutschland vollständig verschließt [...]"
Ex. 9	Purra 2022, June 17	"Ensin vähän drag-satua vauhtiin pääsemiseksi. Glitteriä, meikkiä, partaa, kaikkea värikästä ja hassua. [...] Ehkä sen miettimistä, onko mitään naisia, miehiä, äitejä ja isejä olemassakaan. Miksi juuttua binäärisyyteen. [...] Ei tämä ole dystopiaa. Tämä on jokapäiväistä totta. Ja sitten poliitikoilta kysytään: Mitä voisimme tehdä käsiin räjähtäneiden mielenterveyshäiriöiden kanssa? Jaa-a. Mitä jos ensi alkuun lopettaisimme lastemme ja nuortemme pään sekoittamisen?"
Ex. 10	Weidel 2025, January 11	"Wir schließen alle Gender Studies und schmeissen diese Professoren raus! Sooo! Unsere Kinder, unsere Jugend, die jungen Leute müssen wieder was Vernünftiges an den Universitäten, an den Schulen lernen!"
Ex. 11	Purra 2024, October 29	"Tuolloin 1980-luvulla miehet eivät synnyttäneet eikä kukaan tainnut pitää sitä kovin huonona asiana. Naiset kyllä synnyttivät enemmän kuin nyt."
Ex. 12	Weidel 2023, November 16	"Ich durfte das erleben als Mädchen, als Teenager, was das bedeutet, im Freibad zu sein; also das, was wir eigentlich heute massenhaft erleben; so an Beleidigungen von gleichaltrigen muslimischen Jungs und ich fand das damals schon frauenverachtend und abstoßend. [...] Diese Leute, die das mitbringen, die diese Kriminalität auf unsere Straßen importieren; die Freiheitsrechte der Frau und auch mir als lesbische Frau, als eine homosexuelle Frau... Ich habe doch keine Lust, dann später von einer muslimischen Mehrheitsgesellschaft nach dem Scharia-Gesetz vom Dach gestürzt zu werden mit einem Sack überm Kopf."
Ex. 13	Purra 2023, July 27	"Mikäli seksuaalinen ahdistelu olisi tuotu selvästi esille, ei median olisi tarvinnut narrata muissakaan kohdissa: Kun olen kuvannut röyhkeää seksuaalisesti ahdistelevaa miestä "turkkilaisapinaksi", osa mediasta on kertonut minun kuvaavan yleensä turkkilaisia ihmisiä apinoiksi – siis poistaen koko häirintätilanteen. Hesari alusta saakka käytti monikossa termiä "turkkilaisapinat", vaikka minä puhuin kyseisestä väärin toimivasta henkilöstä, en suinkaan kaikista kyseisen taustan ihmisistä."

## APPENDIX 2. Original quotations from literature

Example (Ex.)	Source Reference	Original Quotation
Ex. 1	Reisigl 2020: 213	“Wir sehen also, dass der Rechtspopulismus zwar insgesamt eine klare geschlechterdiskriminierende Schlagseite aufweist, es finden sich aber auch strategische Äußerungen, die sich gegen die Diskriminierung von Frauen richten.”
Ex. 2	Henninger 2020: 17	“als Bezeichnung für die Kooptation feministischer Anliegen (und einzelner feministischer Aktivist*innen) für nationalistische und neoliberale Kampagnen gegen den Islam und gegen Zuwanderung”
Ex. 3	Dietze 2018: 39	“Die weibliche Führungsperson repräsentiert ja beides, einerseits die ‚Emanzipation‘, sonst wäre sie keine Parteiführerin geworden, und andererseits über die Sichtbarkeit ihres weiblichen Körpers eine persönliche Verletzbarkeit, worüber z. B. die Notwendigkeit einer fremdenfeindlichen Sicherheitspolitik argumentiert werden kann. ”
Ex. 4	Reisigl 2020: 212	“Populist*innen [beziehen sich] affirmativ und rechtfertigend auf das Volk, das es zu vertreten gelte.”

**APPENDIX 3. List of the analyzed Facebook posts by Weidel and Purra**

Number of the post	Date published	Number of the post	Date published	Number of the post	Date published
[1]	1/13/2022	[23]	1/21/2024	[45]	11/30/2024
[2]	1/29/2022	[24]	6/5/2024	[46]	12/7/2024
[3]	3/8/2022	[25]	10/16/2024	[47]	12/24/2024
[4]	6/22/2022	[26]	10/29/2024	[48]	1/25/2025
[5]	7/12/2022	[27]	11/25/2024	[49]	1/30/2022
[6]	9/10/2022	[28]	1/5/2025	[50]	4/13/2022
[7]	11/25/2022	[29]	4/19/2022	[51]	11/4/2022
[8]	1/10/2023	[30]	9/7/2022	[52]	8/14/2023
[9]	8/23/2023	[31]	11/29/2022	[53]	12/27/2023
[10]	8/28/2023	[32]	1/26/2023	[54]	10/28/2024
[11]	9/4/2023	[33]	7/17/2023	[55]	11/11/2024
[12]	9/11/2023	[34]	8/8/2023	[56]	12/27/2024
[13]	4/8/2024	[35]	8/14/2023	[57]	1/22/2025
[14]	5/25/2024	[36]	9/17/2023	[58]	8/8/2022
[15]	1/5/2025	[37]	11/7/2023	[59]	9/22/2023
[16]	1/11/2025	[38]	11/14/2023	[60]	11/16/2023
[17]	6/17/2022	[39]	1/31/2024	[61]	12/7/2024
[18]	10/18/2022	[40]	4/10/2024	[62]	7/10/2023
[19]	2/9/2023	[41]	6/25/2024	[63]	7/14/2023
[20]	3/8/2023	[42]	7/8/2024	[64]	7/27/2023
[21]	3/21/2023	[43]	9/11/2024	[65]	8/4/2023
[22]	10/29/2023	[44]	11/13/2024	[66]	8/8/2023