

Representations of Contemporary Feminist Protest in Germany and the UK

PhD in German

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I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

This thesis is situated within the increasing visibility of feminism in the public sphere in Germany and the UK. Case studies of three contemporary feminist groups, representing two forms of protest, comprise this study: FEMEN, an exclusive group who perform topless public protests across Europe; #aufschrei, an online anti-sexism campaign in Germany; and the Everyday Sexism Project, another online anti-sexism campaign in the UK which was a precursor to #aufschrei. I have selected texts from three different locations from the year 2013: self-representation online, including FEMEN's reporting on their protests and the stories of sexism shared on the hashtag feminist groups' websites; mainstream news media representation via online articles from four major newspapers per country, with a range of left and right-leaning and tabloid and broadsheet newspapers; and the discussion forum comments from these online news articles, which provide a view into more 'general public' discourse.

The aim of this study is not to provide a comparison across countries or media types, but to explore the ways that feminist protest is represented in different locations: how is it constructed and legitimated by the groups themselves? How is it negotiated, supported or rejected in the news media and discussion forum comments? I work with a theoretical framework provided by Discourse Theory and linguistic analytical tools from CDA, namely, social actor theory and contextually constructed opposition. Discourse Theory is well-suited to understanding the construction of identity and conflict, a feature of much of feminist discursive terrain, but it lacks analytical tools for detailed linguistic research. Therefore, as well as providing knowledge about representations of contemporary feminist protest, this study also provides a contribution to developing the methodological rigour of Discourse Theory.

For hope

Acknowledgements

I started my doctoral research in September 2014 and I am writing these acknowledgements just before submission in February 2018. For me, this thesis acts a mini time capsule filled with the many events of the last forty or so months, personal and political. The personal outlook I had in those early months when I first wrote my literature review (the first draft of which is referenced in the introduction to the review), as well as the world I was writing it in, feels a significant distance away from where I am now.

On a personal level, I suffered from RSI which put writing back for six months or so, left a long-term relationship, lived out of my car and slept on sofas for six weeks, moved out of my family home (again!) and put roots down in Reading, lived consecutively with two new friends, suffered a horror winter fraught with illness and antagonism that earned our house the name Plague House, embarked on a wonderful new relationship, made firm new PhD friends, helped move the family home to Reading, lived in Hamburg over a summer, as well as took a number of other European trips. I took up knitting and crocheting with a vengeance and joined the local Labour Party, with some trepidation doing my first leafleting and door-stepping. I also finish the PhD with my paternal grandparents having experienced a number of unfortunately timed accidents and illnesses, a reminder of the fragility of life and the importance of personal relationships over all else.

On a political level, we (at Plague House) felt the deepest despair in 2016, with Brexit, the Trump election and the Conservatives soaring in the polls. I remember how we used to talk about how sick we felt at being so unrepresented by democratic decisions that were out of our hands. This political turmoil, coupled with turbulent personal financial situations that signified the onward march of neoliberal capitalism, affected us in a deeply emotional way that I had never imagined possible. But the 2017 General Election gave us hope, as the political debate shifted and opened, and our left wing ideas have gained more public currency. Although we have seen a dangerous increase in polarisation in politics, at least what we do have now is, to some extent, a legitimisation of the left, of the young and of a different way of seeing the world; we have an opposition leader who, for all his faults, supports and has always supported women's rights, LGBT rights, multiculturalism and minority rights, refugees

and the NHS, as well as ending privatisation, tax evasion and homelessness. I finish this thesis, too, in the wake of the international Women's Marches against Trump, the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in the UK (a year before Germany), #MeToo and #TimesUp and the revival of the feminist society at the University of Reading. It feels, in some way, like forward movement.

And so to personal thanks.

Firstly, The Pool: together we have racked up hours of conversation, sometimes serious, sometimes funny, sometimes supportive, but always ridiculous and full of dozens of private jokes we don't even understand anymore. The PhD years have often felt like extended student years: we trade wealth (in disposable income, savings and general long term financial security) for flexible working hours, spontaneous and long lunches and a great, natural sense of community. There is no greater and more natural sense of community than with you. In particular, fellow Plague House occupant Carl, I treasure our long Sunday morning chats and I'm glad to say that we both come to the end of the PhD more expert at putting the world to rights than we are at anything else.

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Fourthly, I would like to acknowledge the Department of Modern Languages and European Studies, which provided my first university home back in 2009 when the German Department and the Italian Department were two floors apart. This department has been beyond welcoming and supportive and I am proud to be a product of MLES at the University of Reading. In particular, thank you to the passionate and enthusiastic Federico Faloppa who first, and tirelessly, encouraged me into postgraduate study, and to PGR directors Daniela La Penna and Par Kumaraswami: MLES is full of exemplary women – formidable, intelligent, passionate and caring academics – and you are two of them. I also thank the AHRC South West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership for providing my scholarship. My personal experience has also been enriched by the networking and funding opportunities provided by the DTP; I am proud to have been part of the first cohort and to leave seeing the community flourish and grow. The DTP also allowed me to have Virpi Ylännä (Cardiff) as my second supervisor and I thank her for her encouragement and time.

Fifthly, Melani Schröter: undergraduate personal tutor and lecturer, M(Res) lecturer and dissertation supervisor and finally my PhD supervisor. You really are the reason that I was able to start and finish this PhD, from first stoking my interest in critical academics, politics and discourse as an undergraduate, to designing and delivering almost the entirety of my M(Res), to guiding me through the PhD process. You have provided, and continue to provide, endless advice on research, academia and life more generally, as well as an environment for teaching and research that has allowed me autonomy and independence, explicitly teaching me the value of these two qualities, all while completing your own impressive to-do list. Quite simply, you are one of the most amazing people I will ever know.

Finally, to the courageous and defiant feminists whose unpaid labour has contributed the data for this thesis: I recognise and am in awe of your bravery and your strength. I have spent four years and 90,000 words (and more) on your work, but it is you that went out, actually spoke up and acted, and you continue to do so every day. Thank you.

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1 Introduction

As noted by Dean (2009), we do not have to go far to find feminist discourse or discourse about feminism today. In Germany and the UK, and beyond, feminism is increasingly visible in the public sphere (Baer, 2016; Benton-Greig, Gamage & Gavey, 2017; Crossley, 2017; Dean, 2009, 2010; Gill, et al., 2016; Jonsson, 2014; Mendes, 2015b; Scharff, 2013; Smith-Prei & Stehle, 2016). Feminist protest, as the public declaration of feminist aims and objectives, is an important part of feminism (Ramazanoğlu, 1989). Furthermore, it is largely feminist protests, as discrete events, that are the subject of news media coverage, such as the SlutWalk (Mendes, 2015b). It is the job of the news media to convey information about events in the world, and for feminism to be a successful political project, it needs to spread beyond its existing supporters and be present in traditionally non-feminist locations such as these. Understanding how contemporary *feminist protest* is constructed, then, is a vital part of understanding how contemporary *feminism* is constructed.

The aim of this study is to map out part of the ‘discursive terrain’ (Scharff, 2013) of contemporary feminist protest in Germany and the UK through multiperspectival linguistic case studies of three contemporary protest groups: FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project. Working with a concept of discourse drawn from the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, I believe that feminism occupies a political, that is, contested space and the language used to talk about feminist groups both reflects and constitutes the contested nature of feminism. I use tools of linguistic analysis developed within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to understand how the groups and their actions are named, described, justified and situated within the wider understanding of feminism; these tools are van Leeuwen’s (2008) analysis of texts as a recontextualisation of social practice and Jeffries’s (2010) work on opposition in discourse. Multiperspectival case studies that I am using in this project are useful for highlighting subtleties in the workings of different discursive constructions that may not have been clear with a singular case study (Howarth, 2005). The three different textual locations that provide my data, which I discuss in more detail below, present three varying perspectives on feminist protest: a feminist view (self-representation of the groups) and two that are not inherently feminist but cover feminist protest from an outsider’s perspective

(newspapers and comment sections); for the latter comment sections, these contain many voices and many views compared to the newspapers, which are much more limited. It is not the aim of this thesis to provide an overarching or comprehensive definition of feminism or to trouble any existing definition. I have therefore gathered existing academic work on feminism for the literature review and the data from the groups for the analysis by relying on the self-declarations or affiliations with feminism from the authors and the founders themselves, without judgement on whether that fits external criteria for specifically feminist work or protest.

For the first location of feminist discourse, I investigate how FEMEN construct themselves and their actions on their website, and how stories shared on the websites of #aufschrei (Germany) and The Everyday Sexism Project (UK) construct this predominantly online form of protest. These cases represent diverse aspects of contemporary protest: FEMEN are an exclusive group most well-known for topless and deliberately shocking protests against abortion and prostitution, amongst other things (Reestorff, 2014); #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project are part of what has become known as ‘hashtag feminism’: collective stories of personal experience are gathered together to demonstrate that sexism and discrimination against women is a structural, pervasive and ultimately still pertinent problem (Sadowski, 2016). Although my data shows that there is little collective agreement on the exact meaning and realisation of sexism, as a form of general discrimination based on gender, sexism is a key concern for feminists (Attenborough, 2012; Gill, 2011; Ramazanoğlu, 1989; Valentine, Jackson & Mayblin, 2014).

For the second location, I turn to the mainstream news media and the online articles of major newspapers and news magazines that report on the groups. The mainstream news media, even online, continues to be the main source of information of the world beyond people’s own experience (Bednarek & Caple, 2012), therefore I believe it is important to explore similarities, patterns and points of tension between news articles and the groups’ own output.

As a final and third location, I look at the “below the line” (henceforth BTL) comments sections of the online news articles to gain an insight into how readers construct opinions of, firstly, the feminist protest groups and, secondly, the news reporting on these groups. I believe that

this aspect adds richness to current understandings about news reporting of feminism, which often do not go beyond the article itself. Readers are able to negotiate the messages that they receive (Hall, 1980) and do not necessarily have to accept the predominantly negative images of feminism that are present in the mainstream media (Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012; Mendes, 2011a).

The structure of this thesis is as follows: firstly, I outline the theoretical discursive framework of this study; secondly, I conduct a review of current literature on contemporary feminism, its context and its challenges, as well as current literature on mediated representations of feminism and feminist protest; thirdly, I detail my method and the implication of the methodology laid out in my theoretical grounding; fourthly, I present my analysis and the discussion of this analysis across five chapters; and finally, I conclude with final reflections on the findings and the methodological process of the study, as well as a discussion of some of the limitations and next steps for the work.

1.1 Defining Discourse for this Thesis

“Discourse” is an unwieldy term, with almost as many academic definitions as there are researchers, as well as everyday definitions used in non-academic settings; different definitions can have vastly different implications for interpretations of the world, let alone analysis. Following recommendations from Wodak & Reisigl (2009), I begin my thesis with a clear definition of what I mean by “discourse”¹. I am working with a definition of discourse drawn from the post-structural, post-Marxist work of Ernesto Laclau and his collaborations with Chantal Mouffe, known broadly as Discourse Theory² and developed by the “Essex School” (Dahlberg & Phelan, 2011a; Howarth & Torfing, 2005; Laclau, 1990; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). One aim of this study is to demonstrate that Discourse Theory has a useful application for feminism in understanding the struggle for a feminist

¹ Wodak & Reisigl (2009) write specifically about CDA here, but I think that this is an important point to make for any researcher doing anything that she would consider as coming under the umbrella of “discourse analysis”.

² I understand that, as a combination of the abstract terms ‘discourse’ and ‘theory’, this name can appear vague, but I am referring to the specific theoretical approach of Laclau and Mouffe and the Essex School, as opposed to, for example, Critical Discourse Analysis or Conversation Analysis.

identity and the definition of feminist politics. I endeavour to demonstrate this throughout my literature review as well as in my analysis.

The discourse theoretical approach is heavily influenced by the structural linguistics of Saussure and the post-structural developments in linguistics that followed (Laclau, 1995; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Smith, 1998). Saussure identified the arbitrary nature between the signifier (word) and signified (the concept, the object that is being named): there is no necessary or essential connection between an object and the unit of letters that describes it (Laclau, 1995; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). This is perhaps best illustrated by the proliferation of different languages in the world, each one assigning a different signifier to the same signified, for example, “woman”, “die Frau”, “la donna”. This arbitrariness means that the connection between the signifier and the signified can be stretched, challenged or broken as well as maintained. Additionally, Saussure highlighted the negative nature of language, whereby no words can be defined in and of themselves, independently of other words; a word can only be understood through its relation to other words, through what it is not (Laclau, 1995). We do not understand “die Frau” from something essential within the sign itself, we understand it from its differential relations to “der Mann” (complementarity), “das Mädchen” (adult-child), “der Mensch” (hyponymy), and so on. This is known in Laclau and Mouffe’s work as the logic of difference (Dahlberg & Phelan, 2011b; Laclau, 1993; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Torfing, 1999). Meaning can never be permanently fixed because, firstly, there is no single principle underlying the differential relations between signs and because, secondly, the signifier-signified relation is arbitrary and there is no objective meaning or truth to discover (Barrett, 1991; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002); this, in particular, is crucial for the emancipatory perspective of Discourse Theory (Dahlberg & Phelan, 2011b; Glynos & Howarth, 2007).

In their leading work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001)³, Laclau and Mouffe define discourse thus:

³ For chronological clarity: I am quoting from a second edition that contains a new foreword; the first edition was published in 1985.

[W]e will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 91, emphasis in original).

Although a long quote, it captures the basic points about the definition of discourse that I am working with in this project, and I explain them in more detail below.

Discourse is described by Laclau and Mouffe as a structured totality created by the articulation together of elements, which we can also call signs; it is a partial fixity of meaning, an attempt to 'arrest the flow of differences' (Barrett, 1991: 67). This is where the tension between the arbitrary nature of the sign and the conventional nature of the sign comes into view: some form of agreement, however arbitrary or temporary, needs to be reached between people about the meaning of signs, otherwise communication is impossible.

The articulation of signs involves the logics of equivalence and difference which govern the relations between signs: very roughly put, these logics govern what a sign is and what it is not, respectively. To structure a discourse, the equivalential relations between signs are emphasised and the differential relations between them are mitigated or backgrounded. This 'modifies' (see quote above) the sign, hence the differentiation between 'element' and 'moment'. To use an upcoming example from my analysis, the discourse of sexism in #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project involves articulating together different actions, such as groping, staring and making jokes reliant on gender stereotypes. These three signs are equivocated together as examples of sexism. To do this, potential differential relations between them are mitigated: groping is physical contact, staring is non-physical and non-verbal, and jokes are non-physical but verbal. The result of this act of equivocation is called a chain of equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Smith, 1998; Torfing, 1999). As discussed, meaning is derived from differential relations, the logic of difference, so a chain of equivalence is ultimately given structure and therefore meaning by what is excluded. The discourse of sexism, then, is an articulation *together*, or equivocation, of actions (groping,

staring, jokes) *through* an articulation *away* from differential characteristics of these actions (physicality, audibility).

Further to this, signs in a discourse are articulated together around nodal points or privileged signs, which structure and organise the discourse. Nodal points are the signs that are most central to understanding the discourse. Phillips & Jørgensen (2002: 26) use the example of “the body” in medical discourse, which organises the meanings of other words, such as “scalpel”, “symptom” and “tissue”: scalpels are used to cut into the body, symptoms are determined changes on or in the body and tissue is a part of the body, and so on. Nodal points are empty signifiers, meaning that the signifier-signified relation is weaker than with other signs (Dean, 2009; Torfing, 1999). They become emptied of meaning as they anchor together a discursive chain and they are particularly visible when discourses come into conflict as different groups struggle to fill and fix the empty signifier with their own meaning (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). To use the example from Phillips & Jørgensen (2002) again, medical discourse is in conflict with homeopathic discourse, which attempts to articulate “the body” as a holistic object, rather than divided into separate organs. The nodal points from my previous example on the discourse of sexism include “sexism” and “everyday”, but I return to these in more detail in my analysis.

The meaning of a sign derives from what it excludes, also known as its constitutive outside, a notion described as ‘radical contingency’ (Laclau, 1993; Torfing, 1999). Applied on a larger scale, the same is true for discourses, as an articulation of signs. As a result, a discourse is always under threat from what it has excluded. This results in a state of both possibility and impossibility: possibility, because the constitutive outside of a sign – by extension, a discourse – allows the temporary stabilisation of meaning, but impossibility, because this constitutive outside also means that a complete and ultimate fixity of meaning can never be reached (Barrett, 1991; Laclau, 1993; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). For example, the discourse of sexism that I have described above is threatened by BTL commenters highlighting the logic of difference in physicality between groping, staring and jokes, thereby claiming that they cannot be considered together as equal examples of sexism⁴.

⁴ I return to and expand on this point in Chapter 4.

A common criticism of post-structural approaches and Laclau and Mouffe's in particular is that they are perceived to be presenting change as easy (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Torfing, 1999). I think that what is important to remember is that the presentation of these approaches always occurs in a context and *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* appeared in a time of emerging socio-political change in the early 80s (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Laclau and Mouffe present Discourse Theory, as a post-structural approach, as emancipatory in comparison to other structuralist approaches that occupy a similar academic and theoretical space. Discourse Theory is selling the potential for change, meaning that much of the explanation is therefore spent on describing this potential. Stabilisation of discursive meaning through convention and agreement is what allows communication between people and it is the basis of the social (a term I return to below). It is the notion of the radical contingency of discourse, however, that gives this approach to discourse its analytical and political potential: the way things are now are not the way that they have to stay (Dahlberg & Phelan, 2011b; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Torfing, 2005).

Discourse is understood by Laclau and Mouffe to be a 'a theoretical horizon' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1990: 109), which is a description of the fact that nothing can exist outside of articulation within a discourse and still be meaningful to us (Barrett, 1991; Laclau & Mouffe, 1990, 2001; Torfing, 1999). Laclau and Mouffe have used a number of examples to illustrate this, such as a stone continues to be a stone whether or not people are around, but we cannot comprehend the stone outside of a meaning, whether it is as a part of nature, a geological process, a projectile, a decoration (Laclau & Mouffe, 1990). We can never go beyond discourse, hence it becomes our theoretical horizon (Laclau & Mouffe, 1990; Torfing, 1999). The systems of meaning-making available to us include more than language and other semiological signs, to include material objects (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), so feminist discourse includes the material female body, *lila Latzhosen* (Holland-Cunz, 2003; Müller, 2004), the physical spaces of consciousness-raising circles and the street marches of the SlutWalk⁵, for example.

⁵ While I have cited SlutWalk a number of times as an example of feminist protest, I do not cover the SlutWalk, as it has been studied already in a number of ways, including an in-depth comparison of self-representation and newspaper coverage, along with feminist blogs, by Mendes (2015b). Darmon (2014) also gives a view into self-representation and media representation of the SlutWalk. Other work on SlutWalk includes: Baer (2016), Chateauvert (2013), Dow & Wood (2014), McNicol (2015), O'Keefe (2014) and Salime (2014).

Another common criticism of this approach to discourse is that it is idealistic and denies material reality. A lot of ink has been spilled defending this point⁶, and comes, I think, from a misunderstanding over what is meant by “discourse” (not helped by the proliferation of subtly different meanings). Discourse here is *meaning* and we can never escape meaning; material objects always mean something, as naturalised as they may seem. This criticism also comes with the implication that this line of thought means that nothing ultimately matters, because it is “just” a construction. I do not believe that this is a cause for concern: put tautologically, if everything is discourse, discourse is everything. Discourse is our understanding of ourselves and the things around us, our relationships to other people and to the world, how we think things are and how we think they should be. This approach is not a direct path to nihilism, but instead recognises the world as we know it as arbitrary (in the specific sense of having no necessary relation), contingent and changeable, and that objects are inseparable from meaning⁷.

A final criticism of Discourse Theory is that it ‘is adrift in relativist gloom’ (Torfing, 2005: 19) without anchor points of objective truths and values to aim to live by, but it is most easily countered with a simple look at our own lives, as pointed out by Jacob Torfing (2005: 19):

[W]e never find ourselves in a situation where we are prepared to contend that all claims are equally valid. We are always part of a particular discourse that provides us with a set of relatively determined values, standards, and criteria for judging something to be true or false, right or wrong, good or bad.

Meanings in language are agreed by convention, that is, by consensus of those taking part in the communicative event. Laclau draws a distinction between the political and social, whereby politics is understood as any site that contains antagonism and discursive struggle over meaning, rather than politics as tied to a particular institution, set of discourses or

⁶ See, for example, Barrett (1991), Dahlberg & Phelan (2011b), Glynos & Howarth (2007), Laclau (1993), Laclau & Mouffe (1990; 2001), Smith (1998), Torfing (1999; 2005).

⁷ Although Discourse Theory recognises the role of material objects in discourse, in this study I only look at linguistic constructions. I come to this project with a background and an interest in linguistics and language and, as I lay out in more detail later on, I believe that language is a key site for the construction of the meaning of feminism.

location (Dean, 2009). In contrast to the realm of the political, the realm of the social is constituted by sedimentation. Sedimented discourses appear to be the objective truth, or the natural way of things, and are not subject to contestation by different groups such as those in the political realm. Because of the nature of discourse, there can be no objective truth: sedimented discourses only make it *seem as though* there is (Laclau, 1990, 1993; Torfing, 1999). In sedimented discourses, conflict over meaning has been suppressed. For example, many everyday actions occupy the realm of social and are sedimented discourses, such as posting a letter, eating meals, taking the children to school or commuting to work, which we do without question (Laclau, 1993).

There are limits to how far an individual can push conventional meanings before they fail to communicate, therefore conventional, partially fixed – that is, sedimented – meanings are essential for the functioning of the social (Dean, 2009; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). The social, however, should not be understood as inherently negative, because meanings which are agreed upon, uncontested and taken for granted, allow us to live our lives relatively smoothly on a day-to-day basis with a certain amount of ostensible structure (Barrett, 1991; Laclau, 1993; Torfing, 1999). To expand on the schooling example given by Laclau (1993) and mentioned just above, the vast majority of people do not question the idea that we take our offspring to the same building every day, put them into groups according to a calendar year of birth and then impart knowledge on them that has been deemed necessary. The fact that we do not question it means that we get up and take our children to school every day. The limit of this discourse can be seen in the fact that parents have to ring the school if the child will be absent or that parents are fined for taking children out of school for holidays. This highlights, too, the difficulty for change that sedimentation can provide: schooling is required by law and if you provide no form of schooling for your child, you are at risk of your child being removed by state authorities. Stating that you do not believe in the discursive construction of schooling will not stop the force of the law.

Considering all of this, I would claim that feminism is discursive and it exists in a political space, rather than a social space, due to the intense contestation over what it means, what it should stand for and who its stands for, from both within and without (Ramazanoğlu, 1989). The term “feminism” itself is an empty signifier and different groups articulate together signs

according to their main concerns, such as “autonomy”, “equal pay” or “abortion”; or, indeed, anti-feminists articulate together signs such “victimisation of men” and “emasculatation” to create their negative discursive construction of feminism⁸. I have designed my study so that I can gain a view into this struggle in three locations (self-representation of the groups #aufschrei, the Everyday Sexism Project and FEMEN, as well as newspaper articles and comments sections covering the groups), as different people are involved in different discussions with different objectives at each location, which includes people who support feminism and those who reject feminism.

⁸ For an example of the latter chain of equivalence, see García-Favaro & Gill (2016).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction: Making Meaning out of 'Narratives' of Feminism

In this literature review, I focus on two aspects: the academic discussions about the value, place and diversity of contemporary feminism in Germany and the UK, including postfeminism; and existing academic work on mediated representations of feminism and feminist protest, including social media and newspaper media. Throughout the review I incorporate interpretations of the work according to my theoretical framework to demonstrate the value of insights from Discourse Theory for studying feminism. This review of the literature, along with my previous theoretical grounding, serves to illuminate and put into context my research questions, which conclude the review.

The work done by Claire Hemmings on 'telling feminist stories' (Hemmings, 2005, 2007) demonstrates that there are no neutral 'narratives'⁹ of feminist history. She identifies two predominant generalised narratives of feminist history told in Western academic feminism: that of decline in street protests and collective feminist practice and the rise of neoliberalism, resulting in the death of feminism as a political project; and that of the move from the privileged and problematic feminism of the 70s, through racial critiques of the 80s, to the notion of difference and the rise of postmodernism in the 1990s, generally seen as a positive progression of feminist thought (Hemmings, 2005). There is no definitive truth about the history of feminism, although we can do a lot better than these linear, generalised, Westernised and unreflexive narratives, therefore we should be explicit about what we trying to achieve with our particular constructions of feminism, because defining a feminist history allows you to define a feminist present (Hemmings, 2005; Jonsson, 2014).

Hemmings (2005: 17) notes other feminist theorists (and herself) using these constructions of feminist chronology as 'a kind of common-sense glass enabling them to move on to the more pressing concerns of their research'. In the very first draft of this literature review, I did

⁹ 'Narrative' is a term that Hemmings uses, hence my use of it here, which describes particular chronological constructions of feminist history. It is not a term that I use in my work, but my understanding of discourse could also be used in place of 'narrative'.

exactly the same: briefly charting the institutionalisation of feminism in Germany and the UK and detailing postfeminism and its neoliberal and individualistic aspects. I uncritically contrasted the pessimistic accounts of writers such as Holland-Cunz (2003) and McRobbie (2009) on the decay and ‘un-doing’ of feminism with documentation of increased feminist discussion in the public sphere in Germany and the UK, particularly that of the media (Dean, 2010; Hark & Kerner, 2007a; Mendes, 2015a, 2015b; Scharff, 2012, 2013), which is where I then situated my project. In terms of content, not much has changed in subsequent drafts of this review, but I would like to explicitly state that this project is part of an academic discourse that aims to bring some validation, with caveats and a critical academic eye, to current feminist discourses, alongside researchers such as Baer (2016), Budgeon (2001), Crossley (2017), Dean (2009), Harris (2008), Keller (2012), Scharff (2013) and Smith-Prei & Stehle (2014). This is born to some extent, of course, out of a sense of my own self-preservation as a proclaimed feminist, but also in recognition of the increasing visibility of the signifier “feminism”. While reserving judgement on these manifestations, this can be seen in the rise of feminist societies at universities, sales of popular non-fiction books, newspapers, through celebrity culture or in political campaigning (Dean, 2010; Scharff, 2013). It is important to bear in mind that the increasing visibility is not reflective of the same kind of feminist beliefs, objectives or practice across the board and choosing these groups for this thesis does not mean that I would necessarily choose to align myself with them.

This literature review now continues with a discussion of academic engagements with contemporary (post)feminism in Germany and the UK, as researchers aim to pin down, name and evaluate the different meanings of feminism that they encounter. As I stated above, I apply a discourse theoretical lens to the literature review in order to demonstrate its utility for studying feminism. This approach is particularly pertinent for Sections 2.2 and 2.3. In Section 2.2, I look at how we can understand work on feminism through the discourse theoretical concept of dislocation, explained in more detail below, and how the issues of power and social antagonism come into play when defining a feminist identity. In Section 2.3, I discuss feminism more broadly in light of the realm of the political, and particularly the political struggles of contemporary feminism. In Section 2.4, I cover existing literature on mediated representations of feminism in the newspapers and on social media, in order to put my own data on mediated representations into context.

2.2 Feminism as Dislocation: Power, Social Antagonism and Identity

The increased visibility of feminism has brought with it a large amount of debate around, against and within feminism (Casale, Gerhard & Wischermann, 2008; Dow & Wood, 2014; Scharff, 2013), but there is agreement that debate is a healthy sign of feminism's vitality and relevance, perhaps an essential and unavoidable part of it (Casale, et al., 2008; Dow & Wood, 2014). Coming from a discourse theoretical perspective, feminism is a dislocatory and therefore political discourse: taking up a feminist perspective means that you are identifying a problem with the current social gendered order, regardless of what it is you think is wrong and how or if you think it can and should be resolved (Ahmed, 2010; Ramazanoğlu, 1989). Glynos & Howarth (2007: 110) describe dislocation as 'a moment when the subject's mode of being is experienced as disrupted'. Dislocations make the radical contingency of social relations visible – the current structuring of society is not the only possible way – and make it possible for subjects to identify anew and challenge 'existing social relations in the name of a principle or ideal' through social antagonism (Glynos & Howarth, 2007: 112). For Laclau, political demands challenge existing norms or institutions (Dean, 2009; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) and feminism by definition challenges gender norms as well as potentially a host of institutional structures.

I would like to illuminate this discussion further by looking at identity, social antagonism and power in light of theorising on intersectionality, an analytical perspective for recognising the dynamics of intersecting social categories (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013), and postfeminism, an 'ambiguous' (Dean, 2009; Hinds & Stacey, 2001) contemporary discourse characterised by a complex negotiation of both a repudiation of feminism as a collective movement and a celebration of certain, very narrowly defined feminist concepts (Gill, 2007, 2017; McRobbie, 2009; Munford & Waters, 2014; Scharff, 2012).

2.2.1 Intersectionality and the Constitutive Outside

Laclau & Mouffe (2001) claim that the subject is discursively constructed rather than structured by their role in the mode of production (see also, for example, Barrett, 1991; Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002); in this way, they reject the economic determinism of classic Marxism¹⁰. The implication of this understanding is that, because identity is discursive, it is also beholden to the same logics as discourse. Identity is thus radically contingent: the link between the subject and the discursive identity is arbitrary, not essential, and a particular identity is always under threat from that which it excludes (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002; Torfing, 1999). We are discursively interpellated – “hailed”, of sorts; Laclau applies Louis Althusser’s theory of subject interpellation – into a number of different identities, or subject positions, throughout the day and throughout our lives, for example, passing from girlfriend to student to worker to daughter or sister, usually without noticing (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002).

When the subject is interpellated by two identities which exclude one another then the two discourses come into conflict, meaning that they are dislocated, and social antagonism occurs (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002; Torfing, 1999). This antagonism occurs because partial fixity of meaning involves exclusion of other meanings or identities, which is an act of power (Laclau, 1993). Because all identities are discursively constructed, all social relations are inevitably relations of power (Laclau, 1990, 1993). To this end, power in discourse theoretical terms can be found throughout society, not just residing within the police or the government, for example. Sedimented discourses, then, are where the traces of exclusion and power have become invisible and radical contingency has become obscured, and political discourses expose these power relations (Laclau, 1993; Phelan, 2011).

Cho, et al. (2013) recognise this inherent aspect of power in identity creation when they call for intersectional feminist studies to focus on the dynamics of power rather than drifting towards using the analytical tool to identify social categories as if they were static and clearly separable. Intersectionality developed from a black feminist perspective on the way black women were constructed by the law in the US, with Crenshaw (1991), who coined the term, demonstrating that black women were excluded simultaneously from definitions of “woman”

¹⁰ Hence the ‘post’ of their post-Marxist Discourse Theory.

and from “black”, with the default being “white” and “male”, respectively. White women could stand for all women, but black women could not, exposing the inherent racial construction of “woman” (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis & Zarkov, 2017; Devon, 2013). Intersectionality challenges these exclusions by making them visible, exposing taken-for-granted categories and identities and bringing them into realm of the political.

The political in Discourse Theory is characterised by the dynamics of the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Laclau, 1993; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002), developed from the syntagmatic and paradigmatic aspects of language (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Laclau, 1995; Torfing, 1999). As I have already explained, a discourse is created through the articulation of elements into chains of equivalence, where the differences between the elements are mitigated so that they can stand together around nodal points. These chains are always under threat from the differences between the elements and from that which they exclude: the constitutive outsides of the elements that at the same time constitute and threaten to destabilise them (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Laclau, 1993; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002; Torfing, 1999). The logic of equivalence holds elements together into a discourse, and the logic of difference is what separates elements. Both are necessary for the creation of meaning¹¹ and exist in permanent, but changeable, tension.

Intersectionality has travelled widely, if unevenly, from its home in black feminism in the US in the 80s (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013; Davis & Zarkov, 2017), not reaching Germany until the early 2000s (Kerner, 2012; Knapp, 2005; Lutz, 2014); however, it is a central term in much contemporary academic feminism (Davis & Zarkov, 2017). Current discussions about intersectionality even apply the logic of difference to intersectionality itself, as scholars question what “intersectionality” means, what it should mean, and what it should look like as a methodology¹². At its heart, however, intersectionality is about applying the logic of

¹¹ If two (or more) elements are truly equivalent, with no difference between them, then they will mean exactly the same thing and one will become redundant, therefore there will always be some level of difference between elements. As an example, synonyms still have subtle differences in connotation and usage, which can be dominated by formality, medium, region or lexical fashion, amongst other things (Singleton, 2000).

¹² Compare, for example, Cho, et al. (2013) arguing for closer attention to the historical roots of intersectionality and the erasure of black women and structural discrimination in more recent research, and Davis & Zarkov (2017) calling for closer interrogation of what it means to be a Muslim woman in Europe, considering the current political (in the everyday usage of the term) climate of rising right wing discourse. Knapp (2005) highlights how two of the ‘Big Three’ intersections of race, class and gender are not necessarily appropriate in a German

difference to sedimented discourses, making them political through the exposure of exclusions and silences, as mentioned above. While there are multiple definitions, similar to the diversity of definitions of discourse, all definitions revolve around complicating the field of study (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013), whether this is presented as, to take just two examples: ‘pluralization’ and ‘differentiation’ of the problem, with a complex multi-dimensional guide for analysis (Kerner, 2012); or the inadequacy of one category to describe individual experience, with analysis centring on the ‘dynamic interaction’ and interdependence of multiple categories in their specific socio-historical moments (Levon, 2015).

To demonstrate what an intersectional approach might look like, Mohanty’s (1988) influential essay *Under Western Eyes* clearly demonstrates the logic of equivalence in Western feminist academic work on non-Western societies, which elides a multitude of differences in socio-economic position, familial hierarchy and region to create “the Indian woman” or “the African woman”. She aims to dismantle these chains of equivalence by bringing to light local dynamics through careful re-examination of the case studies, that is, applying the logic of difference. These generalisations can be seen as part of securing a Western identity through the creation of an Other identity, articulating together vast Western-defined societies – Africa, Asia – whose only shared aspect is that of being non-Western (Torfing, 1999).

While this sub-section is designed to demonstrate what Discourse Theory can bring to feminist studies as a theoretical framework, it is also worth explaining what relationship intersectionality has to this particular study, given its importance to feminist studies in general. Levon (2015) has been central to the introduction of intersectionality to linguistic gender studies¹³. He advocates a broad approach that is sensitive to the specific context of the research, rather than repetitively adding in categories such as race, class, (dis)ability and so on (Levon, 2015), meaning intersectionality is more a sensibility or a perspective. This also means that the emergent intersections will differ across datasets. While intersectionality is

context, as “race” (“Rasse”) has connections to the Nazi past and “class” (“Klasse”) is an outdated term solely referring to Marxist theory. Carbin & Edenheim (2013) track and criticise the development of ‘intersectionality’ into a liberal consensus-building term that lacks theoretical rigour and precise definition, leaving it unusable for the women it was first designed to help.

¹³ See Baker & Levon (2016) or Dimitris, Milani & Levon (2018) for examples of recent work done with an explicitly intersectional perspective.

not something that I operationalise *per se* in this study, my method – discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 – is designed to critically analyse linguistic constructions of feminist discourse, including taking into account the logic of difference that is key to intersectional approaches. As is evident in the analysis chapters that follow Chapter 3, there is silencing within feminist discourse as well as silencing of feminists from anti-feminist locations such as the media. For example, FEMEN erase Muslim women from their own texts through intersections of religion and race (see Chapters 7 and 9), an erasure which is resonant with wider research on the ‘othering’ of Muslim women mentioned in Footnote 12 and investigated by, for example, Scharff (2011) and Weber (2015). There is also, at times, an erasure of men from the hashtag feminist groups’ discourse of the victims of sexism, which resonates with previous anti-feminist criticism of feminist groups (García-Favaro & Gill, 2016; Rosenbrock, 2012). As Lutz (2014) describes, intersectionality should be a radical moment of resistance to the silencing of inequalities, and this study is carried out in the same spirit.

2.2.2 Postfeminism and Hegemonic Re-articulations

Another key concept in contemporary feminist research is postfeminism. Around in its current guise since the 1980s¹⁴, it is very broadly used to describe changes in society which have been influenced in some way by feminism (Gamble, 2001; Gill, 2007; Lazar, 2009; Lumby, 2014; McRobbie, 2009). Although the term is used in a number of ways by different researchers – with a historical view of a backlash against feminism, or with a theoretical perspective alongside other ‘posts-’ such as postcolonialism and postmodernism (Elias, Gill & Scharff, 2017; Gamble, 2001; Gill, 2017; Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017; Lumby, 2014) – I will be working with the concept of postfeminism understood as a ‘sensitivity’, or, in discourse theoretical terms, as a discourse or set of discourses that sit in a particular socio-economic moment alongside other discourses that attempt to construct society; leading proponents of this approach are scholars such as Angela McRobbie (2009, 2015) and Rosalind Gill (2007, 2017).

¹⁴ Munford and Waters (2014) note that the first documented use of “postfeminism” was in the 1920s, to describe the period following first wave feminism and the campaign for suffrage in the West. This period was characterised by the flapper girl: glamorous and feminine, who revelled in the freedoms afforded to her by the feminism that preceded her, but who had seemingly forgotten that feminism and its struggle.

The aim of this sub-section is twofold: firstly, to introduce postfeminism, which is now ‘virtually hegemonic’ (Gill, 2017: 609) as a wider socio-political context for the feminist groups under study; and secondly, to demonstrate that Discourse Theory can also be applied to conceptualising postfeminism from a theoretical level, through presenting existing literature on the subject and applying the concepts of social antagonism and hegemonic articulation. A social antagonism, discussed in the previous sub-section and in Chapter 1, may be resolved through a hegemonic intervention, whereby one discourse dissolves its antagonistic outsider by re-articulating its elements so that it no longer poses a threat (Laclau, 1990; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002; Torfing, 1999). A hegemonic intervention is described by Laclau as a decision taken in an ‘undecidable terrain’ (Laclau, 1995: 433) and resembles our current notion of discourse in that it is concerned with fixing elements into moments through articulation. What makes an articulation *hegemonic* is that these take place across discourses that are antagonistic (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002; Torfing, 1999).

Beauty norms and aesthetic representations have always been a central antagonism in feminism as well as a target of feminist research (Elias, et al., 2017), but I argue here that this antagonism has been largely resolved through complex negotiations of empowerment and femininity. To demonstrate this, I focus on existing work on postfeminism and beauty advertising, although I do draw briefly from other domains. Feminism is antagonistic to the status quo by almost all contemporary understandings, but we cannot talk about one unified feminist discourse taking on one omnipresent hegemonic discourse. These are multifarious interactions that require individual attention to do real justice to the dynamics, the kind of approach proposed by Mohanty (1988; 2003), which is why I narrow my discussion of postfeminism to beauty advertising, and even within this there are more specific and detailed dynamics than I cannot fully cover here. The importance of studying sites such as the media, of which advertising forms a part, lies in their “everyday” nature and therefore continual role in the creation of the female subject: as McRobbie (2009: 21) describes: ‘relations of power are [...] made and re-made within texts of enjoyment and rituals of relaxation and abandonment’.

McRobbie (2009) conceptualises postfeminism through a ‘double entanglement’, whereby feminism is taken into account but then repudiated; feminism can be repudiated positively,

as its goals have been achieved and it is no longer necessary, or negatively, as it became too extreme and beyond what is necessary. Historically, feminism was valuable because it made gains for women and many feminist ideas are incorporated into contemporary common sense, the most obvious being women's suffrage, but now it has served its purpose and must be allowed to pass away, leaving its daughters to freely pursue their newly empowered lives on their own (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009).

It is postfeminism's relationship to feminism whilst fundamentally not *being* feminism that makes postfeminism such a slippery term. Scharff (2012), McRobbie (2009) and Munford & Waters (2014) describe postfeminism as 'haunted' by feminism; a deceased ancestor, it lurks in the background, in the corner of your eye, disappearing as soon as you try to grasp it. It is because of feminist struggles for female liberation and self-empowerment that women occupy the position they do today and that feminist perspectives, particularly that of gender equality, can be found throughout society, from the media to business to governing institutions (McRobbie, 2009). The figure of the feminist is, however, widely repudiated. Negative stereotypes of feminists as hairy, strident, humourless, homosexual and unfeminine are easily drawn upon by non-feminists and feminists alike, in both Germany and the UK (McRobbie, 2009; Scharff, 2012). For the latter group, Scharff (2012) highlights how a great deal of linguistic work is done even by contemporary feminists to deny or qualify these stereotypes when describing their own feminist identity, which displays how resonant they are. With feminism positioned as a policing and repressive force over women, the end of feminism signifies liberation and a freedom to *return* to a femininity denied by feminism (Gamble, 2001; Gill, 2008; Lazar, 2009, 2017; McRobbie, 2009). Postfeminism exists in a specific contemporary socio-economic context of neoliberalism, a concept only around in an influential way for three decades or so, but it also 'mobilises anachronism' (Munford and Waters, 2014: 10), drawing on images from pre-feminist times to create a path for the future (Genz, 2006). These images from the past can be seen, for example, in the revival of popular interest in baking, vintage fashion and homemaking (Munford & Waters, 2014). This is what Genz (2006) encapsulates when she writes that postfeminism is both progressive and retrogressive.

Originally an economic theory based on the rationality of the free market and the rollback of the state, neoliberalism has gained increasing currency since the 1980s, from the policies and outlooks of governments, supranational organisations such as the IMF and the corporate world, to the everyday workings of people's lives, their conceptions of themselves and their interactions with each other and the world around them (Clarke, 2008; Eagleton-Pierce, 2016; Gill, et al., 2017; Harvey, 2005; Rottenberg, 2016; Scharff, 2012; Sørensen, 2017); a process described by Clarke (2008: 139) as a 'neoliberalisation of things', whereby nothing is left untouched by its logics. Rather than rely on collective structures such as the welfare state or trade unions, people – individuals – must be self-reliant, self-managing and entrepreneurial (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016; Harvey, 2005). As well as the material influence of neoliberal policies that erode collective structures, such as the legal weakening of the power of trade unions and privatisation of previously public organisations, there is a moral dimension to neoliberalism: those who rely on welfare structures are negatively constructed as morally deficient – weak or lazy – and, by contrast, those who do not are positively constructed as dynamic, empowered individuals who take control of their own lives – indeed, who are *free* to take control of their own lives – and make their own choices (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016; Harvey, 2005). Individualisation, that is, this focus on the individual, removing them their wider social context and denying the negative influence of structural inequalities, is key to neoliberalism, although it is not the whole concept (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016; Harvey, 2005; Scharff, 2012). Individualisation is further reinforced in the contemporary world, for example, by technological advances that increase the ability of huge international companies such as Facebook and Google to gather the data of and target individual people through their business and marketing practices (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016).

Women are particularly good targets of neoliberalism, as beneficiaries of progressive advancements in rights that allow them to vote, work, control their own money, consumption habits and when to have children, rights that give them maternity pay and job protection and protect them – on paper – from discrimination at work (Elias, et al., 2017; Gill, et al., 2017; McRobbie, 2009; Scharff, 2012). Historically, too, women have been encouraged to be self-managing and self-responsible when it comes to bodily practices and the display of femininity (Elias, et al., 2017). Women now, then, have everything that they need to be self-responsible, self-reliant, self-managing subjects without depending on wider social structures such as the

welfare state or marriage to a man. Gill highlights the intimate links and similarities between postfeminism and its specific socio-political context of neoliberalism, describing postfeminism as a kind of ‘gendered neoliberalism’ (Gill, 2017: 609): the ‘self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism’ (Gill, et al., 2017: 231). She identifies a number of key aspects of postfeminism: femininity as a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an intense focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference; and the dominance of the makeover paradigm (Gill, 2007). It is the focus on the female body, empowerment and the shift to subjectification that are particularly key to the rest of the discussion in this sub-section.

I suggest that we could view postfeminism as a series of hegemonic re-articulations of feminist challenges in a time of neoliberalism: those facing feminist critiques take key elements or nodal points of feminist discourse, such as empowerment and autonomy, empty them by removing their original equivalential connections with collectivity and solidarity and re-articulate them within the dominant neoliberal discourse (Sørensen, 2017). Neoliberalism and feminism broadly and historically understood are antagonistic: the former is based on an individual’s self-management and free choice, the latter based on recognition of structural inequality and need for collective work for change – as Rottenberg (2009) points out, even second wave liberal feminism had a theory of structural male domination. In postfeminism, it is a particular kind of feminist that is repudiated, as mentioned above, that is, the ‘ossified’ (Dean, 2009), or sedimented, image of the second wave feminist: the one that collectively and publicly protested in groups, the one that called for root-and-branch change, the one that ran women-only spaces, excluding men, the one that transgressed beauty norms for women by wearing gender-neutral or male clothing and not removing their body hair (Gill, 2007; Holland-Cunz, 2003; McRobbie, 2009; Scharff, 2012).

Postfeminist discourse in particular attempts to “re-join” feminism and femininity (Lazar, 2014): gender equality and female empowerment are celebrated but second-wave feminist critiques of normative beauty ideals are presented as inherently incompatible with traditional feminine images and therefore undesirable. It attempts to ‘reconcile the irreconcilable’ (Genz, 2006: 346) and ‘dissolve the difference between “feminist” and “feminine”’ (Lazar, 2009:

375), hence its precarious and slippery nature. The antagonism of second-wave critiques of female beauty ideals can be witnessed in mainstream news media coverage of feminists in the 1970s, whereby “hairy” became equated with “ugly” and other expressions of vilification, as these women challenged the discursive links arranged around the nodal point of “femininity” in Western society (Holland-Cunz, 2003; Mendes, 2011b; Rhode, 1995; van Zoonen, 1992). Normative beauty ideals were vociferously criticised during second-wave feminism, held up as representative of patriarchal disciplining and control over women and their bodies (Genz, 2006); in advertising, feminists openly criticised adverts for objectifying women, putting stickers on offending adverts (Gill, 2008). In reaction to this, advertisers developed new ways to interact with female consumers. While some advertisers continue to this day to openly objectify women, a successful option was the re-articulation of certain feminist concepts, such as empowerment and sexual autonomy without the deep, searching critique of practices, structures and beliefs that comes with feminist politics (Gill, 2008; Lazar, 2009), as this would surely mean the destruction of the female beauty industry. The result is the shift from objectification to subjectification, where the postfeminist woman is presented as confident, discerning and sexually independent, aiming to please herself and not men (Gill, 2008; Lazar, 2009).

Women face increasing pressure to manage and regulate their bodies, with new body parts being called out for attention, such as heels and armpits, as well as the inside of the body with vitamin drinks and health advice that works with DNA testing (Elias, et al., 2017; Gill, 2017). Apps facilitate this further, allowing the detailed and integrated tracking of calorie intake, weight, physical and sexual activity, mood and menstrual cycle (Elias & Gill, 2018; Gill, 2017). More recent work demonstrates how postfeminism demands women take control of their ‘psychic lives’ too, as confident and resilient women who view adversity as an opportunity for growth, reflecting wider trends in neoliberalism in times of austerity (Gill, 2017; Gill & Orgad, 2015, 2018). It is control over all these aspects of bodily management, inside and out, that allows the postfeminist woman to be confident, feel empowered and consider herself successful (Lazar, 2014). There is, however, a stark evacuation of collective politics in beauty advertising, as women are encouraged to consume and manage themselves in order to deal with problems they may face, rather than fundamentally challenge the source of their problems: pampering the hair and body to repair damage done by a modern society, such as

pollution or too many external demands on a woman's time (Lazar, 2009); the construction of the time, skill and pain involved in beauty maintenance as 'girly fun' (Lazar, 2017); the construction of the risk involved in beauty practices, such as using fake nails or harsh hair treatments, as a necessary evil, and the successful management of which is laudable (Dosekun, 2017).

One might ask why this has been so successful. Jonathan Dean (2009) investigates articles posted on a feminist website *The F-Word* and finds a dearth of articles challenging beauty norms, describing the postfeminist approach to "empowered" femininity as appearing to be 'a "sigh of relief" that no one has to worry about advancing a critique of normative femininity' any more (Dean, 2009: 141). I think this notion of 'a sigh of relief' captures the problems posed by social antagonism: it is conflict, the subject is being pulled into different directions, the fight between femininity and feminism, and a resolution is welcomed because an antagonism throws into relief the ultimate and undesirable precarity of identity. Similarly, branching into postfeminism in the workplace, Gill, et al. (2017) identify a 'fatigue' around discussions about gender and the workplace, and sexism in particular, that perhaps increases the desire to view sexism as a problem located in the past, elsewhere or the natural way of things.

This relief from fatigue can also be seen in Love Your Body discourse in contemporary advertising that encourages women to stop searching for perfection and 'love' their bodies 'the way they are' (Gill & Elias, 2014). This discourse is increasingly common, seen in the advertising of big multinational companies such as Dove, Nike and Kellogg's (Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015). These adverts contain allusions to feminist concepts such as female solidarity and feminist criticism and anger about beauty norm pressures on women; that is, these adverts re-articulate certain aspects of feminist challenges and negate further criticism but avoid articulating the deeper critique that might challenge the basic concept of female beauty norms. The adverts, however, have a 'profound affective force' for women, appearing to 'interrupt' the culture of hostile judgement of women's bodies and providing positive messages that counteract the hegemonic discourse of discipline and perfection (Gill & Elias, 2014: 182). Ultimately, these adverts still place the blame upon women for searching for perfection in the first place, for placing too much pressure on themselves when they should

just simply stop judging themselves and each other (Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015). The complicity of the companies who propagate this new ‘feel-good’ discourse in creating these judgemental conditions is erased, and this discourse is still based on the underlying notion that women’s bodies are hard to love and need work, whether physical or mental (Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015). Further investigation also demonstrates that these companies still use re-touched images and models who fit a narrow and conventional image of a woman and websites which still contain body surveillance tools such as calorie counters (Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015).

Postfeminism is highly adaptable, which is perhaps most clear in its interactions with increased feminist visibilities. This can be seen, for example, in the Love Your Body discourses discussed above, but also in the development of neoliberal feminism. Although I return to contemporary feminist discourses in the following sub-section, neoliberal feminism claims a feminist identity while being compatible with the neoliberal status quo. Women are encouraged to take individual actions to improve their situations, particularly at work, by being more confident and resilient (Rottenberg, 2013, 2016). Here, the labels of “feminist” and “feminism” are no longer repudiated along with the image of the hairy, censorious feminist, but the politics underneath bear no threat to the neoliberal status quo; they are ‘small tweaks’ designed to not disrupt existing structures (Gill, 2017: 618). This has also been described as the ‘domestication’ of feminism (Dean, 2009), whereby liberal feminist concepts of empowerment and equality have become widely accepted as common sense, while more socially revolutionary radical perspectives have been largely side-lined and reviled (Dean, 2009; McRobbie, 2009; Mendes, 2011a). Looking at women’s magazines and contemporary gender equality campaigns, Hemmings (2018: 7) critiques this resolution of femininity in much contemporary Western feminist discourse thus:

Femininity is rendered a hallmark of rather than a bar to feminism: indeed we can now see that it has been lurking under the surface waiting to be appreciated as feminism’s glasses are whipped off and its hair shaken out to reveal the shining beauty underneath.

I think the pertinent point is that young women, the prime targets of postfeminism as mentioned earlier in this sub-section, are now embracing the signifier “feminism”, their

supposed enemy, as a positive, proud, personal identity. As Jackson (2018) highlights, discussions about content and practice aside, the ownership of a feminist identity is a political act on its own. But more than that, there is an increased recognition of collective politics and structural inequalities, pushing back on intense individualising postfeminist discourse. Of course, there has always been feminist activity, even during quieter periods such as the 1990s (Bagguley, 2002; Crossley, 2017; Evans & Chamberlain, 2015; Gerhard, 1999), but now one does not need to look very far to find feminist activity, discussion or thought (Dean, 2009; Gill, et al., 2016; McRobbie, 2015). The groups I have selected – FEMEN and the Twitter campaigns #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project – represent part of this change. As feminist protests, that is, organised public campaigns demanding change, these three are designed to be widely viewed and are therefore very visible manifestations of collective feminist activity. Increasing numbers of groups publicly agitating for change do contribute to the increased visibility of feminism¹⁵ but also sit alongside other manifestations, such as organisation without public campaigns or demands, such as the day-to-day activities of feminist societies at universities or consciousness-raising circles, academic engagements with feminist theory, and personal struggles in the private sphere over divisions of labour or even personal internal struggles (Ramazanoğlu, 1989). The act of feminist protest, too, can be realised through a range of demands, organisational structures and the forms of media used to publicise their demands (Jonsson, 2014); the groups in my study differ in all three of these categories, as I explain in more detail in Chapter 3.

2.3 Contemporary Feminism and the Redemption of the Political

I turn now to engagements with self-proclaimed feminism in Germany and the United Kingdom. In this section, I chart some of the current work on feminist manifestations in Germany and the UK, the discussion and judgements around whether this constitutes *good* feminism or not according to a discourse theoretical notion of the political, and the role of technology in the current social context for feminist discourse.

¹⁵ Other contemporary protests include, for example, and among others, the international SlutWalk, the Women's Marches against Trump, the #metoo hashtag campaign, the UK-based No More Page 3 and the German-based #ausnahmslos hashtag campaign.

2.3.1 A Snapshot of Mapped Terrain in Contemporary Feminism

It is well documented that feminism is back on the public agenda in Germany and the UK: in the traditional print media (Casale, et al., 2008; Dean, 2010; Hark & Kerner, 2007b; Jonsson, 2014; Scharff, 2013), through feminist popular publications (Klaus, 2008; Negra, 2014; Scharff, 2012), feminist university societies and organisations (Crossley, 2017; Dean, 2010) and increased activism with protest on the streets (Darmon, 2014; Mendes, 2015a; O'Keefe, 2014) and online (Carter, 2015; Highfield, 2016). While not wishing to downplay the feminist activism and feminist thought that has always been present, this is an undeniable increase in *visibility* of feminism in the public sphere, from which it has been relatively absent over the last few decades (Bagguley, 2002; Dean, 2009; Gerhard, 1999; Hark & Kerner, 2007a; Jonsson, 2014; Knappe & Lang, 2014; Scharff, 2013). The reasons behind this change can be uneven and not always easily identified, but can often be traced initially to individual events: for example, women in Germany responded to public denigration of feminism in the mid-2000s for lowering the birth rate by vocally re-affirming its relevance (Scharff, 2013) and the SlutWalk was started in 2011 by students after a policeman in Canada suggested that women who wore short skirts were partly to blame for being raped (Chateauvert, 2013; Mendes, 2015b). The protest marches spread worldwide as this singular incidence of victim blaming became representative of rape culture in a more abstract sense (Mendes, 2015b). In this way, feminist work also provides the groundwork for future feminist work. In a similar vein, the hashtag #shoutingback used by the Everyday Sexism Project provided the linguistic material for the hashtag #aufschrei even though the #aufschrei campaign itself was prompted by an external accusation of sexism in the German media, which I discuss more in Sub-section 3.2.1.

This feminist visibility is not made of one unified voice, however, and I now present some of the recent work on contemporary feminism in Germany and the UK to demonstrate the entanglements and diversity that are still very much part of any feminist discourse.

Klaus (2008) presents what she terms as 'elite feminism' (*Elitefeminismus*) and 'conservative feminism' or 'feminist conservatism' (*feministischer Konservatismus*), as two examples of

contemporary feminist discourses in Germany. Conservative feminism – also discussed by Hark & Kerner (2007b) – has a strong neoliberal theme encouraging gender equality in the workplace and is exemplified by high-powered women such as CDU minister Ursula von der Leyen and Chancellor Angela Merkel¹⁶. The logic of conservative feminism is that the German economy needs highly qualified women and German society needs children from prosperous families, therefore mothers should have careers and career women should be mothers (Klaus, 2008). Childcare provision is a central issue; however, it is framed as part of *Frauen-* and *Familienpolitik* rather than as an issue of gender relations. This is similar to the ‘neoliberal feminism’ described by Rottenberg (2013). Conservative or neoliberal feminism embraces the neoliberal political and economic order and differs from liberal feminism by lacking any substantial critique of systemic gendered inequality (Rottenberg, 2013). For example, books written by Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg are aimed at improving the situation of women in the workplace in the name of feminism, but place the onus, and blame, on women to be more confident, to ‘lean in’ and be more present, more vocal, and to be more resilient in the face of adversity (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Rottenberg, 2013). Neoliberal feminism fails to recognise the structural limits placed on women in the workplace: for example, workers are presumed to have no family commitments, or at least presumed to have someone at home taking care of the family; the stigmas around flexible working that inhibit asking for it and also getting it; the systemic undervaluing of women’s work; and the financial inequalities between middle and working class women, the latter of whom cannot “choose” to not work (Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017; Sørensen, 2017).

Different from conservative feminism in a few ways, Klaus (2008) also identifies elite feminism as a new phenomenon in Germany, found particularly in a flurry of feminist publications from the mid-2000s including, for example, Thea Dorn’s (2006) *Die neue F-Klasse*, which is located in the popular sphere rather than the socio-political sphere of conservative feminism but retains the same heteronormative outlook and a similar lack of political critique. Elite feminism emphasises humour and sexiness, rejecting a particular negative image of “1970s feminism”¹⁷ in the process. Proponents, who are mostly well-educated white women (hence

¹⁶ It must be said that Merkel does not identify with feminism; she is an example of a successful and powerful woman celebrated by conservative feminist discourse (Klaus, 2008).

¹⁷ See the following section for more detail on an ossified image of feminism.

elite), eschew notions of collectivity, solidarity and patriarchy for individualised and personal campaigns for gender equality by ‘self-aware modern women’ (Klaus, 2008: 181). Awareness of the ‘axes of difference’ (Klaus, 2008: 182) such as ethnicity, religion and class is almost entirely absent from these elite feminist publications, with a particular issue concerning the representation of Islam as monolithic and misogynistic, despite vocal, easily accessible and manifold critiques of generalised approaches of this kind by feminists from as far back as the 1960s. While not using the label of elite feminism, Scharff (2012) identifies similar themes in other popular feminist publications such as Eismann (2007) and Haaf, Klingner & Streidl (2008), as well as in media coverage of a debate between iconic German feminist Alice Schwarzer and CDU family minister Kristina Schröder (Scharff, 2013). This re-engagement with feminism in the specific German context was largely sparked by demographic debates in the mid-2000s that blamed feminism for the low birth rate in Germany because feminism had allegedly encouraged women to work and to eschew traditionally feminine caring roles; it can be seen as a simultaneous re-appropriation of feminism and a celebration of women’s advancement into the workplace (Klaus, 2008; Scharff, 2012)

Crossing over with elite feminism is work in a UK, and wider English-speaking, context that tackles the complex interactions between feminism, popular culture and celebrities. Contrasting ‘public feminism’ with ‘academic feminism’, Negra (2014) highlights how books published by celebrities such as Caitlin Moran do not always recognise the privilege of the authors, which is often white and class-based. Nevertheless, they are the most accessible point for many non-academics wanting to get engaged with feminism. Using the term ‘popular feminism’, Fischer (2017) draws attention to how this celebrity nature of feminism means that feminists in the public sphere – whose primary occupation is not feminism, but acting, singing or writing, for example – are often called upon to speak on issues that they may not necessarily be theoretically equipped to do. Her particular example is that of author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s comments on transwomen’s experience and the subsequent criticism that she received (Fischer, 2017). Brady (2016) describes the same popular occupation of feminism as ‘celebrity feminism’. Weidhase (2015) narrows down on the racial entanglements of ‘hip hop feminism’ or ‘Beyoncé feminism’, referencing the Black American singer as a particularly high-profile example. Beyoncé’s lyrics, music and visual imagery bring race to the fore by centring on the experiences of specifically Black women, which is a

perspective which is often missing from other manifestations of this popular, public or celebrity feminism.

Pinning down the very contemporary relationship between feminism and social media is the term ‘hashtag feminism’ to describe feminism activism taking place on Twitter under the organising function of a hashtag (#). Due to the affordances of the technology, these protests can be highly networked, international and effective consciousness raising tools (Kangere, Kemitare & Michau, 2017; Lokot, 2018). The protests can spread far and wide and the topics covered can be wide ranging, from tackling sexist advertising (Clark, 2014), women explaining why they did not leave domestically violent relationships (Clark, 2016), women defending feminism from anti-feminists (Kim, 2017), normalising the female nipple (Rúðólfssdóttir & Jóhannsdóttir, 2018) and protesting against FGM and violence against women (Kangere, et al., 2017). Two groups in this study, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, also form part of ‘hashtag feminism’ (Carter, 2015; Drüeke & Zobl, 2016; Highfield, 2016; Sadowski, 2016), with #aufschrei and #everydaysexism or #shoutingback, respectively, as their organising hashtags. As I discuss more in the final section of this chapter, there is some debate about the role of technology and how it shapes contemporary feminist activism; for example, for Munro (2013), technology is potentially transformative enough for feminist politics to characterise the development of a new fourth wave, while Kennedy (2007) highlights instead the historical continuities of feminist practice between offline and online realms.

Smith-Prei & Stehle (2014) write about the intersection of feminism and pop in Germany, describing it as ‘popfeminism’ (*Popfeminismus*). They describe pop in the specific German context as a subversive subculture concerned with sex, body politics and identification; it is an ‘irritant’ that ‘in its politicized form, can lead to aesthetic acts of resistance’ (Smith-Prei, 2011: 4). Although popfeminism crosses boundaries with the popular literature of elite and celebrity feminism discussed above, amongst their discussions they also include Charlotte Roche’s novel *Feuchtgebiete* (*Wetlands*), which challenges notions of female hygiene and desire through deliberately grotesque sexual imagery (Smith-Prei, 2011; Stehle, 2011), and the ‘pop-porn’ lyrics and performances of Turkish-German rapper Lady Bitch Ray, who appropriates the misogynistic language and imagery of the heterosexual male rap music industry as a ‘mode of female sexual empowerment’ (Smith-Prei, 2011: 10; Smith-Prei &

Stehle, 2014; Stehle, 2011). They identify that the interaction of pop culture with feminism is problematic, with popfeminism risking becoming part of the objectification and consumerism that it seeks to challenge, and raising complex and 'awkward' questions about race, and the female body and the male gaze (Smith-Prei, 2011; Smith-Prei & Stehle, 2016; Stehle, 2011).

In response to this, however, they highlight the importance of meeting and challenging this 'awkwardness' as a starting point to enter into the debate, rather than simply using it as an excuse to ignore or denigrate contemporary feminist politics. Paraphrasing Donna Haraway, they encourage 'staying with the trouble', the troublesome questions raised by popfeminism, as well as elite, conservative, celebrity and hashtag feminist discourses, to push back on cynicism and actually explore these questions and begin a politicised engagement with contemporary feminism (Smith-Prei & Stehle, 2014, 2016).

2.3.2 Re-Doing Feminist Politics

Dean (2009) calls for more critical engagements with contemporary feminist politics by referring to Laclau's notion of the political, which is not fixed to a particular location, practice or institution, but rather encompasses challenges to existing norms and the articulation of new chains of equivalence. Radical politics goes further than this, explicitly making new links between individual grievances and conflicts to wider political discourses. Dean (2009) argues that the conceptualisation of what radical feminism is or should be has been fixed into the image of a certain type of 1970s radical feminism, characterised by consciousness-raising women-only spaces, aggressive anti-statism and public protest marches, rather than focusing on the basic principles of autonomy and self-empowerment and the critique of patriarchy and structural oppression of women. The privileging of this certain paragon of feminism means that contemporary expressions of feminism amongst young women are often dismissed as ineffectual or not 'true' feminism because they do not fit the 1970s radical mould, characterised as they typically are by a move into the popular and a strong presence on the Internet. Applying Laclau's view of radical politics to UK-based website *The F Word*, Dean (2009) claims that elements of radicality can be found in contemporary feminism by those willing to look. The website hosts articles written by feminists and allows forum space for

comments and discussion underneath the articles. It is this space, according to Dean, that offers the most radical potential as women are given space to engage with feminist ideas and with each other. Its online location is not an automatic barrier to political potential.

Part of the debate around contemporary feminism is concerned with whether new groups and activities represent a significant or radical change from the past. As just noted, sedimentation of the signifier “feminism” with certain feminist practices of the 1970s prevents flexibility in understanding groups and practices today which claim or are claimed to be feminist, and this approach is also blind to the specific socio-historical contexts of past and present feminist politics (Dean, 2009; Hark & Kerner, 2007b; Jackson, 2018). As with all questions in feminism, there is not a simple answer to whether contemporary feminism represents a significant shift from the past. I would like to tentatively sketch out the notion that contemporary feminism represents new modes of communication in a specific socio-historical context, but with continuity in the practices and concerns of those taking part that should not be underplayed.

Budgeon (2001) describes the rise of neoliberalism as the change from the ‘emancipatory’ politics of the 1970s to the individualised ‘life’ politics of late modernity. Feminism sits uncomfortably in this new environment, as it is at its heart an emancipatory and collective movement. The ‘popular turn’ in feminism is arguably an inevitable result of wider changes in society and political engagement, but not necessarily a cause for despair (Budgeon, 2001; Harris, 2010). Smith-Prei & Stehle (2014: 215) describe popfeminism as ‘a way of working with, not outside of, the popular in order to reengage the political for a new generation of women’. In other words, popfeminism is feminism talking to young women in a language that they can understand, particularly when we lack an alternative to global capitalism that could cause a dislocation outside of the feminist academy (Baer, 2012; Mohanty, 2013). Similarly, Harris, Wyn & Younes (2010) describe how young people are disengaged from traditional forms of political participation, such as going to rallies or writing to politicians, because of a lack of faith in traditional political structures and beliefs that their concerns are listened to and taken seriously. They are not, however, disengaged from politics as a whole, but prefer instead to use different participatory methods such as talking about politics to friends and family or expressing themselves through art or writing. This shift in political engagement has

been demonstrated in non-feminist political participation studies, too, in both Germany and the UK (Marsh, O'Toole & Jones, 2007; O'Toole, 2016; Sloam, 2014). New media technologies – web 2.0, the user-generated web including social media and blogging – allow for these kinds of non-traditional, at times playful, acts that are crucial to the development of political citizens (Harris, 2008; Harris, et al., 2010; Lievrouw, 2011). Along these lines, Munro (2013) suggests that the increase in online feminist activism in the UK could be linked to a lack of female representation at a political level.

Another key aspect of feminism's current socio-political context, aside from neoliberalism, is the prevalence of feminist ideas and the acceptance of feminist goals as common sense (Budgeon, 2001; Harris, 2008; Keller, 2012). Ironically, the gains made by feminists of previous generations dampen the view that feminism is still relevant to the identity of young women today (Harris, 2008). Budgeon (2001) and Harris (2010) provocatively suggest that individual actions, politics on a micro level, should be considered part of broadened concept of feminist political action. Through interviews with young women, Budgeon (2001) demonstrates how young women do recognise gender inequality in society, but negotiate these inequalities on an individual level, rather than recognising themselves as part of a collective political category of women as feminism has historically done: '...when they speak of "women" in these accounts, they are referring to individual women taking responsibility for what they want as individuals. They do not recognise or identify themselves as the subject 'woman' of feminist discourse' (Budgeon, 2001: 17). When feminist goals and ideas are common sense and gender equality is law, young women struggle to mark out a territory for the women's movement today, as many of its old concrete objectives have lost relevance (Harris, 2008). For example, Knappe & Lang (2014) raise the point, crucially I think, that an essential part of feminism in the 1970s was about getting women's voices into the public sphere. To a large extent this has been achieved, and the presence of women in the public sphere is now seen as normal, which negatively impacts the reach that feminist activists can have, with the public sphere now offering 'more of a whisper than an audible voice' (Knappe & Lang, 2014: 364).

What this brief discussion of the socio-political context demonstrates is that practices of feminist protest and resistance today cannot possibly be carbon copies of the practices of the past: they would not make sense to young women today, and they would also not have the

same impact and outcome. By contrast, the continuities found in the contemporary feminist politics are important to highlight too, which I turn to now in a more detailed discussion about feminism and social media, which shapes a large part of feminist practice today (Munro, 2013; Valenti, 2014; Youngs, 2007).

Facilitated by the technologies of web 2.0 – the user-generated web, including social networking sites and blogs (Page, et al., 2014) – there is increasing documentation of women who are pushing back on individualisation and micro-political ‘girl-power’ feminist practices and embracing collectivity and unity amongst women (Jackson, 2018; Knappe & Lang, 2014). This is not, however, a step backwards, but a re-negotiation of the existing ground, inextricable from the current time and place. The groups selected for this study can be seen as part of this: #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project use individual stories on social networking site Twitter, gathered together into a collective under one hashtag, to demonstrate the pervasiveness of sexism across social classes, racial lines and in a range of locations, such as advertising, politics, media reporting and the workplace (Baer, 2016; Drüeke & Zobl, 2016; Sadowski, 2016). An increasing number of grassroots campaigns and projects such as these that are raising awareness of and fighting sexism (Carter, 2015; Highfield, 2016; Kim, 2017) ties in with calls in academia to re-recognise sexism as an important form of gendered discrimination and prejudice, and reclaim it from its image of being ridiculous and outdated (Attenborough, 2012; Gill, 2011; Valentine, et al., 2014).

FEMEN aim to re-claim “woman” as a universal political category, although their approach is problematic and at times Islamophobic (Baer, 2014; O’Keefe, 2014; Zychowicz, 2011). The loss of traction of “woman” in light of postmodern critiques has been criticised for leaving feminism politically toothless and therefore irrelevant (Tong, 2007), so FEMEN’s approach can also be understood along with a pushback on this kind of academic critique. FEMEN also campaign against anti-abortion legislation and the anti-abortion stance of the Catholic church, bringing into focus the issue of the ownership and autonomy of the female body (Baer, 2014; FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014; O’Keefe, 2014). Of course, their topless and provocative protest methods brings this sharply into focus too, for different reasons, as they visible adhere to strict female body image norms, while using that female body as it was not

intended: as a site of protest and anger¹⁸ (Baer, 2014; Eileraas, 2014; FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014; O'Keefe, 2014; Zychowicz, 2011).

FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project are 're-doing' feminist politics (Baer, 2014: 200), in contrast to the 'un-doing' of feminist politics by postfeminism identified by McRobbie (2009). As well as highlighting the tension between collectivity and individualism experienced by emancipatory social movements, the groups also throw light onto some of the

central tensions within historical and contemporary feminist discourse, notably those surrounding the category of woman, the role of the body, privilege (especially white privilege and racism), and epistemological problems surrounding feminist speech, including the place of experience and the problem of speaking for others (Baer, 2014: 201).

These tensions are the 'awkwardness' and the 'trouble' that Smith-Prei & Stehle (2014); (Smith-Prei & Stehle, 2016) encourage us to stay with and open up with discussion and critique. Baer (2014: 201) concludes that by engaging with the tensions highlighted above, these groups 'have begun to re-establish the grounds for a collective feminist politics beyond the realm of the self-styled individual'.

Kennedy (2007) demonstrates the similarities of the current feminist practice of blogging to that of the consciousness-raising (CR) circles of the 1970s, a sentiment echoed by others (Dean, 2009; Keller, 2012). The aim of CR groups was for women to come together and share their specific gendered experiences and to, firstly, show that their experiences were common to those of other women; secondly, to understand that the experiences were not self-inflicted; and, thirdly, to build a community of women through dialogue. Blogging, as well as other social media communities such as those found on Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr, fulfils these same functions, although the actions have been translocated online (Kennedy, 2007).

¹⁸ This form of bodily protest is also utilised in the SlutWalk.

Discursive struggles are limited by other sedimented, or naturalised, discourses, and re-activating these sedimented discourses cannot be done by returning to the original site of hegemonic articulation, but by creating new chains of equivalence (Laclau, 1993). To see this section through a discourse theoretical lens, postfeminist discourses around empowerment and femininity¹⁹ limit the sense that feminist discourse can make today. Additionally, the feminist claims that have already been articulated into institutions, such as through gender mainstreaming and equality legislation, and the naturalisation of women in the public sphere, change what feminist discourse can now stand for and still be dislocatory and political. To continue to be relevant as a political project, feminists must open up new contestations, whether that means making visible the racial contradictions of postfeminist discourses (Wilkes, 2015), the heteronormative and racial entanglements of femininity in feminism (Hemmings, 2018), the precarity of women in neoliberal economies (Harvey, 2005; Mohanty, 2013), or the continuing presence of structural discrimination against women in the face of intensely individualistic discourses (Baer, 2016; Gill, et al., 2017; Mohanty, 2013).

2.4 Representations of Feminism and Feminist Protest

In this section, I discuss the role and value of social media and an online presence for feminism, and then I summarise previous work done on representations of feminism in the news media and discuss what new aspects my project can add to knowledge in this area through the use of a multiperspectival case study approach for contemporary groups and the study of BTL comments from the online news articles. To begin, however, I discuss more generally the reasoning behind choosing three mediated sites for understanding contemporary feminist discourse.

2.4.1 Studying Feminism in Social Media and the News Media

¹⁹ See Sub-section 2.2.2 on postfeminism for a discussion of sedimented discourses around femininity, which is particularly visible in discourses about beauty norms: that women remove leg and armpit hair, and wear make up, for example; to do so is to take control of your body and your natural womanhood and to not do so is repudiated as part of an extreme or outdated form of feminism.

Although discourse as it is defined in this thesis includes material objects, it also includes language as in other discourse analytical projects. Language also does not exhaust Discourse Theory in the ways it might do to other theoretical approaches or discourse analytical projects (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth, 2005). Language is a key signifying system according to Discourse Theory, and language is beholden to the same logics as discourse more widely, especially since Discourse Theory developed from structural linguistics (Laclau, 1995). Every text about feminism articulates elements, or signs, together and creates a structured totality that contributes to feminist discourse. This is not merely a reflection of feminist discourse but it *is* feminist discourse, its very constitution. The same elements may be articulated together in lots of similar ways across very different spaces, but the arbitrary, non-essential nature of articulation of elements means that the potential for new articulations remains very much open (Glynos & Howarth, 2007).

The three sites that I have chosen to investigate feminist discourse have different communicative purposes, different producers and audiences for the texts and provide a range of articulations for feminism. The starting point is the texts produced by the groups: the news publications of protest events by FEMEN and the stories and experiences of #everydaysexism and #aufschrei published on their respective websites, as well as the manifestos and descriptive texts from these groups. The websites of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project host stories posted directly to the site as well as those shared under the hashtags on Twitter, with moderation to remove the anti-feminist posts (Bates, 2014; Wizorek, 2014). These can be considered as the first point of feminist dislocations for this project, and the news media and comments sections as responses to these dislocations. Dislocation is a crucial step for social change because it is through dislocation that new political demands and political identities can be created (Dean, 2009; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Torfing, 1999). It does not automatically lead to social change, however, because already-sedimented discourses can absorb the dislocation in a way that prevents its articulation into a wider set of political demands (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Torfing, 1999). Dislocation is an important analytical tool for media analysis in particular, considering that the news media have power in signifying dislocatory events in a way that is favourable to them and maintains the status quo (Dahlberg, 2011; Dahlberg & Phelan, 2011b). Comments sections give a view into the more 'general public' view (Graham & Wright, 2015) of the feminist groups and also the

reporting on the groups, which expands the net of feminist discourse in the public sphere. Through this I can attend to the question of how the general public respond to the dislocations that contemporary feminist protest groups present.

Despite the wealth of work already done on feminism in the news media, I believe that work on constructions in the news media continues to have merit. The primary role of news media is to inform people of events that occur outside of their immediate experience (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Richardson, 2007; van Zoonen, 1992). In this accepted role as informers to society, newspapers hold a great deal of power to signify feminist protest and feminism by extension. The majority of people reading the articles about the groups in my study will not have first-hand experience of taking part in the protests (especially for FEMEN, who are a small and exclusive group). As Bagguley (2002: 175) notes, ‘a social movement does not “exist” for a society unless the society knows about it’, and the press can be an integral step in that process. Press representation can be problematic because the media image can *become* the movement itself for those who do not have any other perspective. Van Zoonen (1992: 456) explains:

Given news media’s institutional assignment to represent reality – which is legitimated by and expressed in media laws, professional ethics and values about, for instance, equal time and fairness – media definitions easily attain the status of objective actual truth.

A valuable contribution of this project is showing the range of discursive constructions of the groups, including the self-representation of the groups and the discussion in BTL comments, rather than showing the news media’s representation alone. The increased presence of social media and the Internet in people’s lives means that the struggle over the meaning of feminism has become much more publicly accessible. It is just as easy to find the FEMEN manifesto online as it is to find news articles about FEMEN. In contrast to her pessimistic attitude to feminism in the mainstream media (see below), Schowalter (2012: 229) highlights in hope that ‘feminist women have and continue to create spaces of resistance in spite of the seemingly ever-expansive amount of post-feminist and anti-feminist news coverage’.

2.4.2 Feminism and Social Media

The fact that so much feminist dialogue takes place online warrants a discussion about the relationship between feminism and social media. Initial academic debates about web 2.0 – for political participation more generally as well as for feminism – centred around the inherent ‘good’ or ‘bad’ about new technologies (Shaw, 2014). A number of feminist scholars have pushed back against this, highlighting how social media, as a mode of communication, cannot be essentially negative or positive, and they have pushed back against the artificial separation between the ‘offline’ and the ‘online’ (Shaw, 2014). The technology and the dialogue online are created by offline people living in the offline world, and new technologies are just as much at risk of repeating and consolidating existing social hierarchies as any other mode of communication (Bosch, 2011; Fenton & Barassi, 2011; Kingston Mann, 2014; Press, 2011; Shaw, 2014). As Shaw (2014) succinctly puts it: ‘the internet is full of jerks, because the world is full of jerks’.

Positive aspects of web 2.0 for building feminist communities are numerous. The technology is cheap and easy to use (Al-Rawi, 2014; Lievrouw, 2011; Lindgren, 2012; Monaghan, 2014; Petray, 2011; Schuster, 2013). The ease of sophisticated content creation means that many more people are able to communicate in complex and creative ways (Jones, 2015; Lindgren, 2012) such as addressing multiple audiences at the same time through personal storytelling (Jones, 2015), or multilingual users targeting specific audiences through language choice (Coeseemans & De Cock, 2017). As opposed to traditional media, social media provides a direct link between people without need to negotiate intermediaries (Jones, 2015) and it allows activists to cross boundaries of time and space, allowing potentially international reach, as well as overcoming the limitations of organising physical meetings (Al-Rawi, 2014; Choi, Steiner & Kim, 2006; Keller, 2012; Schuster, 2013; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). It can also be a first step for later offline organising (Jackson, 2018; Sundén & Paasonen, 2018), as well as directly influencing media discussions (Karlsson, 2018) and people’s individual behaviour (Jones, 2015). By expanding the concept of public space, social media allows for alternative voices usually marginalised in the traditional public spaces such as the mass media (Castells, 2007; Chiluba, 2013; Clark, 2014; Keller, 2012). Relatedly, it allows space to critique the mass media (Eriksson, 2016) and allows women and girls the space to play with, resist and challenge

mainstream discourses around social norms, such as body image, sharing that resistance with other women and girls (Bosch, 2011; Harris, 2008; Shields Dobson, 2014). Social media technology also allows young women space away from the anti-feminist voices on the internet, which are often sexually violent and intensely threatening, to not just exist but to share feminist knowledge and “learn” how to be feminists in relative peace (Jackson, 2018).

In contrast, ethnographic work done with bloggers – feminist and otherwise – reveals the difficulty in sustaining a protest presence online, as, while the technology is cheap and easy to use, it also offers little by way of remuneration and the effort required to maintain a visible presence is a serious barrier cited by many who have to work on their social media articles in their spare time around their job, family and offline social life (Choi, et al., 2006; Lopez, 2014). Another barrier comes in the form of technological literacy for older generations of women, who have not grown up with social media in the same way that young women today do (Fotopoulou, 2014; Petray, 2011; Schuster, 2013). Similarly, although the majority of young people in the Western world do have regular access to the internet, there are still some that do not, and that does not even include those in less technologically-advanced countries (Fotopoulou, 2014; Robinson, et al., 2015). For this reason, Fotopoulou (2014: 14) warns against a feminism that becomes ‘networked by default’, which links back to my previous point about social media reflecting, repeating and consolidating existing social hierarchies.

Finally, and the most important point for considering whether social media really represent a space and positive space for women, is that the openness of social media means that it is just as easy to attack women as it is to support them (Al-Rawi, 2014; Drüeke & Klaus, 2014; Eckert, 2018; Ganzer, 2014; Gardiner, 2018; Higgins & Smith, 2014; Jane, 2018; Kingston Mann, 2014; Shaw, 2014). Ganzer (2014) discusses how easy it is to disrupt the feminist communities built up through hashtags on Twitter by the concerted efforts of trolls creating parody accounts with similar names or creating hashtags with similar structures but which convey misogynistic or racist sentiments. Shaw (2014: 273) describes the amount of misogyny and violent sexism online as ‘shocking’: Laura Bates, the founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, has at times been forced to give up running the Twitter account due to amount of abusive messages that she received (Carter, 2015; Higgins & Smith, 2014). Higgins & Smith (2014) demonstrate how the abusive messages sent to the Everyday Sexism account are specifically gendered –

containing sexual aggressiveness or attempts to undo the gains of second wave feminism with statements such as ‘get back into the kitchen’ – in comparison to the ungendered, predominantly scatological insults aimed at male politicians on Twitter²⁰. Drüeke & Klaus (2014), Drüeke & Zobl (2016) and Maireder & Schlögl (2014) all demonstrate, within different timeframes of analysis, how the more the #aufschrei debate entered the public domain through television and newspapers, the more anti-feminist messages were registered under the hashtag.

Research into the linguistic affordances of hashtags has demonstrated the importance of this practice for creating, or allowing the creation of, groups and communities on social media, named ‘ambient affiliation’ by Zappavigna (2011). Particularly applicable to the hashtag feminist campaigns²¹, users add hashtags – such as #aufschrei or #everydaysexism – or @username mentions to their posts in order to contribute to a wider public discussion on a topic, even though they may not directly interact with other users on the same topic, do not know each other and may not interact again in the future (Zappavigna, 2011). These affiliations can range from the mundane, such as discussions about sleep (Zappavigna, 2014a) or coffee (Zappavigna, 2014b), to political self-branding (Coeseemans & De Cock, 2017) and emancipatory feminist campaigns (Drüeke & Zobl, 2016). This can be a powerful tool for good, opening up a space for public ‘collective coping’ after traumatic events (Eriksson, 2016; Lindgren, 2012) and allowing the building of small stories into ‘narratives of emancipation’ (Jones, 2015) for marginalised groups. In contrast, however, the examples of anti-feminism in the above paragraph are facilitated by the same linguistic affordances and demonstrate that although social media technology is designed to bring people together (Eriksson, 2016), there is no guarantee that that will be an enjoyable, safe or supportive experience.

What this discussion ultimately shows is that social media and online technologies are not inherently liberating or limiting. Returning once more to Laclau and the redemption of the political covered in the previous section, this demonstrates how a particular space – in this

²⁰ Koulouris (2018) recounts his experience as a feminist involved in a debate against a high profile anti-feminist, and specifically the abuse he received on social media afterwards. Even though he is a man, the anti-feminist abuse directed at him still managed to objectify and sexualise women. He writes, tellingly, ‘it is clear to me that the contributors cannot construct a critique outside the realm of misogyny’ (Koulouris, 2018: 6).

²¹ FEMEN also communicate through Twitter but it does not provide their primary source of protest.

case, virtual space – cannot be inherently political or apolitical (Dean, 2009; Laclau, 1990; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Because material spaces are also constructed through discourse, their political value comes from these discursive constructions.

2.4.3 Feminism and the News Media

There have been a number of studies done on feminism in the news media, predominantly newspapers, and while there are inevitably subtle differences between the studies, some recurrent themes can be found across the data: marginalisation (in practical terms of coverage); emphasis on conflict; the pastness of feminism; the distinction between feminists and ordinary women; and the transgression of heterosexual feminine norms for appearance and behaviour. Although I want to avoid making broad generalisations, the dominance of a negative image of feminists in mainstream news media is widely accepted across the work I am summarising here. As always, generalised statements come with a number of caveats and I would like to add here that a few newspapers reject this trend, for example, the Guardian in the UK (Dean, 2010; Jonsson, 2014) and taz in Germany (Huhnke, 1996). Both of these papers are left leaning and employ a number of active feminists among their staff (Huhnke, 1996; Jonsson, 2014). That being said, political leaning is no indication of a paper's attitude to feminism, as the traditionally left Daily Mirror (UK) without exception employed only negative frames for feminists covering the time period 1968 to 1982 and in 2008 (Mendes, 2011a).

A few studies cite the presence of positive themes (Bronstein, 2005; Dean, 2010; Huhnke, 1996; Jonsson, 2014; Lind & Salo, 2002; Mendes, 2011a; van Zoonen, 1992), but these themes have their own complexity that requires further discussion, which I return to later. Collectively, the studies roughly cover the time period 1968 to 2009 and are located in the US, UK, Germany and the Netherlands. Because of the similarities in the results, I do not believe it is necessary to continually distinguish between location and time period in the following analysis, but on the occasions where these dimensions become pertinent, I make them explicit.

Firstly, feminism has always and continues to receive marginal coverage in the news media. The 1970s remains the peak decade for reporting (Bagguley, 2002; Mendes, 2012; Rhode, 1995) with a sharp decline in the 1980s as public feminist protest declined (Ashley & Olson, 1998; Bagguley, 2002; Huhnke, 1996). Jaworska & Krishnamurthy (2012) and Mendes (2012) both report a fall, in numerical terms, in reporting from 2000 onwards; however, this is contrasted against recent work by Dean (2010), Jonsson (2014) and Scharff (2013) which discusses the notable presence of articles about feminism in the newspapers in Germany and the UK since 2005, reflecting an increase in wider public discourse about feminism, although these latter studies do not provide numerical comparisons with previous years.

Secondly, conflict is associated with feminism and feminists. Feminists are often linked to militancy (Ashley & Olson, 1998; Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012; Lind & Salo, 2002), suggesting conflict with society external to feminism. Huhnke (1996) suggests that the recurrent trope of pitting feminists against more positively-evaluated groups (e.g. 'American scientists', 'women') found in Germany's weekly news magazine *Spiegel* functions to delegitimize feminism. On the other hand, and more commonly, there is a focus on conflict *within* feminism (Ashley & Olson, 1998; Bronstein, 2005; Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012; Lind & Salo, 2002; Mendes, 2011a; Rhode, 1995), which again can delegitimize the movement by presenting it as incoherent, weak or petty, particularly if the conflict is framed as a 'catfight' (Rhode, 1995). Further to this, Bronstein (2005) and Mendes (2012) record how this internal conflict is sometimes framed as an intergenerational conflict between second and third wave feminists, rather than as a conflict between moderate and radical or as the result of racial critique. Working in a similar way to the dichotomy trope I mentioned above, third wave feminists come out of the comparison positively but, as Bronstein (2005: 790) notes, this is 'no win' for feminism because second wave feminists are negatively presented as a direct result.

Thirdly, feminism is presented as something that belongs to the past: its goals have been achieved, therefore it is irrelevant. This is more common in reporting from 1990 onwards (Bronstein, 2005; Dean, 2010; Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012; Mendes, 2011a). That being said, Mendes (2011b) notes the presence of this theme from as early as the 1970s, where women were already presented as 'never having it so good', and in the 80s, where women

were presented as so liberated that men now needed liberating themselves. Once again we encounter the opposition of second and third wave feminists in Bronstein (2005), where second wave feminists are presented as out of touch and fundamentally different to contemporary feminists, therefore belonging in the past.

It is perhaps worth noting here that feminist protest is subject to the same pressures as other protests that cover different issues – race, cuts to public services, for example – but are similarly characterised as organised and public demands for socio-political change. The general ‘protest paradigm’ – the more a group challenges the status quo, the more they are presented negatively in the mainstream news media – is well established and explored in studies of media coverage of protest (Boyle, et al., 2005). Further to that, conflict of any type has high news value (Mendes, 2011a; Rhode, 1995). To this end, the negative themes presented above are not a surprise. The themes that I now discuss centre on what makes feminist protest ‘feminist’, namely, its critique of the role of women in society, gender hierarchy and heteronormative standards for feminine appearance and behaviour. It is the latter in particular that represents the most negative but also the most persistent image of feminism.

Fourthly, feminists are not presented as ‘ordinary women’. Lind & Salo (2002) note that feminists are more often linked to public spaces than ordinary women, to industries such as the media and the arts, whereas women are often linked to the home. Jaworska & Krishnamurthy (2012) assert that feminism in Germany in particular, as opposed to the UK, is linked to academic and intellectual spheres, to which only a limited number of people have access. In van Zoonen’s (1992) work, feminists are put in contrast to housewives specifically with their academic or elite status. In contrast, Mendes (2011b) cites modern examples where feminists are described as housewives or workers, that is, as ordinary, but her criticism of this is that it normalises these roles and does not allow for a radical critique of the roles of women in society.

The previous theme is linked to the fifth and final negative presentation of feminism: the transgression of acceptability in behaviour and appearance of women. Challenging these social norms of behaviour and appearance is central to feminism, but they become the

clearest point of attack for the news media. Rhode (1995) highlights that feminists in the 1970s faced a 'double bind' when it came to these norms: if a feminist was not feminine, she was ridiculed and delegitimated, and if she was, she was presented as a hypocrite. This is less of an issue in contemporary presentations of feminism, which I discuss below.

Feminists in the 1970s who did not remove their body hair, did not wear make-up, who eschewed traditional female clothing for clothing more commonly associated with men and who behaved in combative ways were consistently ridiculed and delegitimated (Ashley & Olson, 1998; Hinds & Stacey, 2001; Mendes, 2011a; Rhode, 1995). I would like to make the point that behaviour and appearance considered extreme or challenging compared to typical expectations for women is not inherently negative, but instead it is the ways in which the news media frame it, for example, by describing such feminists with negatively evaluated language such as 'ugly' or 'strident' (van Zoonen, 1992) or failing to engage politically and philosophically with their actions (Mendes, 2011b). Hinds & Stacey (2001) study the figure of 'the bra burner' from the 1970s to the 1990s, a figure who remains a persistent and pervasive image for feminism, despite being historically erroneous. Although 'the bra burner' is at times ambiguous, embodying both the sexually liberated woman and the woman who is liberated *from* sexualisation, they claim that 'the bra burner' reflects wider concerns about the untamed female body and the threat of a feminist agenda. Instead of being a starting point for a critique of patriarchal constructions of femininity (or indeed the notion of femininity itself being a patriarchal construction), the image becomes a source for snide humour at 'petty' politics and by extension rejection of feminism as a whole.

In addition, feminism is often linked to lesbianism, which, when understood in a heteronormative framework, is a negative association (Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012; Lind & Salo, 2002; Rhode, 1995). Furthermore, feminism is at times blamed for damaging presumably essential or natural relations between men and women, and women and the family more widely, as women change their behaviour in their private relations (Dean, 2010; Mendes, 2011b).

Coming back to feminism and feminine beauty norms, the dynamic becomes clearer when looking at contemporary representations of feminists. Feminists who adhere to beauty norms

are often celebrated as ‘fun’ and ‘sexy’, producing a kind of attainable or accessible feminism that can be promoted (Bronstein, 2005; Dean, 2010; Mendes, 2012). In Bronstein (2005), this is achieved through a negative comparison to second wave feminists as ‘mannish’ and ‘hairy’. Although more of a feature of contemporary feminism, it was present in the 1970s, too, as demonstrated by van Zoonen (1992), whereby Dolle Mina, a Dutch feminist group who did not present a critique of beauty norms, was positively reported by the Dutch news media compared to negative evaluations of more radical feminist activities such as women-only consciousness-raising circles.

This representation can be linked to the wider representation of the politics of feminism and the claims of de-politicisation and ‘domestication’ (Dean, 2010) of contemporary feminism. Barbara Holland-Cunz (2003) makes the point that the persistent negative image of feminism – strident, combative, hairy, manly/unfeminine – comes from the radical elements of feminism visible in the 1970s. By contrast, liberal feminist approaches focusing on legal changes such as equal pay and work discrimination have found wider acceptance in the news media (Dean, 2010; Mendes, 2011b; Rhode, 1995; van Zoonen, 1992). Van Zoonen (1992) suggests that firstly, news media historically view “politics” as taking place in traditional domains such as the law, economics and governmental institutions, not on a personal and private level that was and is claimed by radical feminists, therefore the press is unable to engage with radical feminist views; and secondly, radical feminist views pose a far greater threat to the current organisation of society, demanding a fundamental transformation at all levels, therefore news media, as elite institutions that are directly under attack, are unwilling as well as unable to engage with this view of politics. This split between liberal/moderate and radical has been explored and understood in a number of ways by scholars in this area, which I now discuss.

Mendes (2011b) describes the framework of postfeminist discourse in news coverage which accepts feminist goals, but rejects feminism and feminists. Equal pay and legal changes can be or have been achieved without feminism. She notes the presence of postfeminist discourse from the 1970s, but she claims that it has now become hegemonic. Rhode (1995), too, notes the trend from the 1990s of promoting ideas of gender equality while denying those of collective action. As explicated by Dean (2010), focusing on less politically radical goals, such

as gender stereotypes as opposed to concepts of patriarchy or systemic oppression, shifts the dynamics of the discussion and neutralises further critique: nobody can deny that breaking down gender stereotypes and promoting legal equality for women are not worthy goals; the problem is that this comes at the expense of more probing political viewpoints. In her recent work on the SlutWalk, Mendes (2015b) found that most papers were able to engage to some level with the discussion of rape culture and victim blaming that the SlutWalk protesters were trying to provoke, but this was often at a superficial level. Additionally, the links to feminism were often erased, although it is not clear whether this is because feminism was taken for granted or seen as not relevant (Mendes, 2015a).

In addition to postfeminist discourse, Bronstein (2005), Dean (2010), Mendes (2011a) and van Zoonen (1992) explore what Dean (2010) describes as the discourse of ‘domestication’. As opposed to postfeminist discourse which repudiates feminism as a whole, domestication discourse repudiates some elements of feminism *‘in the service of an affirmation of feminism’* (Dean, 2010: 398, italics in original), that is, sanitising the supposedly more unpalatable aspects of feminism in order to allow its positive representation. He uses the example of the focus on constructing contemporary feminism to be welcoming to men as a response to critiques of women-only spaces representative of radical feminist activities in the 1970s. Continued affirmations of contemporary feminism being fun and sexy and allowing women to embrace traditional femininity, as mentioned earlier, can be read in the same way. Interacting in a significant way with neoliberal discourse, recent representations of feminism (since circa 2000) consistently emphasise feminism as a set of individual beliefs rather than a collective political movement. Within this, any activity done by a woman (baking, sewing) can be framed as empowering and therefore feminist because it is ‘her choice’ (Bronstein, 2005; Mendes, 2012). In Sisco & Lucas (2014), when electoral candidates Sarah Palin or Hilary Clinton were linked to feminism in the 2008 presidential campaign, it was because of their lifestyles or actions – combatting personal sexist attacks on the campaign trail or having children and a career – rather than their issues as politicians. The US media also positively evaluated the ‘choice’ feminism exemplified by Sarah Palin (Sisco & Lucas, 2014), a kind of feminism that resembles neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2013) and conservative feminism (Klaus, 2008). Mendes (2012) laments the news media’s continuing inability to deal with challenging feminist politics because, as Bronstein (2005: 795) writes, the domestication

discourse, while affirmative of feminism, presents contemporary feminism as 'so superficial as to pose no threat to the status quo'.

While some may question whether contemporary feminism really is radical and politically grounded (Dean, 2009)²², Darmon (2014) and Schowalter (2012) both track the passage of feminist politics into the news media. When looking at the SlutWalk, Darmon (2014) describes how the messages of female collectivity and the recognition of violence against women as being part of systemic gender hierarchy are transformed into neoliberal discussions in the newspapers about the clothing choices of women. Although this is not always the case and the Guardian, for example, is better than other newspapers are at embracing the political aspects, a significant portion of engagements with the SlutWalk strip away the political and emphasise the personal. Similarly, in the US, Schowalter (2012) details how a report on gender inequality which is written with a clear framework recognising structural oppression of women is without exception changed into a discussion about women's individual life choices, eradicating discussions of race and class as well. She writes scathingly:

[w]hen a news corporation devotes a week of coverage to a 442-page study about institutionalised sexism and then fails to deliver any of that content to their audience, the ability of feminists to use mainstream media outlets to disseminate messages should be called into question (Schowalter, 2012: 299).

Even when clearly given the opportunity to engage with feminism on a political level, the news media is often found wanting.

Mendes (2011a) re-evaluates current knowledge on the representation of 1970s feminism in the press and finds more positive frames, such as references to feminism as united and effective, than has previously been reported; however, she describes frames that present feminism as complex or contradictory, a political 'grey area', as more realistic of the feminist movement. Jonsson (2014), too, claims that the frames of unity are problematic because they

²² See, for example, Tong (2007).

can gloss over the true diversity of feminism²³. While sharing a common theoretical thread of a general and damaging asymmetry between men and women, feminist theory and practice is manifest in an inordinate number of ways, which are often contradictory (Ramazanoğlu, 1989). Even groups protesting on the same topic will have different objectives, practices and theoretical grounding (Jonsson, 2014). Dow & Wood (2014) make the point is that debate and differences of opinion demonstrate the vitality and the viability of feminism, although the practicalities of conveying information through the news media in terms of limited time and space mean that the battle for representing this complexity is perhaps currently a losing one.

Studies such as those carried out by Dean (2010), Hinds & Stacey (2001), Jaworska & Krishnamurthy (2012), Mendes (2011a) and Bronstein (2005) collected articles through use of the search term “feminism” (or variants and translations thereof). While this approach has its own clear merits in understanding the press representation of feminism as a discrete concept, it does not necessarily allow engagement with the representations of more specific and concrete feminist practices and protests. Considering the numerous studies on this subject, it is also highly unlikely that a new study along this vein will add anything substantial to the detailed work which has already been done. In light of this, both Dean (2010) and Scharff (2013) encourage moving beyond understanding whether feminism is understood as positive or negative by the press and instead ‘mapping the discursive terrain’ in more detail, as it is beyond doubt that feminism is back on the public agenda (Scharff, 2013: 838). In this, I follow the example of Scharff (2013), Sisco & Lucas (2014) and van Zoonen (1992) and use a case study approach in order to understand the dynamics of reporting on individual feminist protests. Furthermore, considering the current pervasive construction of feminism as apolitical and/or personal, or the absence of the term “feminism” in coverage of feminist protests (Darmon, 2014; Mendes, 2012, 2015b), there is always the possibility that a feminist protest may not be reported as such, and therefore would be missed in a top-down search for feminism in the newspapers.

²³ Both Mendes (2011a) and Jonsson (2014) highlight that this is of most concern for feminists who fall outside of the young white Western middle-class category, such as feminists of colour, feminist with disabilities and older feminists who arguably need feminism the most.

To conclude this section I would like to now address recent work on below the line (BTL) comment sections in the news media. This section is brief because there is scant work on this particular aspect of the news media. BTL comments sections come below the article on websites of newspapers, where users – presumably readers of the articles – are able to post comments and engage with the article, each other, and at times, the journalist who wrote the article (Craft, Vos & David Wolfgang, 2016; Graham & Wright, 2015). There are varying degrees of moderation for comment sections because it requires a great deal of work for what can be seen among journalists as very little reward in terms of generating news (Bergström & Wadbring, 2015).

Comments can be seen as low quality because of the risk of abusive and aggressive language that the anonymity of the internet can bring (Graham & Wright, 2015), the poor argumentation contained within (McCluskey & Hmielowski, 2012; Richardson & Stanyer, 2011) and the risk of a vocal minority taking over the majority of a conversation (Richardson & Stanyer, 2011; Weber, 2014). In contrast to these studies, I am not looking at comment sections as sites for democratic engagement or as a representative sample of society, but as a public site for feminist discourse. Readers negotiate the messages that they receive (Hall, 1980), and do not have to accept the mainstream news construction of events that they encounter. As McCluskey & Hmielowski (2012: 314) highlight in their work comparing online posts and letters to the editor, comment sections ‘bring additional views into public discourse on pressing social, cultural and political issues’ by offering greater differences of opinion. By contrast, letters to the editor, the traditional “reader’s voice” in newspapers is controlled by the newspaper in a much clearer way and has much more limited space (McCluskey & Hmielowski, 2012).

There has been some recent work on feminist discourse travelling through the media, such as Darmon (2014) and Schowalter (2012) discussed above. Additionally, work on online presence of contemporary feminist protest has looked at the protest’s relationship to the active feminist blogosphere, such as for the SlutWalk (Mendes, 2015a) and a study on the communication networks of #aufschrei (Maireder & Schlögl, 2014). As for feminist topics in comment sections, there is scant work on this topic therefore this is a gap that I would like to contribute to filling.

Looking at anti-feminist discourse in comments about the Lose the Lads Mags Campaign in the UK, García-Favaro & Gill (2016) highlight how traditional, banal and well-known sexist and anti-feminist tropes are found online in response to reporting on the campaign. Benton-Greig, et al. (2017) present similar results in their study of comments responding to a feminist campaign against the adverts of a well-known beer company in New Zealand, where commenters drew on the old trope that feminists are humourless, for example. Both studies found that the percentage of negative comments vastly outweighed positive comments, with Benton-Greig, et al. (2017) citing that around 90% of comments in their study were unsupportive of feminism. The most common theme for commenters in both studies, too, was the claim that men are the real victims, be it the real victims of society or victims of feminism (Benton-Greig, et al., 2017; García-Favaro & Gill, 2016). García-Favaro & Gill (2016) warn, however, that it is important to engage with the comments academically because ‘new modalities’ are at work within these old tropes, continuing to limit the success of feminist campaigns and perspectives in new ways.

2.5 Conclusion

To conclude this literature review, I would like to re-iterate the aims of the project, which lead into the research questions. As a broad aim, the project is structured to investigate the discursive terrain of contemporary feminist protest in the mediated, online public sphere using texts that anyone could access. Using an approach to discourse that sees a discourse as a partial fixity of meaning created along chains of signifiers, I am looking at how three feminist groups, FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, are constructed linguistically across three sites – their own output, news articles and news comment sections – because language is an important system of making meaning. Due to the arbitrary and non-essential nature of signifying processes, these meanings are always open to contestation and change and are only temporarily fixed. Feminist groups produce dislocatory, political discourse by challenging the status quo of gender norms and the subsequent structuring of institutions and society across gendered lines. Dislocatory discourse such as this challenges the naturalised functioning of society and exposes the radical contingency and precarity of social

relations, dislocations which subjects then seek to resolve through re-articulations. I am interested in investigating these articulations in the elite social position of the news media and the more open public space of the comments sections to understand how feminist protest is constructed in these non-feminist sites. If feminism is to be a successful political project and dismantle discriminatory gender relations, then it must be articulated across all areas of society, not just within its original location.

I have identified three themes of particular interest throughout my review of the literature, which structure my research questions and then the subsequent analysis sections, although the method of analysis will not have followed the same structure, which I explain in the following methodology section. Firstly, the dislocatory aspects of the feminist protests: how do the groups construct their problem with gender relations? How do they challenge the existing status quo? In turn, how is this negotiated by the news media and in the comment sections? I use the term 'negotiated' rather than reject or support because I do not wish to force a binary of reject/support which might cover up some of the more nuanced reactions to the projects, for example, the 'I'm not a feminist, but...' discussed by Zucker (2004) which exposes postfeminist identities that reject the label of feminism but support the aims. Secondly, the protest forms of the groups. This is the most divergent aspects of the groups, with the Everyday Sexism Project and #aufschrei part of contemporary hashtag feminism that utilises social media technology, and FEMEN using more traditional methods of street protest: what are the affordances of the different protest methods? How are these methods constructed and justified? Does the negotiation of them in the news media and BTL comments differ according to method of protest? Finally, and also related to the second point of enquiry, what are the tensions between individuals and collectivity in the groups' discourse and the discourses about them? This is set within the wider socio-political context of postfeminism, resurgent feminism and the 're-doing' of feminist politics that is rejecting extreme individualism that I detailed at the start of this section.

2.6 Research Questions

1a. How do FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project create discursive dislocations through the linguistic self-representation of the problems they identify and the aims they want to achieve?

1b. How are the dislocations of FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project negotiated discursively in the news media articles and the BTL comments?

2a. How are the protest forms of FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project constructed through their linguistic self-representation?

2b. How are the protest forms of FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project negotiated discursively in the news media articles and the BTL comments?

3a. How is the tension between individual actors and collective politics in the discourses of FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project constructed through their linguistic self-representation?

3b. How is the tension between individual actors and collective politics in the discourses of FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project negotiated in the news media articles and the BTL comments?

3 Methodology

This methodology is split into two sections. In the first section, I re-visit the theoretical framework for discourse that I introduced in Chapter 1 and explain what that means for an actual method of analysis. Discourse Theory functions as a conceptual framework but it is lacking in concrete methods of analysis, meaning that I have to look elsewhere for such tools, namely within Critical Discourse Analysis. This section comprises four sub-sections: a discussion of the stipulations for what a Discourse Theory project should cover; a discussion of the CDA tools that I am adapting with my theoretical framework; a brief explanation of the process of analysis and the presentation of the results; and a reflexive essay, in which I provide a reflexive account of my personal role in this thesis and tackle the ethical issues of feminist research. In the second section, I provide brief historical summaries of the groups under study, a breakdown of the data and finally a look at the anonymisation of the data in this study.

3.1 Operationalisation of a Discourse Theoretical Methodology

3.1.1 Discourse Theory and Investigations of Conflict over Meaning

Discourse Theory developed by Laclau is well-known for being abstract, focused more on theoretical development than empirical study, and the density of Laclau's writing, which assumes a knowledgeable background in the key theorists that he draws from, such as Lacan and Derrida, has also limited the appeal of this approach to discourse (Dahlberg & Phelan, 2011b; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Nevertheless, much more empirical work has been done using Discourse Theory by researchers from or inspired by this school of discourse and political analysis, such as in the edited collections of Dahlberg & Phelan (2011a) and Howarth & Torfing (2005). The majority of this work focuses on political analysis, with the edited collections designed to persuade political scientists to engage with the notion of discourse

and post-structural approaches to meaning, rather than engage with linguists already comfortable working in such a paradigm²⁴.

A full discourse theoretical project should work at a macro-level, encompassing as many possible aspects of discourse as possible, including the extra-linguistic such material objects (Howarth, 2005). This study falls short of this, as I focus on just the linguistic aspects because of limits of time and space, but I believe that the concepts drawn from Discourse Theory such as radical contingency, dislocation, social antagonism, politics and sedimentation provide a useful framework for understanding linguistic constructions of contemporary feminist protest.

In principle, a discourse theoretical approach should identify the nodal points of a discourse, how other signs in a discourse are thus organised and which signs are excluded (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). It should highlight the radical contingency of a discourse, how a particular discourse could have been articulated differently and understand why it has been articulated the way that it has (Dahlberg, 2011; Howarth, 2005; Torfing, 2005). Jacob Torfing (1999) encourages the use of a variety of methods and tools for analysis within a discourse theoretical perspective, with the primary concern being that the methods, data and tools should be driven from the identification of a problem or a question, rather than the other way around (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth, 2005; Torfing, 2005). Phillips & Jørgensen (2002) demonstrate how systematic linguistic analysis developed by Norman Fairclough in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)²⁵ can be used alongside a Discourse Theory approach.

Discourse Theory and CDA differ most obviously on the notion of the discursive and extra-discursive, with the former rejecting anything outside of discourse; however, where the two approaches cross over is in their understanding of language as *meaningful* (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Language is recognised by both approaches as one of the primary ways that we interact with the world and with each other, albeit interlinked with material practices. Political projects are built up through language, via manifestos and demands, the naming practices of groups and the delegitimation of the opposition groups, for example, so language

²⁴ See, for example, Torfing (2005).

²⁵ For examples of Fairclough's approach, see Fairclough (2009a), Fairclough (2009b) and Richardson (2007).

is a primary location for investigation in order to understand political projects. Research done under the CDA rubric, too, is problem-driven, with the decision of the most appropriate or useful method left up to the researcher to make and justify (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak, 2011; Wodak & Reisigl, 2009). Finally, researchers in both approaches align themselves to a political standpoint and their work has explicitly emancipatory aims, which includes at least the exposure of taken-for-granted knowledge and better understanding of current social power dynamics, if not fully fledged recommendations for professional practitioners (Fairclough, et al., 2011; Torfing, 2005). To this end, applying a form of systematic linguistic analysis developed in CDA to a discourse theoretical approach should not be problematic (Dahlberg & Phelan, 2011b; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002).

One major issue facing discourse analysts (and social constructionists more widely) is the fact that they are supposed to be deconstructing a discourse, uncovering the taken-for-granted, while still being part of that discourse, or at least the wider social context (Burr, 2007; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Systematic linguistic analysis acts as a tool for “distancing” the researcher from the text, providing a form of translation to identify features of the text that are not immediately obvious at the first look (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Another tool of analysis is that of multiperspectival case studies, as I am doing here. My project can be considered as eleven small case studies, if we take the construction of each group at mediated location in each country as an individual case, as I demonstrate in Figure 1 at the end of this sub-section. Accessing multiple perspectives through many individual case studies can be a form of translation, placing the discourse under study in a new light through comparison and highlighting subtleties that may not have been immediately obvious (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth, 2005).

FEMEN and the two examples of hashtag feminism, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, are varied cases of contemporary feminist protest and I selected them for that reason. FEMEN are an exclusive, clearly defined group who protest in traditional public spaces such as on the streets and in press conferences. They protest topless with deliberately shocking performances designed to draw attention from all quarters. #Aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project can be seen more as feminist protest resources. It is impossible to draw the boundaries of who is included in the group, due to the vast numbers of stories and

the anonymity of the publishing process. I have chosen to use stories shared on the websites rather than using Twitter data because there are many anti-feminist, aggressive and threatening posts connected to the respective hashtags and I would be reticent to say that they are part of this feminist protest “group”. Using cases that differ so widely such as these here could also help to illuminate the particularities of discourse about contemporary feminist protest; for example, the mode of protest (online and faceless against offline and topless) could affect their reception in the news media and subsequent comment sections (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth, 2005).

The reasoning for choosing Germany and the United Kingdom is twofold and it is less based on comparison than with the choice of the groups. Firstly, the groups operate in both countries: FEMEN has a number of branches globally, although they are based in Paris, and are reported on in the press of both the UK and Germany; #aufschrei (Germany) and the Everyday Sexism Project (UK) operate along very similar lines²⁶. Secondly, I have personal access to both languages, being a native English speaker and having completed German Studies to Master’s level.

Germany and the United Kingdom do not represent opposite cases of contemporary feminism, as the development of feminism in these two countries is more similar than in other Western nations, such as the US (Marx Ferree, 2012; Scharff, 2012). The global reach of neoliberal and consumerist discourses (Clarke, 2008; Harvey, 2005) and technological networks also means that contemporary feminism in different locations worldwide draw on similar discursive resources, limiting extreme variation. I remain, however, sensitive to the local contexts. I do not, however, wish to over-state the comparative nature of the study when it comes to the two countries, particularly because I have a small corpus of data and the aim is to access a range of voices in different locations held together by participation in contemporary discourse around feminism, rather than create a study which is comparative by design. Differences in press coverage of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project across

²⁶ There are a number of hashtags in other countries that perform the same function, such as #yesallwomen in the US (Thrift, 2014), #prataomdet (#letstalkaboutit) in Sweden (Karlsson, 2018; Wizorek, 2014), #sendenalat (#tellyourstory) in Turkey (Drüeke & Zobl, 2016) and #ЯНеБоюсьСказать (#IAmNotAfraidToSayIt) in the Ukraine (Lokot, 2018). #MeToo (from October 2017) is the most recent example of anti-sexism hashtag activism in English speaking countries, unrelated – at least directly – to the Everyday Sexism Project.

Germany and the UK may have more to do with, for example, the age and wider public awareness of the groups than some fundamental difference in feminism in each country.

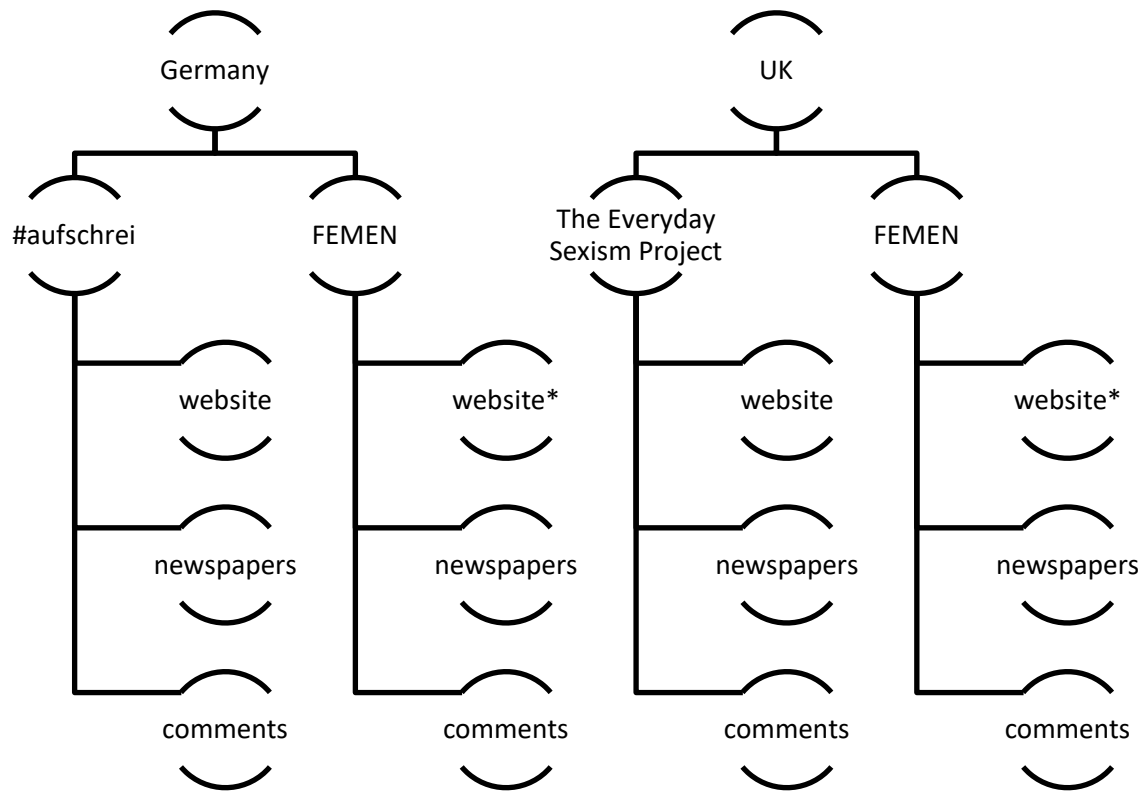


Figure 1: A Visualisation of the Eleven Case Studies in this Study; *FEMEN only have one website in English, although it covers protests worldwide

3.1.2 Applying CDA Methods

I have chosen to synthesise a discourse theoretical methodology with CDA methods because they are complementary rather than competing: the CDA methods provide the bones for the analysis of the data in my study and Discourse Theory puts flesh on those bones when it comes to conceptualising discourse more deeply, in particular the nature of political discourse and the process of discursive conflict. It is the detailed focus on conflict, change and social antagonism that I value in Discourse Theory, and I would like to develop methodological tools for this approach to discourse analysis, rather than working entirely in a CDA framework.

The label of CDA covers a range of methods and definitions of discourse with different emphases on research objects, including cognitive approaches (Hart, 2011; van Dijk, 2009), historical and ethnographically-led approaches (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009) and multimodal approaches (Machin, 2016; van Leeuwen, 2005), as well as combinations of approaches, such as those used by Koller (2011) and van Leeuwen & Wodak (1999). Researchers are united by a focus on linguistic and textual analysis in general, as well as the emancipatory and problem-driven nature of research (Fairclough, et al., 2011). As a result, various detailed methods of linguistic analysis have been developed by CDA researchers. I work from Theo van Leeuwen's approach to texts as a recontextualisation of social practice, which is laid out in *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis* (2008) and Lesley Jeffries's work on contextually constructed opposition from *Opposition to Discourse: The Construction of Oppositional Meaning* (2010). The analytical tools developed in these approaches draw on the same linguistic resources as other CDA approaches, so on closer inspection they may not appear overly dissimilar from the tools of the other researchers named above; for example, the Discourse Historical Approach developed largely by Ruth Wodak uses large parts of van Leeuwen's Social Actor Network. I chose Theo van Leeuwen's approach as a starting point because he has produced a clear and detailed framework for analysis which specifically deals with textual data, rather than material objects, images or fieldwork observations. Lesley Jeffries's approach was a later addition, as I realised that her work on opposition in discourse was useful for picking apart the construction of conflict in texts, which is a central part of Discourse Theory if not an exhaustive one. In this way, Jeffries (2010) is supplementary to van Leeuwen (2008), who provides the main analytical power for this study.

For van Leeuwen, "discourse" refers to socially constructed knowledge of social practices, and texts are a way to investigate this knowledge (van Leeuwen, 2005, 2008). Recontextualisation is the process of representing a practice in a text and the target of analysis is the transformations that inevitably take place. There is a key difference between "doing it" and "talking about it", because it is through language that we legitimate, or delegitimize, evaluate, positively or negatively, and ascribe purposes to social practices (van Leeuwen, 2008). My data, then, can be considered recontextualised feminist protest, and the language used to talk about it is the place to look for legitimations and evaluations of that practice. Legitimation and evaluation can be found not just in overt explanations, but in the moment

that a semantic category is applied, such as how a social actor is named: are they ‘Feministinnen’, “‘Feministinnen’” (the use of “” to imply they are not, or at least not “proper”, feminists) or ‘Emanzen’ (a negative term for feminists)? Or indeed, the failure to ascribe a semantic category to an actor or an action through suppression or backgrounding can be just as illuminating (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Although I am not going to list all the categories of transformations and representations in van Leeuwen (2008), it is important to note that the key starting point of analysis is a sociosemantic category, a category of meaning, rather than a linguistic feature. The reasons for this are twofold: an object, concept or process may be represented by a number of different linguistic features, or suppressed and not represented at all; and linguistic features are not inherently positive or negative, so their meaning depends heavily on the in-text context as well as the social context of the text (van Leeuwen, 2008). It is during the investigation of a particular sociosemantic category that a researcher draws upon linguistic features to understand the representations and theorise potential implications of such representations.

There are three broad categories identified by van Leeuwen (2008) that I consider to be most pertinent to the project: firstly, the representation of actors, in particular the feminists themselves and the people who are the focus of the protest (for example, Vladimir Putin); secondly, the representation of the protest action and subsequent reaction; and thirdly, the evaluation and legitimation of the protest, that is, asking how the groups and the protests are evaluated, and how they and their protests are constructed as legitimate or not legitimate. I have also drawn on other socio-semantic categories such as time and space, but these play less of a defined role in the final results, appearing intermittently throughout.

In this process, van Leeuwen (2008) can be considered more of a guidebook than a textbook, as it is not an exhaustive linguistics resource – as, indeed, nothing can be. For this reason, I have also drawn upon the work by Jeffries (2010) to provide further analytical grounding for understanding discursive construction of chains of equivalence. She looks closely at the construction of opposition in language and provides linguistic tools for picking these out of a range of texts. These largely comprise grammatical triggers, for example, negation (“is” & “is

not”) and parallel structures (“we are X, they are Y”), and lexical triggers that explicitly reference opposition with verbs such as “change” and “turn”. Opposition in language is where the meaning of one lexical item necessarily negates the meaning of the other, relating to the logics of equivalence and difference in my conceptual framework. Using this analytical framework, I can explore, for example, the dislocations that the feminist texts produce by identifying the conflicts that they construct. Who or what is their protest against? What about current society is incompatible with feminism, hence providing the impetus for the protests?

As a final note on CDA in this study, I would like to mention the feminist Critical Discourse Analysis programme put forward by Lazar (2005b) and the other contributors to her volume *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse* (2005). This is a founding text for explicitly feminist CDA, although there has been much work since and, as highlighted by Lazar (2005b), much work before. Feminist CDA is not about proscribing a particular method, but about advancing ‘a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining a (hierarchically) gendered social order’ (Lazar, 2005b: 1), using tools of analysis appropriate to the problem under study. This study fits comfortably within the programme of feminist CDA, bringing the same contribution of a Discourse Theory framework to feminist CDA as it brings to wider CDA; this is perhaps even more pertinent for the feminist CDA programme because, as I have demonstrated in my literature review, Discourse Theory is particularly useful for feminist research. Discourse Theory is also lacking an explicitly feminist framework; although Laclau & Mouffe (2001) do investigate feminism in the second volume of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, this is done as a point of analysis rather than from a feminist stance. This lack of a feminist programme may indeed be a result of the same phenomenon as identified by Lazar (2005b) for CDA: that feminist work largely sits comfortably within a critical framework without the need for a name. Nevertheless, an explicit feminist perspective for Discourse Theory is another contribution of this study, and another contribution that CDA can make to Discourse Theory alongside its tools of analysis.

3.1.3 Process of Analysis & Thematic Structure

Ultimately it is down to the researcher to define the limits of discourses according to the scope of the project and to that end it is also down to the researcher to identify and then justify, through presentation of results, the elements involved in the construction of that discourse (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). I carried out linguistic analysis of the texts according to the sociosemantic categories of van Leeuwen, working through social actors, social action, time and space, and finally evaluation and legitimation and making detailed notes, although there was often cross-over between the categories, particularly when it came to evaluation and legitimation. I also carried out analysis identifying the semantic and grammatical triggers of opposition in the texts, as laid out by Jeffries (2010); this second layer of analysis was most useful in picking apart the points of conflict and dislocation in the groups' discourse, but I was still reliant on categories of evaluation and legitimation to understand these points. For methodological clarification, conflict and dislocation are closely entwined, because a discursive dislocation causes discursive conflict, but they could arguably be separated thus: dislocation is an initial discursive disruption (Glynos & Howarth, 2007), identifiable by, for example, declarations of problems with the status quo, such as when the hashtag feminist groups emphatically claim that sexism is a legitimate problem for discussion. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, dislocations have political potential in that they allow for the development of new discourses but they can also be internally, and quickly, resolved²⁷. Conflict is the competition between different discourses, not necessarily just two, over the resolution of these dislocations, and is best identified through access to multiple texts that provide differing stances. The findings of this thesis deal extensively and almost exclusively with discursive conflict, whether it is arguments for and against topless protest, or arguments for and against the existence of sexism, to name just two examples.

With this analysis done, I was able to return to my research questions and my conceptual framework of Discourse Theory. Nodal points have two important features here: they are privileged signs and they are tendentially empty. With this theoretical background, I identified as nodal points the signifiers that were given prominence in the texts, both in placement and repetition, and these can cut across grammatical categories. These signifiers, as tendentially

²⁷ The books written by Bates and Wizorek also provide evidence of the particular dislocatory experiences that caused them to start their respective projects, namely, personal experiences of sexism (Bates, 2014) and reading an article on street harassment (Wizorek, 2014).

empty, are hard to define when they stand alone, but make more sense when placed within a wider context of a whole text or sections²⁸. As with the boundaries of discourse, nodal points are down to the researcher to identify and justify these selections within the theoretical definition of a nodal point, as there is no objective method for identifying them. In this study, I identified nodal points by starting with the feminist texts and looking at the words used particularly frequently or given prominence through names or, most crucially, used in the basic linguistic legitimisation of the problems that the groups want to tackle. The basic legitimisation of the groups is how they fundamentally justify and structure their discourse which dislocates the gendered status quo – that is, that sexism or patriarchy *is* a problem – therefore, their legitimations would be the clearest access point to their organising, privileged nodal points. The selection of the nodal points is also reinforced by the fact that these are often the focus of anti-feminist discourse in the media. Signs do not necessarily need to be in conflict to qualify as nodal points, but their situating as centres of conflict demonstrate how their meaning is not fixed (as tendentially empty) and demonstrates their importance for the organising of the feminist groups' discourse (as privileged signs), because re-articulating these signs is arguably the quickest way to dismantle a discourse²⁹.

²⁸ “Nodal points” map closely onto “key words” as they are used in Discourse Studies, as privileged organising signs and as tendentially empty. In Discourse Studies, key words are broadly ‘a discourse in a nutshell – their usage and semantics reflect changes as well as constellations of groups, attitudes and evaluations’ (Schröter, 2008: 43) and they ‘normally denote highly abstract concepts’ (Schröter, 2008: 46), which are then filled with meaning by the accompanying text. The role of key words in conflict is also evident, as they can have ‘different implications relative to the party or group that uses them’ (Schröter, 2008: 46), and note how, particularly in the German tradition of key words, ‘Stigmawörter’ and ‘Fahnenwörter’ capture this notion of struggle to fix meaning, such as the development of ‘political correctness’ from a ‘flag word’ in left wing discourse into a ‘stigma word’ first in right wing discourse and then in wider public discourse (Schröter, 2008). The process of identifying key words is the same as nodal points: manually, text-based and with a knowledge of the socio-historical context (Schröter, 2008; Schröter & Veniard, 2016). This differs from keywords in Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies, which uses reference corpora built from many millions of words and statistical analysis to derive keywords from smaller corpora according to frequency (McEnery & Hardie, 2012; Schröter & Veniard, 2016). The similarity of nodal points to other terms used in linguistic analysis is not surprising given that the term was not invented by Laclau and Mouffe but comes from Jacques Lacan, who influenced many academic traditions (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

²⁹ That is not to say that any of this is done with specific knowledge of Discourse Theory and nodal points, but that this theoretical framework helps to identify and theorise this phenomenon. For example, “sexism” (“Sexismus”) is a privileged organising sign for the hashtag feminist groups, which they fill with meaning through their stories (see Chapter 4); given its prominence in their discourse, it also provides a clear point of attack for BTL commenters because their whole campaign becomes redundant if sexism is no longer a meaningful and useful term for them.

From these nodal points, I was able to look more holistically at the discursive construction within a text, that is, how the meaning of these empty signifiers is made. Due to differences in perspectives of authors and the aims of texts, the various sociosemantic categories and opposition were not equally relevant in all texts, which becomes more evident in the analysis chapters.

When it comes to the final presentation of analysis in this thesis, there were a number of available options, such as organisation according to data set or according to the sociosemantic categories in van Leeuwen (2008). I made the final decision to present the results in two broad parts, one per “type” of protest: one part considering #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project together as hashtag feminism and one part for FEMEN. Guided by the research questions in Chapter 3, these parts are split into three chapters according to the three themes of dislocation construction, protest form and the construction of collectivity. This thematic structure provides a holistic view of the data and I draw upon the self-representation, news articles and BTL comments all within one chapter, with signposts for which data set I am using. Stylistically this has proven the best thesis structure, because separating chapters according to data set or sociosemantic category required a great deal of repetition and cross-referencing across chapters as themes cut across all data sets and categories. Furthermore, on closer look, the data sets are also not as clearly defined as it first appears, because feminist voices appear in the newspapers, most notably in self-penned articles from Laura Bates and Inna Shevchenko in the Guardian, and the BTL comments under articles about #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project provide space for further stories of sexism.

Finally, as this is a thesis in German Studies, preference is given to the German data, although the thesis is written in English, but this does not mean that data from either language is more valuable. In practical terms, this means that when I quote from the two languages, the German comes first, and I predominantly use German quotations for sections, for example. When a theme or a feature is more prominent in one language over another, I make that explicit.

3.1.4 Doing Feminist Research: Reflexivity and Ethical Issues

If I am claiming that feminism is a discourse, it raises the question of how and why I am able to, and indeed choose to, draw the limits of this discourse and name it as feminism. I address the answer to this question in this sub-section, where I outline my reflexive approach to this study, taking the time to discuss the ethical issues raised by this particular study. For more detail on the anonymisation of the data, see Sub-Section 3.2.5.

A criticism of those that take a discourse theoretical approach is that researchers often do not turn their critical eye back on themselves and provide a reflexive account of their projects (Dahlberg & Phelan, 2011b; Glynos & Howarth, 2007). This is also true of those working in Critical Discourse Analysis (Billig, 2003), but it is especially important in an avowedly post-structuralist theory of discourse such as Laclau's, where the contingency and arbitrariness of discourse is foregrounded. By contrast, reflexivity and self-critique is well established in feminist academic research, even if not applied across the board³⁰. I would like to reconcile the gap between these approaches and provide a reflexive account of a feminist project using Discourse Theory that recognises the implications of both feminism as discourse and *discourse* as discourse.

Sara Ahmed (2004) points out that discussions of "whiteness" (which can be applicable to other social categories) can often result in white people wanting to know what to do to assuage their guilt and this means that the discussion continues to still be about the feelings of the privileged group. My intention is for this reflexive piece to not be an apology or a celebration of my position, but be an honest acknowledgement of my role as a researcher in creating and completing this project to add depth to any dialogue resulting from this work. This sub-section, however, should not be an exercise in navel-gazing; I should discuss the implications of the choices I have made in designing my project in such a way, not simply provide a list of personal attributes (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2010a; Zeffiro & Hogan, 2015).

³⁰ See, for example, the edited collection by Ryan-Flood & Gill (2010b), as well as Jenkins (2014), Kingston Mann (2014), Scharff (2010), Shaw (2013), Shaw (2014), Zeffiro & Hogan (2015).

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001), Laclau and Mouffe highlight the impossibility of objective truth while at the same time implicitly presenting their own work as the objective truth (Dahlberg & Phelan, 2011b). The logic of Discourse Theory means that researchers working within its confines must instead be open to contestation and open to the knowledge that their constructions of the world are just one possible articulation of elements and that those elements can be articulated differently. Paradoxically, researchers must be open to the knowledge that Discourse Theory, by its own logic, could itself be contested and destroyed. This seems like an impossible and hopeless situation, but this is where I would return to the point made in the previous section by Torfing (2005), that we always exist within discourses which come with their own values and limits. Recognising that the values and limits of a particular discourse are not the ultimate truth is not to surrender to nihilism, because there is no ultimate truth; instead, there are contested meanings which hold, for whatever reason, better explanatory power for different individuals and the aim of much academic work is persuading our colleagues and other readers of our work over to our own particular interpretation (Glynos & Howarth, 2007).

The main source for critique in this project is that I am a feminist and I believe that there are deep-rooted problems between the relations between women and men, and in the definition and expectations of what a woman should be. How feminism is contested in public spaces could give an insight into the problems facing those that endeavour to tackle these problems. My choice of feminism as a topic of academic study and my personal alignment with feminism already demonstrates certain assumptions: that feminism exists and that feminism is important and necessary. The first point is much less contested than the second, but demonstrates my position in this particular point in time, as a person born at least four generations since the first usage of the signifier “feminism”. The second point means that I stand in contrast to anti-feminists (Drüeke & Klaus, 2014; Klaus, 2008), to those that subscribe a postfeminist discourse, where feminism is repugnant because its aims, whatever they are, have been achieved or because it is too extreme (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), to those that eschew the moniker “feminist” while supporting its aims (Zucker, 2004), and, most importantly, to those that consider mainstream constructions of feminism to be exclusionary along lines of race and class, universalising and even unusable for women who are not white, middle-class and Western (Ramazanoğlu, 1989). I believe in the potential of feminism as a

political project, as something to strive for; however, I recognise that those who adhere to the terms “feminism” and “feminist” often have conflicting views, objectives and practices (Jonsson, 2014; Ramazanoğlu, 1989) and that women’s oppression and judgement of other women happens on a daily basis (McNicol, 2015; Mohanty, 2003; Ramazanoğlu, 1989; Shaw, 2013), therefore I know that my claim to feminism is not a simple one and requires constant reflection.

All the locations I have chosen for my study mean something. I am focusing on Western feminism, which historically has faced criticisms of privilege along lines of class and race, failing to recognise the different impacts of these categories on women’s lives, and applying gross generalisations to diverse groups of women (Mohanty, 1988; Ramazanoğlu, 1989). This *is* another piece of work produced by a white, middle-class feminist in the West about predominantly white, middle-class feminist groups, but this is not necessarily a limitation, because I am to some extent an insider (Shaw, 2013), and this is arguably less problematic than speaking for others who occupy vastly different social categories within the research process (Scharff, 2010). On this point, my work does speak for the groups, authors of the news articles and the BTL commenters under study: I quote their texts, but these are selected examples, and these choices alone are an act of power (Laclau, 1993; Scharff, 2010), which I discuss in more detail further down. I interpret their texts, put them into my theoretical framework, pull out discursive structures of legitimation and evaluate and, at times, criticise. In this case, it is useful firstly to refer back to the discussion about intersectionality from Sub-Section 2.2.1: ethically grounded feminist research should pay attention to the silences in a project as well as what is said (Scharff, 2010), which is what my analytical method is designed to do. Secondly, as I discuss in more detail below, I should make my final analysis, my process and the data as transparent as possible, to allow for easy access and to allow for critique, especially from the original contributors. To that end, I have included full appendices, shorthand to find quotes in the original data, and paid attention to the requirements for rigour and justification required for academic work.

In the design of the project, too, there are other silences that require mentioning. I recognise that my socio-economic background has facilitated my education and my ease of travel into the higher education system in the UK, resulting in this academic feminist project. It is cycles

such as this that perpetuate systematic inequalities in society, as the same voices continue to be heard while others struggle to enter privileged discursive communities and have the same voice (Ramazanoğlu, 1989). Additionally, by choosing digital representations of feminism, I am drawing on a kind of feminism that is not necessarily open to all, as it excludes those unable to access technology due to financial reasons or technical illiteracy, which particularly affects the older generations and those at the lowest socio-economic levels (Fotopoulou, 2014; Mehra, Merkel & Peterson Bishop, 2004; Petray, 2011; Robinson, et al., 2015).

As well as being a feminist, I am a doctoral researcher and I endeavour to function within an academic discourse. This affects how I realise my feminist identity, and likewise being an academic affects how I view and act on my feminist beliefs; I study feminism through an analytical lens with the application of academic feminist theory, not because it is the objectively right and only way to approach feminism, but because it is a way to approach feminism academically. Defining the boundaries of a particular discourse is an analytical exercise, due to the way that discourses blend into, cross over and borrow from each other, and comes down to the research aims of the project (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Because I am also functioning within an academic discourse, I must do this in a certain way to gain acceptance (Glynos & Howarth, 2007), such as using clearly defined and justified case studies, framing them in a wider theoretical and cultural context and producing the final written product of the thesis that is structured according to the expectations of the wider academic community. Because my work rejects claims of ultimate truth and objectivity, the claims that I make cannot be tested in a positivist way and instead I am reliant upon attending to the conventions of social constructionism (Burr, 2007; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). This means that all the steps that I take in the research process should be clear, coherent, consistent, furnished with reasoning according to theory and then detailed rigorously in the final presentation (Burr, 2007; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002).

If discourse is meaning-making, I am making meaning of the events that I study by articulating them within my theoretical approach. My study is a discourse in itself, a partial fixity of meaning that uses “contemporary feminism”, “protest” and “media” as nodal points, organising the rest of the project around these particular points. By contrast, for example,

Baer (2016) looks at the same groups in her work on ‘re-doing’ feminist politics, taking “precarity” and “the female body” as nodal points to organise her work, which results in a slightly different perspective. In setting the boundaries of my discourse, I decide what to include and what to exclude, such as dealing with textual data rather than interview data, and then picking which texts to analyse and what to write up. Enacting these exclusions is an act of power (Laclau, 1993; Scharff, 2010) and it is not an objective process, so I have detailed and justified my selection process (Sub-Section 3.2.4). There will always be voices left out, such as, for example, the posts from the hashtag feminist websites not selected for analysis. People expended emotional and temporal labour to share these stories and they are no less worthy of attention than those selected, meaning that, as feminist researchers, there is always more work to be done beyond the boundaries of our latest project; this is equally relevant for BLT commenters, both supportive and critical. At the same time, contributors to the hashtag feminist groups and the BTL forums have no control over their inclusion in the project. I take the presence of the stories in a public forum as a starting point, as a level of privacy has already been conceded, but as there is no way to contact contributors, I have anonymised their data (see Sub-Section 3.2.5).

I name the groups, the news reporting and the comments as all part of the discourse around contemporary feminist protest; in this, I include both the discourse produced *by* self-proclaimed feminists and discourse *about* feminism. I take the groups’ self-naming as feminist as my starting point (Bates, 2014; FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014; Wizorek, 2014), not just confirming acceptance of feminism as a valid object of study, but accepting their claims to feminism. Others may be unwilling to see FEMEN as feminist due to their highly problematic interactions with and statements about Muslim women (Baer, 2016; O’Keefe, 2014; Zychowicz, 2011) or because of their topless protests and their deliberate choice of conventionally attractive women as protesters (Reestorff, 2014). Others may struggle to see hashtag feminism as truly and effectively feminist due to its exclusively technological nature and neoliberal influences (Dean, 2009; Evans, 2015). Within my analysis there are voices in the media and the comment sections that deny feminism, reject its importance or refuse to recognise these groups either as feminist or as necessary. Within the bounds of my study, these are just as important as the supportive voices, as I am framing my project as an

exploration of the political and contested nature of feminism according to Laclau's notion of discourse.

As Mohanty (1988; 2003) goes to pains to explain, forging feminism as a political project is possible, but only if we respect the oscillations between the local and the global, finding patterns across the world while still recognising particular differences. This requires careful, sensitive and reflexive work that avoids generalisations. As I stated in my introduction, this project is about mapping a part of the discursive terrain of contemporary feminism. This does not mean that my results here can be generalised to other feminist protests or feminism as a whole. My results hold for the groups under study within the parameters that I have set (the specific year, the specific countries, the specific groups, the specific newspapers), provided that my interpretations are accepted by the academic community. What it means is that we become more knowledgeable about one particular point in this terrain, and then this work, and I, can enter into dialogue with other work that is situated along both similar and contrasting lines (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002).

3.2 Scope of the Project

I start this section with three smaller sub-sections on the brief histories of the groups. These are chronological histories taken from books produced by the founders of the groups (Bates, 2014; FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014; Wizorek, 2014) and academic work done on the groups. This is to provide an insight and some context for the reader, but I present much more detail on discursive construction in the upcoming analysis chapters. It is important to bear in mind that there is no "true" sequence of events and the same feminist texts and news articles that constitute the object of later analysis also contribute to the background for these histories.

3.2.1 A Brief History of #aufschrei

Media coverage, as well as some academic articles, such as Maireder & Schlögl (2014), often situates the beginnings of #aufschrei in January 2013 as a response to sexist comments made by politician Rainer Brüderle towards journalist Laura Himmelreich from news magazine

Stern³¹. Key founder Anne Wizorek refutes this narrative, stating instead that it came from a late night Twitter discussion on the 25th of January about a blog post from feminist blog kleinerdrei.org. In the post, which pre-dates Himmelreich's revelation of Brüderle's sexist comments, Maike Hank wrote about her own experiences with sexual harassment in public places, the post itself a response to a documentary about public sexual harassment set on the streets of Brussels (Wizorek, 2014). The blog post mentioned the Everyday Sexism Project and suggested a German-driven alternative. Inspired by the Swedish hashtag #prataomdet (#letstalkaboutit) and #shoutingback, used by the Everyday Sexism Project, Wizorek put forward the German language hashtag #aufschrei (Wizorek, 2014).

Within 24 hours, #aufschrei had turned into a national debate, with more than 8,000 people using the hashtag (Maireder & Schlögl, 2014). After the first two weeks, there were around 60,000 posts shared on Twitter (Wizorek, 2014). The debate was picked up in the mainstream media, including major newspapers and political TV shows, and by the feminist blogosphere. At times it drifted away from the technicalities of #aufschrei and towards a more general 'Sexismus-Debatte' (Drüeke & Klaus, 2014; Drüeke & Zobl, 2016; Maireder & Schlögl, 2014; Sadowski, 2016). In this way, #aufschrei became a 'symbol' of the wider debate about sexism in German society, which did not always reference #aufschrei itself (Maireder & Schlögl, 2014: 688).

#Aufschrei received some international coverage, with corresponding hashtags in French, #assez, and Italian, #gridala. Wizorek (2014) credits this international recognition to the Everyday Sexism Project for re-tweeting some of their posts and raising awareness outside of Germany. Despite this, it is important to not overstate the direct and day-to-day connections between the different hashtag initiatives covering everyday sexist practices. #Aufschrei developed out of its specific German situation, nearly a year after the Everyday Sexism Project in the UK, although the technological capacities of online networks, especially Twitter and hashtagging, meant that the dialogue could spread and intensify in a similar way (Drüeke &

³¹ During a conversation at a hotel bar, Brüderle said to Himmelreich: "Sie können ein Dirndl auch ausfüllen" ("You could fill out a dirndl too", my translation) and kissed her hand. The full article by Laura Himmelreich is available at: <https://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/stern-portraet-ueber-rainer-bruederle-der-herrenwitz-3116542.html>.

Klaus, 2014; Drüeke & Zobl, 2016). The temporal proximity and subsequent conflating of the Himmelreich-Brüderle comments and #aufschrei demonstrates that the ground was ready for a discussion about sexism in German society at that particular historical moment, and not before.

In March 2013, German president Joachim Gauck gave an interview in news magazine Spiegel and described the reaction to Brüderle's comments (the ongoing sexism debate) as a "Tugendfuror", a rage about virtue³². The founders of #aufschrei wrote an open letter to the president, which can be found in the Full Appendix (Chapter 13); in essence, they claimed that his perspective trivialised the issue of sexism in German society as well as trivialised the political engagement of #aufschrei and the sexism debate. In July 2013, #aufschrei won a Grimme Online award for the offline impact that the predominantly online campaign had produced and in 2014, one of the founders Anne Wizorek produced a book covering the history of #aufschrei as well as putting forward her own opinions on the future of feminism in Germany (Wizorek, 2014).

The hashtag and website are, at time of writing (late 2017/early 2018), considerably less active than the Everyday Sexism Project: the website has not been updated since 2014. The symbol of #aufschrei as a link to socio-political debates about sexism in German-speaking society remains relevant, however, with the appearance of #schweizeraufschrei in October 2016, two years and ten months after the first #aufschrei³³. This was again in response to comments made by a high-profile politician, but in this case in response to a female politician who claimed that, in some cases, women should share a portion of the blame when they have been raped.

The two protest events I have chosen for #aufschrei are the initial founding in January 2013 and the open letter/"Tugendfuror" in March 2013.

³² It is also sometimes translated into English as a 'gentlemen's offence'.

³³ <http://www.vice.com/alps/read/twitter-user-berichten-unter-schweizer-aufschrei-von-sexismus-im-alltag-ch>.

3.2.2 A Brief History of the Everyday Sexism Project

The Everyday Sexism Project was started in the UK in April 2012 by Laura Bates (Bates, 2014; Carter, 2015; Highfield, 2016). Initially designed to be a small website for Bates and her friends (www.everydaysexism.com), it ballooned into something much larger, particularly once she set up the Twitter account @EverydaySexism and the corresponding hashtag #everydaysexism; within two months, there were over 1,000 entries on the website from all over the world, and within 20 months, there had been 50,000 stories shared on the website (Bates, 2014). The growth of the project attracted the mainstream media, with features run on the project worldwide, and Bates herself was invited to write for a number of broadsheet UK newspapers, including the Independent and the Guardian (Bates, 2014; Carter, 2015). Bates has produced a book *Everyday Sexism* (2014) which documents some of the stories shared on both the website and the Twitter page.

Although I have only collected stories from 2013, a year after the project started, at time of writing, the website and hashtag are still being used, although less productively than at its initial peak, and Laura Bates continues to write for the Guardian. The stories are currently being collected into a searchable database by a team at Oxford University (Carter, 2015).

For the news media and BTL data on the Everyday Sexism Project I have chosen two events from 2013: the two-year anniversary of the Everyday Sexism Project and when the project hit 50,000 entries.

3.2.3 A Brief History of FEMEN

FEMEN was founded in 2008 in the Ukraine by four women: Inna Shevchenko, who remains the most prominent member of the group internationally, Anna Hutsol, Alexandra Shevchenko (no relation to Inna) and Oksana Shachko (FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014). Joining together through readings of Marxist texts and a shared discontent of gender relations (FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014), FEMEN represent a 'new generation' of feminists in the Ukraine, who grew up without extensive knowledge of communism and who rejected post-Soviet

norms (Rubchak, 2012: 56). Initially their protests were rooted in a specific Ukrainian context, against issues such as sexual exploitation in higher education institutions, sex trafficking and sex scandals in politics (FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014; Rubchak, 2012; Zychowicz, 2011). As they gained recognition and numbers, the group expanded both geographically and in objective (Thomas & Stehling, 2016).

By 2012, they had gained at least the attention of Western Europe from their protests at the Euro 2012 football championships in Ukraine. They aimed to highlight the increase in sex trafficking and prostitution that the influx of tourists would bring (Athanassiou & Bury, 2014; FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014; Thomas & Stehling, 2016). By 2013, they had fled the Ukraine, claiming asylum in Paris and setting up headquarters centred on training up new FEMEN members to physically resist security and police (FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014; Thomas & Stehling, 2016). There are now a number of branches of FEMEN operating worldwide, including FEMEN Germany based in Hamburg; these national groups are most easily accessed through their various Facebook pages³⁴.

FEMEN members have a recognisable “look”, which is a key part of their self-representation: young, predominantly white, slim and conventionally attractive with long hair, flower wreaths, bare breasts and slogans painted on their bodies. The flower wreath was originally a Ukrainian folk symbol, signifying ‘a medieval myth of mysterious female powers over men’ (Rubchak, 2012: 65), but as it has travelled outside of the Ukraine with FEMEN, it has now become a symbol of FEMEN itself (Reestorff, 2014). The FEMEN ‘look’ has itself, as a whole, become something akin to a consumer brand (Thomas & Stehling, 2016). This is accentuated by the commercial ventures through merchandise products decorated with FEMEN’s symbols and slogans which can be bought on their website.

FEMEN are still active as of time of writing, with their protests publicised on their main Twitter feed, Facebook page and website (which has been revamped since 2013). Some of their more

³⁴ A small selection of active Facebook pages for illustrative purposes include:
 FEMEN Nederland: <https://www.facebook.com/FEMENnederland/>
 FEMEN Canada: <https://www.facebook.com/FEMENCanada/>
 FEMEN sweden: <https://www.facebook.com/FEMENsweden/?fref=ts>

recent protests have included a protest in Hamburg against Woody Allen³⁵ and in the Ukraine for the release of activist Angelina Diash³⁶, both of which took place in 2017.

The protest events for FEMEN that I have chosen are: a protest against Vladimir Putin at a technology fair in Hanover in March 2013 (UK news); a protest in Tunisia for the release of a fellow FEMEN Tunisia member, which led to the arrest and imprisonment of the activists, meaning that the coverage ran from May until June 2013 (both UK and German news); and the protest at the Cologne Cathedral during Christmas Mass in December 2013 (German news).

3.2.4 Data Selection & Data Overview

To recap, I collected textual data from three sites: websites of FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism project, the online articles of mainstream news media and the BTL comment sections of the online articles. For all textual locations, I copied and pasted the selected texts from the websites into Word documents, printed these documents out and analysed them by hand according to the method laid out in Section 3.1. To narrow down the data, I selected the two events for each group covered most broadly by the newspapers; these are the initial founding of #aufschrei and the “Tugendfuror” for #aufschrei; the first year anniversary and when the website hit 50,000 entries for the Everyday Sexism Project; and a protest at the Hanover Fair exhibition (German and UK news), a protest in Tunisia (UK news) and a protest in the Cologne Cathedral during Christmas Day Mass (German news) for FEMEN. The events all took place in 2013. I collected the news articles that covered these events and the BTL comments from these articles, where they were present (some articles did not have a discussion forum or there were no comments). One anomalous part of the data is the news media coverage of the Everyday Sexism Project, where there is limited newspaper data directly reporting on the protest. This is because Laura Bates, the founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, was taken on as a writer for the Guardian, and the stories from the project formed the basis of the Telegraph’s articles. There are therefore fewer articles reporting on

³⁵ <https://femen.org/hamburg-femen-actions-against-culture-of-silence/>

³⁶ <https://femen.org/free-angelina-diash/>

the actions of the projects because Bates engages with issues raised by the projects in the Guardian and the stories formed a regular series in the Telegraph throughout 2013, which I also collected.

For the self-representation, I collected FEMEN's own reporting on their three protest events. Because the hashtag feminism groups do not report on events in the same kind of way, I collected the first 30 posts from each month of 2013, to provide a spread over the year; some stories are extremely short, meaning that one post is not equivalent to one news article. For #aufschrei, months later in the year had fewer than 30 posts, hence there are fewer overall posts. In addition, I also collected the descriptions and/or manifestos of the groups from their websites. Posts from #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project were collected from their respective websites: www.alltagssexismus.de and www.everydaysexism.com. FEMEN's articles were gathered from archived versions of the website through website archiver web.archive.org, as the site had substantially changed from the 2013 version when I came to collect my data (2015) and the news page was limited to the previous few months. Working from archived material is not problematic because the data still appears the way it would have done originally in 2013.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Event/Time</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>No. Texts</i>
FEMEN Manifesto	-	English	1
FEMEN: Cologne	Dec 2013	English	4
FEMEN: Putin Protest	Sept 2013	English	5
FEMEN: Tunisia	Jun – Sep 2013	English	24
#aufschrei: Description	-	German	1
#aufschrei: Posts	Jan – Dec 2013	German	311 ³⁷
#aufschrei: Open Letter	Mar 2013	German	1
Everyday Sexism Project: Description	-	English	1
Everyday Sexism Project: Posts	Jan – Dec 2013	English	360

Table 1: Meta-Data for the Self-Representation Texts of the Feminist Groups

The newspapers were selected to demonstrate a variety of political leanings to get a broad view of the discursive terrain of representations of feminism in the media, although a left-right comparison is not an ultimate aim of the project. As demonstrated by Mendes (2011a),

³⁷ 09/2013: 16 posts; 10/2017: 17 posts; 12/2017: 8 posts.

a variety of supportive and derogatory discourses can be found within the same newspaper due to the differing opinions of column writers, therefore a left-right comparison may obscure the subtleties of the messages available in the papers. The papers were chosen according to accessibility and paywalls, for example, I selected die Welt over FAZ for the German news data because archived FAZ articles are only available to those paying a yearly subscription, and likewise for the Telegraph over the Times for the UK news data. The German corpus is represented by weekly magazine der Spiegel, conservative daily die Welt, the left liberal daily die tageszeitung (taz) and the tabloid BILD. As the articles are collected online – with many of them not appearing in the print versions of the papers – the difference between weekly and daily papers is not an issue, because the websites all function as 24-hour news sites. The UK corpus is represented by the left liberal daily the Guardian, the conservative daily the Telegraph, the centre-left daily the Independent and the tabloid Daily Mail.

<i>FEMEN: German Data</i>					
		<i>Tunisia Protest</i>		<i>Cologne Cathedral Protest</i>	
<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>die tageszeitung</i>	German	3	32	5	270
<i>Spiegel</i>	German	11	796	5	483
<i>Welt</i>	German	5	38	4	343
<i>BILD</i>	German	15	203	2	0
<i>Total</i>	-	34	1069	16	1096

Table 2: Meta-Data for the German Newspapers and BTL Comments for FEMEN

<i>FEMEN: UK Data</i>					
		<i>Tunisia Protest</i>		<i>Hanover Fair Protest</i>	
<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>Guardian</i>	English	2	0	2	870
<i>Independent</i>	English	2	0	1	0
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	English	0	0	3	0
<i>Daily Mail</i>	English	1	129	1	315
<i>Total</i>	-	5	129	7	1185

Table 3: Meta-Data for the UK Newspapers and BTL Comments for FEMEN

<i>#aufschrei</i>					
		<i>Launch of the Hashtag</i>		<i>Tugendfuror Open Letter</i>	
<i>Website</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>die tageszeitung</i>	German	2	257	2	99
<i>Spiegel</i>	German	4	551	4	787

<i>Welt</i>	German	1	47	1	92
<i>BILD</i>	German	2	2	1	91
<i>Total</i>	-	9	857	8	1069

Table 4: Meta-Data for the German Newspapers and BTL Comments for #aufschrei

<i>The Everyday Sexism Project</i>					
		<i>One Year Anniversary</i>		<i>50,000 Entries</i>	
<i>Website</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>Guardian</i>	English	1	691	1	438
<i>Independent</i>	English	1	0	0	0
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	English	11 ³⁸	0	1	267
<i>Daily Mail</i>	English	1	168	1	132
<i>Total</i>	-	14	859	3	837

Table 5: Meta-Data for the UK Newspapers and BTL Comments for the Everyday Sexism Project

As a final point on presentation, the quoted examples have a shorthand provided in brackets that identifies firstly the newspaper and the data type for the reader's immediate information, as well as its location within the full appendix (Chapter 13)³⁹. I also quote directly from the data without correcting or highlighting mistakes, as there are a significant number of grammatical and spelling errors and orthographical irregularities. This is most relevant for FEMEN's self-representation material, the hashtag feminism stories and the BTL comments. I have also added emphasis in bold to some quotations to make the link to the claim made clearer; any italics or capitalisation is in the original text and is the author's emphasis, not mine.

3.2.5 Anonymisation of the Data

I have already discussed general ethical issues in feminist research and discourse studies research in Sub-section 3.1.4, so this sub-section serves to explain the methodological decisions behind the final anonymisation of the data. I do not believe that there are any

³⁸ These are the 11 entries from the series of weekly extracts from the Everyday Sexism Project, rather than reporting on the year anniversary.

³⁹ For example, #a taz BTL 2.1 identifies immediately that the quote is from the BTL comments on a taz article, as well as directing the reader to Section 2.1 within the BTL comments in the full appendix (which contains only taz BTL comments).

ethical issues in collecting the news articles or FEMEN's website data, as these texts are designed to be communicated widely. The hashtag feminism stories and BTL comments data require closer attention, however, because they are produced by individuals to join in with a virtual conversation, and BTL comments can connect to usernames that can link to an account or profile of the commenter, although they are rarely recognisable names (Page, 2012; Page, et al., 2014). That being said, the stories and comments are readily and easily available to anyone with access to the internet. In light of this, I removed the usernames from all stories and BTL comments quoted in the thesis, following the practice of Benton-Greig, et al. (2017), García-Favaro & Gill (2016) and Page (2012). The comments and stories alone are not searchable through search engines; readers must travel directly to the site to find the comments or stories, so the act of removing usernames increases the opacity of the authors' identities.

4 #aufschrei and The Everyday Sexism Project: Construction of the Problem

4.1 Introduction to the #aufschrei and The Everyday Sexism Project Chapters

In the following three chapters, I present the results of the analysis of the texts produced by #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, the news media articles and the corresponding BTL comments. The part contains three chapters that relate to the themes identified in the research questions in Chapter 3: construction of the problem, or, how the dislocations of the feminist groups are firstly constructed and then negotiated (Chapter 4); the online protest form of the two groups (Chapter 5); and finally the tension between individuals and collectivity that these groups present (Chapter 6). Each chapter is structured according to smaller sections covering themes that emerged during the process of analysis and ends with a wider discussion drawing together the results and pertinent issues from the literature review. When quoting the stories from #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, I use a structured appendix (Chapter 12) for half of the stories (alternated between German and English) when the feature under investigation is present in both data sets; this is highlighted in the text with (A) alongside the quote number and is to save space within the presentation of the results while still providing reasonable evidence for my claims. All of these examples can also be found in the full appendix (Chapter 13).

4.2 Construction of the Problem: Introduction

In this chapter, I explore in more detail the discursive construction of “sexism” in #aufschrei, the Everyday Sexism Project, the news media and the BTL comments. “Sexism” is the most central nodal point to #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project: it is the key organising signifier which structures the other signifiers in the discursive chain of equivalence articulated in the texts produced by the two groups – in the descriptions on the websites and the accompanying stories. The following sections are structured thus: firstly, how the founders and participants of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project fill “sexism” with meaning through constructing an extended chain of equivalence, and how this is also supported in the media; secondly, how “sexism”, once constructed, is legitimated as a problem; and thirdly

and finally, the ways in which opposing voices in the media and the BTL comments attempt to delegitimize the projects by breaking apart the links in the chain.

4.3 What is Sexism?

The centrality of the signifier “sexism” to the discourses of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project is most immediately obvious by its place in the names of the groups themselves: the Everyday **Sexism** Project and the website alltagssexismus.de. The descriptions on their websites also make it clear that it is primarily sexism that is the target of the protest, by placing it in the first line:

- (1) Hier werden Erlebnisse zu Sexismus [...] gesammelt. (#a description)
- (2) The Everyday Sexism Project exists to catalogue instances of sexism experienced by women (ESP description)

Similarly, when the chain of equivalence is built up around sexism, as I return to below, it remains the most repeated signifier, and nearly always occupies the first place in lists:

- (3) Sexismus und sexuellen Übergriffen (#a open letter)
- (4) sexism, equality and women’s rights (ESP about)

The first point to make is that nowhere in the feminist texts or the news media articles is a clear denotation of sexism provided (“sexism is X”) as you might find in a dictionary; its definition appears to be largely taken as assumed knowledge⁴⁰. Understanding what the project founders mean comes instead from other signifiers that are equivocated with sexism (3), or placed in opposition to sexism (4). For example, to place (3) into more context (5, below), we can see that sexism (‘Sexismus’) and sexual assaults (‘sexuellen Übergriffen’) are linked together as part of the same collective, structural phenomenon:

⁴⁰ The aim of this research is not to evaluate how closely the construction of sexism found in the multiple texts produced by #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project matches to a dictionary definition of sexism, either in German or English; the aim instead is to understand what definition they themselves put together through various linkages and explanations, and the subsequent responses in the media.

- (5) Doch die Masse der Einzelerlebnisse verdeutlicht, dass es sich bei Sexismus und sexuellen Übergriffen um **ein kollektives Phänomen handelt, das strukturell begünstigt wird**. (#a open letter)

By contrast, in (6) below, sexism is linked to ‘equality’ and ‘women’s rights’ inasmuch as all three are ‘difficult to talk about’. Here, sexism is put in opposition to ‘gender equality’ through contextual mutual exclusivity (Jeffries, 2010: 19): sexism should *not* exist if gender equality *does* exist. In this particular construction, sexism, then, becomes a subject of ‘equality’ and ‘women’s rights’, rather than ‘sexism’ being a synonymous concept to ‘equality’:

- (6) It seems to be increasingly difficult to talk about **sexism, equality and women’s rights** in a modern society that perceives itself to have achieved gender equality. (ESP about)

The word sexism itself is a nominalisation, a process turned into a noun, which has the effect (not necessarily intentional) of removing the actors involved in the action and the process itself (Billig, 2013; Van Dijk, 2008; van Leeuwen, 2008): the dynamic and complex social action of sexism becomes a static entity through objectivation, that is, turned into an object (van Leeuwen, 2008: 63), further obscuring its meaning. In the texts, this noun is then linked to other objectivated actions, such as in examples (3) and (4). The description text for #aufschrei also constructs an intersectional approach in this way with links to other “isms”, showing sexism as just one part of a network of negatively evaluated actions that happen to women:

- (7) Hier werden Erlebnisse zu Sexismus, Homo-, Queer- und Transfeindlichkeit und zu Rassismus, Klassismus und Ableismus, den Frauen erleben, gesammelt (#a description)

These experiences (‘Erlebnisse’) are in turn built up from a range of further objects, including the indiscriminate ‘small things’ (‘Kleinigkeiten’) to ‘sexual/sexualised violence’ (‘sexualisierte Gewalt’):

- (8) Das können Kleinigkeiten sein, die sich wie Alltag anfühlen oder sexualisierte Übergriffe und Gewalt (#a description)

Sexism is fleshed out in the ‘About’ page for the Everyday Sexism Project through demonstrative examples from politics (9), media (10) and the workplace (11):

- (9) disrespectful comments being made to female members in the House of Commons (ESP about)
- (10) the sexist portrayal of women in the media (ESP about)
- (11) an all-female nude calendar [...] and a plane emblazoned with a cleavage baring, swimsuit clad caricature (ESP about)

This particular text contains no references, unlike #aufschrei, to physical contact between people. That being said, the author, Laura Bates, later expands this discursive chain to include such actions in newspaper quotes, which I return to below, which perhaps reflects how the stories shared on the Everyday Sexism Project developed this chain into physical actions.

It is worth noting that these description texts are the founding texts for the projects' websites and they provide the legitimation, scope and aims of the respective projects. It is not important for the aims of my particular research to establish whether everyone who has gone on to post on the websites has read and fully endorses the content of the description texts; what is important is the resultant discourse created by the stories and the description texts together. The authors of the stories in my data, however, do not display any issue with the construction of sexism in the description texts when posting their stories, and I take the stance that if they post on the website, then they consider their story to be relevant to the aims of the project.

The stories continue to build on the chains of equivalence started in the description texts, adding a wide range of actions as representative of sexism, and the types of actions named are remarkably similar across both languages. Rather than objectivated action, as I described above, the actions in the stories here are most often activated (van Leeuwen, 2008: 63) – dynamic, featuring actors, emotions and active verbal processes – and it is here that we can explore the mechanisms of sexism in more detail. The actions in the stories can be split roughly into verbal and physical, although both can appear in one story.

Verbal instances include cat calling and wolf whistling (12, 12A):

- (12) der bruder von meinem freund, der allen frauen, die er attraktiv findet, hinterherpfeift und dumme sprüche ablässt. (#a stories)

Victim blaming (13, 13A):

- (13) a taxi driver [...] was convicted of sexually assaulting two women [...]. [A] male "friend" told me **he felt sorry for the perpetrator** as he'd have to live with the fact that he's on the sex offenders register for 7 years. When I suggested it would make more sense to feel sorry for his victims, the couple of men we were sat with **rounded up on me to dispute the details of the sexual offence**. (ESP stories)

References to gender stereotypes, including jokes (14, 14A):

- (14) Menschen, die mein Klingelschild mit Dr.-Titel sehen und sagen, "Ach, Ihr Mann ist Arzt?". (#a stories)

Sexual references, ranging from requests for sex up to rape threats (15, 15A):

- (15) I heard a very loud and rowdy group of men [...] begin to shout at and heckle me [...] disgusting chants of "balls deep" and "it won't hurt because we've got KY". (ESP stories)

As well as the absence of verbal action, in other words, a woman being ignored in favour of a man (16, 16A):

- (16) Ich fahre mit MEINEM Auto zusammen mit meinem Lebensgefährten zur TÜV-Werkstatt. [...] Der KFZ-Fuzzi spricht ab da dann fast nur noch meinen Freund an (#a stories)

Physical actions are equally, if not more, varied but almost without exception include an element of sexuality. There is a range of incidences of physical contact, from unwanted touching (17, 17A) to much more explicit sexualised contact (18, 18A):

- (17) On the bus yesterday a guy sat next to me and instantly pushed his leg as close up to me as possible, I moved to create more room and he instantly filled the gap I'd created and continued to push his leg and thigh against me. (ESP stories)
- (18) verfolgte mich in einem Geschäft ein Mann und legte mir immer wieder unter meinem kurzen Rock die Hand auf den Po (#a stories)

Other physical actions expand the notion of sexism to include rape, both vaginal and anal (19, 19A):

- (19) I have been raped twice (ESP, stories)

Sexual assault of children (which also includes incestuous child abuse) (20, 20A):

- (20) Dass ich mit dreizehn im Urlaub vom Angestellten eines Hotels die ganze Zeit angegraben und belästigt wurde (#a stories)

Domestic violence (21, 21A):

- (21) I saw a couple my age(early 20s) arguing very loudly [...]. Suddenly, he picked her up by her throat and threw/slammed her to the ground. (ESP stories)

Related to physical action is the invasion of personal space through staring (22, 22A):

- (22) Der Postbote, der mir nie in die Augen schaut, sondern immer nur auf meine Brüste starrt. (#a stories)

Stalking (23, 23A):

- (23) I have a friend now who had to move house and change her job to escape a guy who was stalking her. (ESP stories)

And public masturbation (24, 24A):

- (24) wenn ein Typ (jünger) sich dauernd einen runterholt wenn ich an seinem Garten vorbeigehe (#a stories)

The authors of the stories also connect sexism to other forms of discrimination such as homophobia (25), transphobia (26) and racism (27). This is more prevalent in the German corpus, perhaps because this intersectional approach is prominent in the #aufschrei description text, although these examples are still few and far between:

- (25) typen die fragen ob sie "mitmachen" dürfen **#heterosexismus** (#a stories)
- (26) **Ich bin trans.** Ich habe Brüste und eine Vagina, aber für mich ist es selbstverständlich, dass ich mich als Mann fühle. Ich bin es einfach und ich meine, dass Menschen das akzeptieren sollten. **Aber sie tun es nicht, weil ich meine Genitalien nicht operieren möchte** (#a stories)

- (27) he proceeded to tell me how beautiful he was, that I must be on my period, then proceed to get out his arse and tell me to **"go home to my own country"** (I am a borne and breed Londoner).. (ESP stories)

Every story either reinforces the existing discursive chain or expands to include new actions, resulting in a form of "crowd sourcing" the meaning of sexism that takes it beyond the initial description texts.

The founders of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, Anne Wizorek – not the only founder but the most prominent – and Laura Bates, respectively, are largely visible in the news media, either through interviews or through employment. The form of the stories, too, as small, pre-prepared packages means that they are easily transportable into news articles, either woven into the body of the text as in the Guardian articles (ESP Guardian, henceforth G, 3.1, 4.1) and Spiegel (#a Spiegel, henceforth S, 3.1), or in a block at the end of an article as in the Daily Mail (ESP DM, henceforth DM, 1.1) and BILD (#a B, henceforth B, 1.2). Perhaps as a result of this, the discursive construction of sexism continues in the same vein in the news media: a definition of sexism is lacking across the articles, with the meaning coming from lists of equivocated concepts and the cumulative effect of the quoted stories. A similar range is replicated with the quoted stories, for example, victim blaming, comments about gender stereotypes and physical assaults. At times, the founders further bring in new elements of objectivated action through direct quotes, for example:

- (29) sexism, misogyny and abuse (Bates, ESP DM 2.1)
- (30) sexism, prejudice, harassment and assault (Bates, ESP Independent, henceforth Ind, 1)

When asked in an interview (#a S 3.2) what needed to be in place in order to remove the need for #aufschrei, Nicole von Horst replied, 'Consent Culture', and Anne Wizorek, the removal of the 'Old-Boys-Network'⁴¹.

⁴¹ Both of these quotes are presented here in the original language, perhaps reflecting that these two terms have been borrowed from the English-speaking world.

A chain of equivalence is structured by mitigation of the differences between signifiers (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Torfing, 1999). As I have demonstrated above, founders of and contributors to the projects have created a lengthy chain of signifiers out of what they consider relevant to the key nodal point of the projects: sexism. In doing this, the differences between, for example, physical and verbal actions or actions with individual legal distinctions and corresponding punishments are backgrounded. When a discursive chain expands to include ever more links, there is a 'loss of meaning' (Torfing, 1999: 97) and it is the equivalential link itself that comes to the fore; the equivalential link here could be roughly described as "bad things that happen to women". Recognition of the equivalential link rather than individual links in the chain is a potentially radical step, as Dean (2009) describes in his hypothetical example of discrimination in the workplace, or in postcolonial critiques of feminism that I highlighted in Chapter 2. New connections are made across once-disparate discourses, allowing for the construction of a wider counter-hegemonic discourse. In this particular case, connecting together "assault" – "gender stereotypes" – "rape" and so on, as detailed above, then allows for explorations and explanations of *why* they might be connected, and then subsequent challenges to opposing discourses that separate them.

4.4 Scales of Sexism

As I have explained, the range of actions shared on the websites suggests that there is an understanding amongst contributors that their disparate experiences are relevant to the aims of the project, creating a particularly extended chain of equivalence. In the #aufschrei open letter, the founders construct the experiences as part of the same collective, structural problem (5). In a direct quote in the Daily Mail, Laura Bates also explicitly connects the 'minor' and 'serious' actions:

- (31) The same ideas and attitudes that underlie 'minor' incidents like catcalls, which we are so often told to ignore, or brush off, are also at the root of more serious incidents of violence and assault. (ESP DM 2.1)

There is a tension across the feminist texts, news media and comments over the organisation of the chain of equivalence into a scale, as Bates has partially done above, with the evaluation of 'minor' and 'serious'; however, it should be noted that 'minor' is in quotations, presumably

to distance from the idea that these incidents are to be considered less important. The connection of these latter 'minor incidents' to sexism through their fundamental role as the underlying 'root of more serious incidents' is also clear.

The description texts of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project include indications of a range of incidents (see (8) for #aufschrei):

- (32) [Instances of sexism] might be serious or minor, outrageously offensive or so niggling and normalised that you don't even feel able to protest. (ESP description)

Even though Bates here uses the same comparison of 'serious' and 'minor', she still negatively evaluates the 'minor' incidents because they cause a form of silencing, which, as I establish in the following section, is a strong form of legitimation for the project. Similarly, Anne Wizorek takes a holistic view of the stories in an interview in Spiegel (#a S 3.2), claiming: '[die Tweets] bewegen mich alle, auch wenn sie unterschiedlich schlimme Erlebnisse schildern'.

A small number of BTL commenters firstly recognise the presence of sexism in Germany (33) or the UK, respectively, and secondly replicate this 'relatedness' of the wide range of actions included in the stories and news articles, some through introducing the concept of 'patriarchy' (34):

- (33) Richtig so, wenn Herr Gauck behauptet dass es in Deutschland kein Sexismusproblem gibt, dann ist er schlecht informiert. (#a taz BTL 6.1)
- (34) Die Gesellschaft an sich ist sexistisch, weil patriarchalisch strukturiert, und so sind auch alle aktiven Mitglieder dieser Gesellschaft patriarchalisch sozialisiert. (#a taz BTL 6.1)

These commenters recognising the sexism discourse of the projects are most prominent in the Guardian discussion forum (while still representing a relative minority overall):

- (35) Sexual assault and sexual harassment are perfect examples of sexism and how some men view women as "things", objects for their own sexual gratification and in some cultures, property to be traded or sold. (ESP G BTL 4.1)

- (36) Rape and assault ARE everyday sexism. That's why the prevalence is so appallingly high. It's necessary to show the WHOLE continuum between joking and raping, to show that the one is part of a culture that enables the other. (ESP G BTL 4.1)

By contrast, this range in the Telegraph (ESP Tel 6.1) becomes an explicit scale, rather than a range, whereby women's editor Emma Barnett evaluates the examples in the article from 'funny' to 'worrying', and 'typical' (cat calling) to 'non-typical' (sexual proposition from a stranger). As I show below, the founders of the projects attempt to push back on trivialisation of sexist actions, which includes brushing something off as humorous or as out of the ordinary, as Barnett does here.

Articles in Welt and Spiegel both broach the topic of 'boundary setting': that #aufschrei is part of a wider discussion to understand what is acceptable and when. After introducing rape jokes, the authors in Spiegel suggest where these might and might not have a place, that is, as a form of 'masculine showing off' amongst teenage boys, but then not in the workplace, which ignores any potential relation between attitudes and actions across society:

- (37) Potenzprahlerei mag unter pubertierenden Jungs angemessen sein, am Arbeitsplatz ist sie es nicht. (#a S 3.1)

The project is positively presented as part of wider discussion to define where the limits of 'flirting' and communication between the sexes lie, with the positive evaluation evident in choices such as 'brauchen' (38), and 'gut' and 'Fortschritt' (39):

- (38) Die aktuelle Debatte zeigt, was Deutschland 2013 braucht: eine Verständigung darüber, wo die Grenzen liegen und wann sie überschritten werden. Was als charmantes Kompliment durchgeht und was als sexuelle Belästigung. (#a S BTL 3.1)
- (39) Was Männer neckisch finden, erleben Frauen als erniedrigend. Das ist der ganz alltägliche Sexismus. [...] Beide müssen doch lernen, miteinander klarzukommen. Das ist schwer. Das gibt Krach. Doch dieser Krach ist gut. Er ist die Begleitmusik eines gesellschaftlichen Fortschritts. (#a Welt, henceforth W, BTL 7.1)

As I come back to, dismissing actions as flirting (and then in turn as natural and essential to human reproduction and therefore life) that are otherwise considered as sexism is one way in which BTL commenters delegitimize the projects in the comment sections.

4.5 Why is Sexism a Problem?

In this section I turn to the issue of the legitimization of the chain of equivalence: having linked together a range of actions, how is the negative representation of these actions constructed? Through the construction of the actions as problematic, the groups gain their own purpose and legitimate their campaigns. As I show, this is largely done through drawing implicitly on the common sense value of freedom and its associated positive connotations.

Dislocation, in discourse theoretical terms, is ‘a moment when the subject’s mode of being is experienced as disrupted’ (Glynos & Howarth, 2007: 110). Dislocations make the radical contingency of social relations visible and make it possible for subjects to identify anew and challenge ‘existing social relations in the name of a principle or ideal’ (Glynos & Howarth, 2007: 112). Across the data in this research the construction of sexism as a problem and as something that needs to be changed is almost inextricable from the construction of the meaning of sexism, which I have already covered. This is done through strategies of legitimization: providing ‘answers to the spoken or unspoken questions “Why should we do this?” or “Why should we do this in this way?”’ (van Leeuwen, 2008: 105). As I explain, appeals to authority (van Leeuwen, 2008: 106) and moral evaluation (van Leeuwen, 2008: 109) are used to demonstrate the conflicted identities of women: these personal stories do not match what we might expect from our legal structures or from our own personal values and morals. These dislocations allow for potential feminist identifications and challenges to the gendered status quo.

A number of academic studies have noted the ‘disappearance’ from public discourse of gender as an axis of discrimination (Gill, 2014; Valentine, et al., 2014). What could be described as sexism is talked away as banter or humour (Valentine, et al., 2014) or as irrelevant (Worth, Augoustinos & Hastie, 2016) or should be dealt with through personal choice and individual navigation (Valentine, et al., 2014; Worth, et al., 2016). Pushing back on this is a clear foundation of both #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, firstly with the naming of sexism, and secondly by emphasising the seriousness of sexism in their description texts:

- (40) Sexismus ist keine Bagatelle, sondern ein ernsthaftes Problem (#a description)
- (41) sexism *does* exist, it *is* faced by women *everyday* and *it* is a valid problem to discuss (ESP description, emphasis in original)

Moral evaluation legitimation is ‘based on values, rather than imposed by some kind of authority without further justification’ (van Leeuwen, 2008: 109). Evaluative adjectives are central to this form of legitimation, which requires application of our own knowledge of our socio-cultural contexts to understand what might be presented as “good” and “bad” (van Leeuwen, 2008: 110). These short texts lay the groundwork for moral evaluation legitimation by first describing sexism negatively as a ‘problem’ (40, 41), and then also by describing negative emotions associated with experiences of sexism: experiences that are ‘outrageously offensive’ and ‘niggling’ (ESP description) or ‘die euch lähmen oder aufregen, die euch nerven oder stören’ (#a description).

This moral evaluation legitimation can be found in some news articles, such as BILD, which describes the #aufschrei Twitter timelines as ‘ein erschreckender Blick durch das Schlüsselloch unserer Gesellschaft’ (#a Bild 1.2). The Telegraph, too, headline their weekly quotes from the Everyday Sexism Project as ‘What Women Don’t Want’. Negative adjectives (‘erschreckend’) or grammatical structures (‘don’t want’) are used to legitimate the project by negatively evaluating how sexism makes women feel.

The open letter of #aufschrei and the ‘About’ page of the Everyday Sexism Project provide more detailed evidence for the legitimation of the projects. The open letter was addressed to President of Germany Joachim Gauck by the founders of #aufschrei after comments he made on the wider sexism debate that founders felt trivialised sexism. The letter contains references to the constitution and gender justice clauses within; by implication, due to Gauck’s job role, he has a particular duty to uphold the constitution (42). This is a form of impersonal authority, a form of authority legitimation based on ‘laws, rules and regulations’ (van Leeuwen, 2008: 108). The authors also appeal to personal authority legitimation, a form of authority legitimation based on personal authority (van Leeuwen, 2008: 106), by quoting his own statements back at him (43); in this particular case, then, the personal authority for how Gauck should behave comes from himself, rather than an external figure:

- (42) Dass gerade Sie **als Bundespräsident und großer Verfechter der Freiheit** sich von dieser wichtigen Debatte abgrenzen und sie nicht als wichtiges Thema begreifen, macht uns große Sorgen. Es geht hier nicht um eine „Frauenfrage“, sondern um **eine Frage der Geschlechtergerechtigkeit, die in der Verfassung verankert ist**. (#a open letter)
- (43) Wir möchten den Brief gerne **mit einem Zitat von Ihnen** schließen: „Wir müssten gemeinsam darauf achten, dass wir Verantwortung wirklich ernst nehmen, dass wir uns korrigieren, wenn etwas nicht klappt.“ (#a open letter)

The role of the projects is presented as that of breaking a silence, with explicit references made to silence, but also through the use of language about language (also in example (6)):

- (44) Viele Frauen **haben lange geschwiegen** und sich erst jetzt getraut, ihre Erfahrungen **zu teilen**. (#a open letter)
- (45) To stand up and **say** ‘this isn’t right’ (ESP about)
- (46) Women who object to the over-sexualisation of female celebrities **are told** ‘it’s a choice’ [...] Women **are told** that modern ‘equality’ means career girls can have their cake and eat it (ESP about)
- (47) we **are blasted** for ‘whining’ (ESP about)
- (48) And nobody will be able **to say** we can’t **talk about it** anymore. (ESP about)

According to Jeffries (2010: 30), contextually constructed opposites are ‘contextually relevant temporary associations of lexical items’ in which the meaning of one lexical item necessarily negates the meaning of the other. I would suggest that we could understand the opposition presented in the examples above as silence/speaking up. The conventional opposition of speaking or not speaking does not, alone, clearly situate positive and negative poles, which would provide the project’s legitimisation. Contextually constructed opposites rely on extensions or analogies to more conventional oppositions in order to work in this way (Jeffries, 2010). It is evident from the examples above that this silence, the act of not speaking, is imposed rather than done through choice. This contextual opposition, then, can be related to the conventional opposition of freedom/oppression, whereby speaking up is freedom and

silence is oppression. I would suggest that this is a continuation of the moral evaluation legitimisation, because we generally would value freedom and reject oppression⁴².

To strengthen this, in the open letter to Gauck, the #aufschrei founders make explicit references to freedom, both that being able to speak up is freedom, and also that a life without sexism is freedom:

- (49) Auch das ist eine Form von Freiheit - die Freiheit, offen über Erlebnisse sprechen zu können (#a open letter)
- (50) Helfen Sie, diese Gesellschaft zu verändern, damit alle Menschen in Freiheit und Würde leben können. (#a open letter)

Noticeably, when referring to this enforced silence, Bates refers to the silencing of women through the use of labels such as 'bra burner' and 'militant feminist':

- (51) to complain about everyday sexism [...] renders you likely to be labelled 'uptight', 'prudish', a 'militant feminist', or a 'bra burner' (ESP about)

This appears to be done uncritically: the terms sit alongside other negative labels such as 'uptight', 'prudish', as well as 'killjoys' and 'overreacting', all of which have been used in the past and present to demonise feminists (Ahmed, 2010; Benton-Greig, et al., 2017; Gill, 2007; Rhode, 1995; van Zoonen, 1992) and the basic premise of these as negative labels goes unchallenged⁴³. By contrast, the #aufschrei open letter was written to reject in particular the phrasing of "Tugendfuror" by Gauck, and the founders criticise language used to describe and thereby oppress women:

- (52) Dieser Begriff wird ähnlich wie „Hysterie“ abwertend verwendet, um **die Wut von Frauen lächerlich zu machen und als Überemotionalität zu deklassieren**. Damit bedienen Sie jahrhundertealte Stereotype über Frauen – **Stereotype, die sexistische Strukturen aufrecht erhalten** und Geschlechtergerechtigkeit im Weg stehen. (#a open letter)

⁴² I recognise that this is a not unproblematic claim; however, my aim here is not to have a theoretical discussion about whether freedom and oppression are always positively valued, or should be positively valued, but to point out that everyday understandings of freedom assume that it is positive and desirable, and oppression the opposite.

⁴³ Compare this to Chapter 8, where FEMEN take on 'militant' as a point of pride.

The act of silencing, then, as an act of oppression, is an act of power. This is attended to implicitly in the description of silencing on the Everyday Sexism Project's 'About' page (see examples covered above) and explicitly in the #aufschrei open letter, which addresses the interplay between power relations, power abuses and sexism:

- (53) Häufig geschehen Übergriffe und Sexismen in Machtstrukturen; Machtpositionen und Abhängigkeiten werden ausgenutzt (#a open letter)

This is repeated in some of the stories shared on both projects' sites, with contributors recording how fears over their own jobs kept them silent (54, 54A):

- (54) Bei jedem Praktikum, bei dem ich zum Putzen und Aufräumen verdonnert werde - weil ich eine Frau bin. Obwohl diese Praktikas absolut nichts mit solche Aufgaben zutun haben. Und weil **ich mich nicht wehren kann, weil die Anweisungen immer vom Chef kommen und ich keine schlechte Beurteilung bekommen möchte**. (#a stories)

Or stayed silent through fear of reprisals (55, 55A):

- (55A) When I was 18 years old, a boy who I thought was my friend tried to rape me at a party. He was much bigger and stronger than me, and even though I tried to fight him off, I did not stand a chance. [...] He only let me go after another friend threatened to call the police. **I never reported it, because I was too scared**. (ESP stories)

Additionally, they are simply unable to or do not explain why they did not physically react (56, 56A):

- (56) mein erschreckendstes erlebnis war eindeutig eine gruppe 9-12jähriger, die sich im bus drüber unterhielten, dass man "eine frau prinzipiell vergewaltigen kann, dass sie einen kennen, der das schon gemacht hat" und von dem typen sprachen sie, als ob er besonders mächtig und cool ist. **Ich bin halb eingefroren**. Niemand hat irgendwas gesagt, alle schauen weg. (#a stories)

Other contributors report feeling as though they must remove themselves from situations, itself a form of silencing (57, 57A):

- (57) faking illness so I didnt have to get my arse felt up by the teacher every week (ESP stories)

Silencing in the workplace is also visible in news articles in taz (#a taz 5.1) and Welt (#a W 7.1), in particular with reference to the accusation of sexism against politician Rainer Brüderle by journalist Laura Himmelreich in Stern (part of the wider landscape of sexism debate in the German media at this time). This is done, however, without the critical engagement of silencing provided in the #aufschrei texts as quotes from other female journalists are included in the articles which suggest that Himmelreich was unprofessional to report the incident and that such behaviour is part of the job:

- (58) Die ehemalige Stern-Journalistin Wibke Bruhns äußerte sich kritisch. Sie sagte der „Süddeutschen Zeitung“, früher hätten Journalistinnen solche Belästigungen nicht aufgeschrieben. „Man versuchte, sich subtil zu wehren- ohne es an die große Glocke zu hängen“. **Belästigungen gehörten zu den „Widrigkeiten des Berufs“.** (#a taz 5.1)
- (59) Es war nicht das erste Mal, dass ein Politiker einer Journalistin zu nahe kommen wollte, so erinnert sich "Welt"-Redakteurin Inga Griesse an eine Begegnung mit Willy Brandt. **Doch bisher wurde so etwas eher verschwiegen.** Der "Stern"-Bericht ist **ein Regelbruch, der auch in der Medienbranche für Kritik gesorgt hat.** (#a W 7.1)

In the latter article, Annette Prossinger then puts forward a suggestion that is not echoed anywhere else in the data: perhaps the ‘force’ of #aufschrei comes from a form of ‘new power’, as older men are, in a sense, left behind in a modern world where women are no longer dependent on them to advance professionally; what once might have been acceptable is now considered sexism. With this in mind, Prossinger wonders who might be the real victim after all:

- (60) Hier der alte Mann, der vermutlich nicht einmal ahnte, wie belästigend seine Avancen waren – da die junge Frau, die sich wehrt. **Ob sie ihm damit mehr geschadet hat als er ihr, gehört zu den offenen Fragen in der Debatte.** (#a W 7.1)

Spiegel has the highest number of articles covering #aufschrei’s initial founding and the open letter, including interviews and opinion pieces as well as news reports. The authors of Spiegel 3.1 cover the issue of power in the workplace, too, (61) and highlight the silencing arguments that are levelled at women making claims of sexism (62):

- (61) **Sexismus gibt es dort, wo es Macht gibt:** Es braucht ein Machtgefälle, um Grenzen ungescholten überschreiten zu können. Und: Sexismus verfestigt dieses Gefälle. Wer

den blöden Spruch reit, hat die Macht; wer sich qua Position nicht wehren kann, ohne Konsequenzen frchten zu mssen, hat sie nicht. (#a S 3.1)

- (62) weil sie keinen Spa verstehen; weil sie prde sind; weil sie berhaupt dankbar sein knnen, wenn ihnen mal ein Mann Aufmerksamkeit schenkt; weil sie angeblich nur neidisch sind; weil sie nur ihre allgemeine Unzufriedenheit zum Ausdruck bringen; weil sie "Kampf-Emanzen" sind. Nicht die Mnner, die bergriffig sind. (#a S 3.1)

I would argue that silence is another nodal point for the groups, even if the signifier itself is not as prominent as, for example, sexism. The discursive construction of silence is based on the role of breaking a silence, specifically a woman's silence, and on the further relation of silence to oppression and freedom. Silence is the basis for the legitimation of the project, and therefore the basis for the politics of the groups. Challenging this construction of silence is also the basis for some criticism of the groups, as I come to in Chapters 5 and 6, as BTL commenters question the relation of silence to oppression and the existence of a silence in the first place.

The dislocatory efforts in the Everyday Sexism Projects 'About' page are continued through repeated constructions around the conjunction of negation 'yet', to highlight the contrast between how women theoretically *should* experience a gender equal society and how they *actually* experience their current society (63, 64). By extension, current society cannot be one of gender equality. Linguistically, both grammatical ('yet', the parallel structures) and semantic (contextual knowledge of gender equality) features demonstrate the contextual opposition being created here (Jeffries, 2010):

- (63) Women who complain about disrespectful comments being made to female members in the House of Commons are accused of 'overreacting', yet only 22% of MPs are female. (ESP description)
- (64) Women are told that modern 'equality' means career girls can have their cake and eat it, yet only around 13% of FTSE 100 corporate board members are female. (ESP description)

In the #aufschrei open letter, the discontinuity between women's silence and women's experience is presented through appeals to an expert authority, a form of authority legitimation based on expertise rather than status (van Leeuwen, 2008: 107). This is done with an attached survey from the Department for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth

(BMFSFJ), that claims 58% of women have experienced sexual assault, as well as a commentary from the psychology faculty at the University of Bielefeld.

In the Telegraph (ESP Tel 6.1), women's editor Emma Barnett recognises how 'sadly and annoyingly', there is a disconnect between the legal rights of women and their everyday experiences, combining both moral evaluation and impersonal authority legitimization to create contextual opposition. In the Daily Mail (ESP DM 1.1), Bates raises the issue that groping in nightclubs is sexual assault under UK law, but 'often neither the instigator nor the victim realise this'.

This kind of contextual opposition can also be found in some stories through the use of a hypothetical double standard between the experience of men and women:

(65) Bei mir kommt an, ich könne froh sein, dass ich einen "guten" Mann abgekriegt habe und soll mich nicht beschweren. Aber **wer sagt eigentlich zu den Müttern**, dass es toll ist, dass sie das alles tun? NIEMAND! Und **welcher Mann würde zu einem Kumpel sagen**, du kannst so froh sein, dass deine Frau sich so toll um alles kümmert?! (#a stories)

(66) Having a second icecream during a concert interval when on holiday, when a man comments: "You know what they say, a moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips!"

Now, would they even consider saying that to a man? (ESP stories)

4.6 When is Sexism Not Sexism?

The logics of equivalence and difference are always in tension, and one cannot completely suppress the other out of existence (Torfinn, 1999). While I have covered how the discourse recognising sexism is constructed through the feminist texts, news media and some BTL comments, my data also contains a number of different strategies designed to destabilise this construction; these are particularly prevalent in the comment sections. To do this, commenters challenge the links in the chain of equivalence by highlighting the backgrounded differences between signifiers, or by bringing in new connections that question the overarching equivalential link of "bad things that happen to women". The following sections

are concerned with these particular strategies, such as “X isn’t sexism”, “what about sexism against men?” and “there are more important things to worry about”.

BTL commenters in both the German and English data take issue with the equivocation of a range of different actions with sexism that takes place in the feminist texts and the news articles. Perhaps reflecting the range of actions, there are a range of responses that question or outright reject what can be considered sexism (68, 71), but also that trouble the other links in the chain, such as sexual harassment (67, 71, 72) and sexual assault (69, 71). Through grammatical negation, such as ‘is not’ (Jeffries, 2010: 35), these commenters create opposition and difference to disrupt the previous equivocation:

- (67) Kommt mir das nur so vor, oder wird bei der aktuellen Diskussion einfach alles gleichgesetzt? Anmache = Frauenfeindlichkeit = Vergewaltigung?

Sexuelle Belästigung ist nicht gleich sexueller Missbrauch (zumindest laut Wikipedia)
Und wie definiert sich eine sexuelle Belästigung? (#a S BTL 3.2)

- (68) Wenn jemand an den Po faßt ist das Belästigung und kein Sexismus mehr. Eine Vergewaltigung ist definitiv auch etwas anderes. Ein dummer Anmachspruch ist in erster Linie einfach nur dumm. Was also ist Sexismus? (#a S BTL 3.2)

- (69) Es ging nicht um sexuelle Übergriffe, sondern Frauen haben sich über Frauenwitze am Arbeitsplatz beschwert und so getan als sei dies eine Vergewaltigung!!! (#a S BTL 4.3)

- (70) There is a bit of a difference between cat calling and someone physically touching you. (ESP DM BTL 1.1)

- (71) I would not call any sort of physical sexual assault, including groping, "sexism." It is surely much more serious. Also, I would distinguish sexual harassment from sexism - it is personal, and therefore worse. (ESP G BTL 3.1)

- (72) I don't condone wolf-whistling women in public. Harassment is simply the wrong word to describe the behaviour, in the same way that if I said that your comment has raped me, it would equally be the wrong term to use. (ESP Telegraph, henceforth Tel, BTL 5.6)

In the examples above, there are a number of reasons given for splitting apart the discursive chain of sexism, including the expert authority of a Wikipedia definition (67) and the personal aim and physicality of sexual harassment as opposed to the generalised aim and non-physicality of sexism (71). Others do not explicitly reason why they separate, for example, harassment from wolf-whistling and from rape (72), but others invoke the line between

physicality to differentiate firstly what is and is not sexism (68, 71), and secondly the level of 'seriousness' (70, 71). Within physicality, the commenter in (68) differentiates groping from a rape, perhaps invoking a further difference of genital penetration.

Another related construction is the contextual incompatibility between sexism and crime: "it's not sexism because it's a crime", most clearly visible in (75) and (76), which delegitimizes the projects through the impersonal authority of law. This incompatibility is drawn upon a number of times to differentiate physical actions of assault, violence and rape from verbal actions of jokes and flirting (73, 74, 77). Examples (73) and (74) – and (82) below – also set out that the correct way to deal with these actions is to go through the legal system, which implies that the reaction of #aufschrei was wrong. Slightly different is commenter in example (78), who uses this incompatibility to deny the need for the Everyday Sexism Project and by extension the existence of sexism: since sexual assault and rape are illegal, then there is no need for the project. This recognises the equivocation of physical actions with sexism in the discourse of the Everyday Sexism Project but then wholesale rejects it.

- (73) Und zum eigentlichen Thema: es gibt zum einen Straftaten im Sexualbereich, da ist dann die Polizei und die Staatsanwaltschaft der richtige Ansprechpartner. Und zum anderen gibt es Anmachen, Sprüche und Witze. (#a S BTL 4.3)
- (74) Sexuelle Gewalt gehört vor Gericht.

Aber Herrenwitze mit sexueller Gewalt gleichzusetzen ist deutlich am gesunden Menschenverstand vorbei. (#a S BTL 4.3)
- (75) Sexuelle Gewalt und Missbrauch sind Straftaten, kein Sexismus. (#a S BTL 4.1)
- (76) Some of these examples given are straight up crimes, not sexism. (ESP G BTL 5.1)
- (77) I would even go so far as to say it is *dangerous* to conflate real crimes (such as rape and sexual assault) and real structural discrimination (such as happens in the workplace, on the job market*) with the subjective perception of hackneyed flirting attempts or rude remarks for which the only criteria to make them "sexist" appears to be the gender of the person saying them! (ESP G BTL 5.1)
- (78) What is the point of this story? It is illegal for men and women to touch other people without consent. (ESP DM BTL 1.1)

The negative evaluation of 'conflating' actions that is identified in (77) is repeated a number of times across the BTL comments. This is variously presented as a critique of the effectiveness

of the projects (while not outright rejecting the projects) (79), problematic for confronting the issues of assault, abuse and violence (80), damaging to the victims of these actions (81), and problematic for dealing correctly with the actions (82):

(79) by mixing the innocuous with the vile and unacceptable the story loses its impact (ESP Tel BTL 5.5)

(80) Was diese Damen aber machen: Banalitäten als Sexismus anprangern, ihnen ein Gewicht verleihen, das sie nicht haben. Sie auf eine Ebene mit sexuellen Verbrechen stellen.

Was ist das Ergebnis? Das ganze Thema wird inflationär, verliert an Wert und selbst das Kernproblem von sexueller Gewalt wird belanglos. (#a S BTL 4.1)

(81) Sie meinen, wenn z.B. ein Mann auf eine Aussage einer Frau hin zurück schreibt, ist das automatisch gleichzusetzen mit sexueller Belästigung? [...] Sie verharmlosen damit echte sexuelle Übergriffe und die Leiden der betroffenen Frauen (#a S BTL 4.3)

(82) One point, you don't help your case by not filtering out some of the "weaker" examples. For instance, very near an entry on anal rape, I read someone complain about how at a restaurant a waiter gave the bill to her husband without asking who was paying. One is an issue that needs dealing with by the full weight of the law, the other "problem" can be solved by a quick and pleasant word with the restaurant employee. Somehow linking the two doesn't do anyone any favors. (ESP G BTL 3.1)

References to dictionary definitions of sexism and other equivocated actions are almost non-existent in the corpus, with the OED quoted once in the Guardian and Wikipedia mentioned in passing in Spiegel (67). Instead, definitions are produced by the commenters themselves, either presented as an opinion, such as 'I would not call [X] sexism' (71) or as fact, such as '[X] are not sexism' (75, 76). This lack of and therefore need for definition is highlighted a few times (83, and 67 and 68, above), but this is not a feature for extended discussion in the same way as is the definition of sexism:

(83) Die lebhafteste Diskussion in diesem Forum - wie auch in den anderen zu diesem Thema - zeigt, dass es einer Definition des Sexismus' bedarf. (#a S BTL 3.2)

4.7 Sexism is a Problem, But...

While the founders of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project emphasise the seriousness of sexism, pushing back on hitherto trivialisations of sexism as unimportant, a common delegitimation of the projects revolves around reversing this focus. Rather than opposing the meaning of sexism as a term, some BTL commenters, and one critical opinion piece in Spiegel, take issue with the negative evaluation of sexism as a problem, or at least so serious a problem as to require a campaign.

Women are advised to deal with incidents of sexism themselves, particularly the issue of groping or unwanted touching with like-for-like physical assault:

- (84) **Eine schallende Ohrfeige oder ein Bier ins Gesicht** gekippt wäre passender als ein Tweed oder diese unsägliche öffentliche Diskussion. (#a W BTL 7.1)
- (85) There is nothing stopping a woman in this position from doing one of more of several things to make it stop. She can turn around and slap the crap out of the offender. She can loudly, or quietly, warn the creep not to do it again. She can walk away and take care to not get around him again. It really depends on her personality and the circumstances, but you cannot legislate this kind of thing. **It is up to the woman to stop it.** (ESP DM BTL 1.1)

Additionally, Emma Barnett of the Telegraph (ESP Tel 6.1), while writing an ostensibly positive piece about the Everyday Sexism Project, presents her own personal way of dealing with men who are, in her words, 'threatening': pull a silly face. These suggestions go against the stories shared on the projects that demonstrate women unable or unwilling to react in these particular situations through fear, and the strong emphasis on enforced silencing that is in the description texts.

In the BTL comments, victimhood is presented as a choice on behalf of the woman who is on the receiving end of sexist behaviour (86), or that women as a group are particularly adept at victimhood (87):

- (86) NEIN ! Und ich habe fast durchgängig immer mit Männern zusammengearbeitet, sehe gut aus und und das scheint wichtig zu sein, habe nie einem Mann nur den geringsten Anlass zu solchen Dingen gegeben, **Es liegt auch an der Frau ob sie sich zum Opfer macht!** (#a B BTL 1.1)
- (87) Maybe, instead of **playing the victim** and posting it all over a website they should have stood up for themselves and sorted the issue there and then? But saying that,

too many young women today have no idea how to banter, especially not whilst sober and with the opposite sex. Yes, actual sexism does occur, but too often it is **women being precious and over sensitive**. And I say that as a female. (ESP DM BTL 2.1)

Similarly, some commenters claim that many incidents of sexism in the discussion are based on subjective feelings, which presumably means that the campaign is not based on solid, “graspable” foundations such as legal definitions and therefore is lacking expert or impersonal authority and is not legitimate. This is also visible in example (85), although the reason why it is not possible to legislate against groping is not clear in this comment.

- (88) Das Schlimme an der ganzen Sache ist doch, dass es nicht um wirkliche sexuelle Belästigungen geht (die ich nicht runterspielen möchte) sondern um **subjektiv als sexistisch empfundene Geschehnisse**. (#a S BTL 4.3)

Jan Fleischhauer in Spiegel (#a S 4.4) delegitimizes the founders of #aufschrei in a number of different ways, but one of these ways is to present the project as small and receiving too much attention relative to size. He rejects the naming of the #aufschrei as a ‘Twittersturm’, replacing it with the diminutive ‘Stürmchen’, and questions the quoted number of Tweets shared under the hashtag:

- (89) Es ist schwer zu sagen, wie viele Frauen am Ende tatsächlich über sexuelle Belästigungen berichteten, aber **die Zahl der Beiträge**, die man wirklich als Aufschrei verstehen kann, **dürfte weit unter den angegebenen 80.000 gelegen haben** (#a S 4.4)

Whereas the founders of #aufschrei use their open letter against Gauck to highlight how his comments demonstrate a wider cultural problem, Fleischhauer rejects this collective construction and describes the comments as ‘ein paar als unsensibel empfundene Äußerungen’. These are articulated as concerns of the ‘neue Weltordnung’ (i.e. the social media world) and in opposition to ‘Welthunger’ and ‘Atomtod’, suggesting that the concerns of the younger generations have drifted from the concerns of the past, which might be considered real, collective or structural social concerns. This younger generation is described sarcastically as one of ‘heilige Ernsthaftigkeit’, which in turn implies that they take their concerns (already established as the wrong concerns) too seriously, to an undesirably dogmatic level.

The same kind of arguments can be found across the BTL comments, with commenters telling the founders of the projects or women in general to be more relaxed:

(90) Okay now everyone **take a deep breath and chill-out!** Its only an article!! We all know that in the land of reality there are MUCH more pressing issues to worry about.....try North Korea wanting to be known as a nuclear weapons state.....reality check people. (ESP DM BTL 1.1)

(91) honestly a few lewd comments...**you need to lighten up** or you will be getting your panties in a bunch about every little rudeness that comes to you in life.

seriously, in the scheme of things these little nattering incidents are annoyances, nothing more. (ESP Tel BTL 5.4)

As can be seen in (90), this sits alongside the argument that there are bigger issues that should instead be the focus of attention and the projects are either deliberate or unintentional distractions:

(92) Haben wir nun wieder ein Thema, welches von den WIRKLICHEN Problemen in dieser Republik ablenkt? (#a W BTL 4)

The analogies of ‘einen Elefanten aus einer Mücke/Ameise machen’ (93) and ‘Sturm im Wasserglas’ (94) are also used across the German BTL comments to delegitimize the project through comparison to something that has become much larger than it should be:

(93) Meines Erachtens hat Deutschland wichtigere Themen als über einen angeblichen "Sexismus gegenüber Frauen" zu diskutieren. [...] Die Medienlandschaft sollte meines Erachtens ihren originären Auftrag wahrnehmen, nämlich wahrhaltige Informationen für die Bevölkerung, und nicht, wie schon zu oft, aus einer Mücke einen Elefanten machen! (#a W BTL 7.1)

(94) aktuell gleicht #Aufschrei einem Sturm im Wasserglas, da wird der Herr Bundespräsident recht entspannt bleiben. (#a S BTL 4.3)

On a number of occasions, sexism is referenced in the German BTL comments with the compound ‘Luxusproblem’ (lit. ‘luxury problem’, but also ‘First World problem’, see example 95), which draws on ideas of the privilege of the founding members of #aufschrei to diminish the project as something that one worries about when all other problems have been solved. This idea of privilege is also used to delegitimize the founders of the projects as feminists, claiming that they are focusing on the wrong *feminist* issues:

- (95) Diese Sexismus-"Debatte" ist **ein Schlag ins Gesicht der vielen Vergewaltigungsopfer in Indien und anderswo**. Während sich Frauen in Saudi-Arabien, Iran oder sonstwo, gegen übelste Formen der Unterdrückung und sexueller Ausbeutung tagtäglich wehren müssen, **geilt man sich hierzulande an einem Luxusproblemchen** auf. (#a B BTL 2.1)
- (96) White middle class females have equality. What about **the black/Asian women who have to go through FGM and who suffer horrific care in 3rd world countries when it comes to child bearing and birth?** What happens to the sons of these women when they grow up in abject poverty? No **white feminists are nothing more than fantasists, immature with no time on their hands**. A product of 21st have it all education. (ESP Tel BTL 5.8)

The denial of sexism as a problem is different to the opposition to the chain of equivalence around sexism that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter because it is not based on narrowing down the definition of sexism by excluding other named actions. Instead, it is about challenging the overarching equivalential link of “bad things that happen to women” by attacking the discursive foundation of legitimation that the groups have laid down. Two further arguments that do this are, firstly, denying sexist actions are bad and instead presenting them as flirting and/or natural gendered communication and, secondly, the claim that it is actually men, not women, who are the main (or only) victims of sexist behaviour, the latter of which I return to in Chapter 6.

News articles in Welt and Spiegel bring together sexism and flirting, questioning where the line between the two might lie. Commenters across the BTL datasets go further than this and construct the problem as one of gendered communication, rather than one of gendered oppression, and the supporters of and contributors to the projects are merely misinterpreting this communication. These arguments draw on ideas of sexuality and biology and therefore construct the impossibility of stopping such behaviour because of its inevitability as “hard-wired biology”:

- (97) **Das Flirten und Frauen Komplimente zu machen ist für mich ein normales Verhalten.** Manche Männer machen das mit Niveau, manche sind dabei plump. Weil es halt unterschiedliche Männer gibt, und so schafft es nicht jeder, dass so etwas positiv rüber kommt. [...] Sollen die Männer insgesamt nun deswegen ein schlechtes Gewissen haben, wenn sie sich ganz normal verhalten? (#a S BTL 3.2)

- (98) **Male sexual interest in women and women's in men is deeply woven into human biology.** Unless we want to go about suppressing human sexuality altogether there isn't too much we can do about unwanted sexual advances between humans. The abusive behavior is another matter but I think that's **dysfunctional sexuality** not patriarchy. (ESP G BTL 3.1)

4.8 Denying the Denials of Sexism Below the Line

While the most critical voices come from the BTL comments, it is important to point out that these critical voices are not alone. In all papers' discussion forums there are commenters who challenge the attempts to deny sexism and to delegitimize the projects, its aims and its founders. There are commenters, often the same commenters, who display open support for the projects and their aims, but the examples I show here are explicitly engaging within the discussion forum itself and critiquing their peers.

Commenters support the claims of women and reject calls to 'lighten up':

- (99) **Sie hat recht...**[...] Der Bundespräsident sollte mal eine Frau sein. (#a B BTL 1.1)
- (100) According to many of the comments here, women should "lighten up" it's only a bit of fun. [...] There seems to be a growing disrespect within society for everyone and many men seem to see feminism and its success as an excuse to abuse women. **There is no excuse for abuse of anyone.** (ESP Tel BTL 5.4)

They deny the claims that victimhood is a choice on behalf of the victim:

- (101) Nein, eine Bar ist kein Ort, in dem Frau damit zu rechnen hat sexuell belästigt zu werden. Sie hat Brüderle klar abblitzen lassen, er wollte es nicht akzeptieren. **Das ist definitiv eine Belästigung. Der Ort ist dabei vollkommen egal.** Wer behauptet Frauen dürften nicht weggehen, wenn sie so etwas nicht wollen begibt sich auf eine Ebene mit Salafisten, die verlangen Frauen müssten Burkas tragen, um nicht vergewaltigt zu werden. (#a W BTL 7.1)
- (102) As for bottom pinching, for you stupid men who know nothing about women either mentally or physically, female reproductive organs are very near where mens' grubby fingers grab at. And what if we have our period? It's immature, abusive, annoying, crude and sickening. **Don't tell the victims to 'get over it', just stop doing something that in this day and age is inappropriate and backwards.** (ESP DM BTL 1.1)

They point out that the comments in the forum themselves are evidence enough of sexism:

(103) Ich fürchte, 95% der Kommentare zu diesem Artikel bestätigen ungewollt, dass der ahnungslose Sexismus sehr weit verbreitet ist und den Betroffenen (Frauen) ganz widerlich auf die Nerven gehen muss. (#a S BTL 4.3)

(104) This article turns out to be entirely unnecessary...

...because the sexist comments below it are all that's needed to prove that sexism is alive and well in Britain. (ESP Tel BTL 5.3)

Finally, commenters highlight the irony of other people telling women that sexism does not exist, thus performing the same act of silencing women that the projects are aiming to stop:

(105) aller hier versammelten abätzenden kommentare haben männer geschrieben. Keine Ahnung, wie sie darauf kommen, alltagserfahrungen von Frauen bewerten zu können. (#a taz BTL 6.1)

(106) Indeed, the sheer number of sexists and misogynists who flock to these comments to attempt to minimise, demean and mock women for having the audacity to openly discuss the abuse they have received is fairly astonishing and really highlights the problem. (ESP G BTL 4.1)

4.9 Construction of the Problem: Discussion

On reflection of the results presented above, the nodal point of “sexism” is potentially productive for feminist politics, but there is perhaps more to be done to ensure the potential is realised. This discussion will be aided by bringing in the notion of radical politics, developed in Discourse Theory but applied specifically for feminist politics by Dean (2009), which I briefly covered in Chapter 2. Political discourses become radical when they are articulated into a broader chain of equivalence that constitutes a counter-hegemonic discourse; by contrast, a dislocatory event could be resolved without recourse to wider counter-hegemonic discourses. Arguably, many of the contributors who shared their stories on #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project had attempted to resolve their experiences alone, or at least on a much smaller scale, but the projects allowed them the opportunity to articulate their experiences together (thousands of them) under the nodal point of “sexism”. Use of the signifier “sexism”, as opposed to shrugging it off as something that just happens, allows access to wider feminist discourses that potentially open up discussions of gender and gendered

oppression. Gill, et al. (2017) highlight the arguments used to deny sexism in the workplace, including locating sexism as something that happens elsewhere, or in the past or as something inevitable that one has to deal with alone. At the most basic level, the hashtag feminist groups dislocate this postfeminist discourse by claiming sexism is a structural and deep problem that is happening now and happening all around us.

As nodal points become emptied, they take on a 'performative' function of anchoring the chain of equivalence (Dean, 2009). The importance of the nodal points of "sexism" and "silence"⁴⁴ to the projects' discursive construction is clear from the results I have presented above: it is within these nodal points that the political potential of the discourse is contained by creating a dislocation. Standing alone, they mean relatively little, but are substantially changed when part of the projects' discursive self-representation. "Sexism" comes to mean a huge range of actions and "silence" holds together the legitimation of the project through relations to freedom and oppression and the associated power relations of silencing, self-silencing and ignorance. The performative political function of these nodal points is further evidenced by the fact that these are the main points of attack from outside, particularly in the BTL comments but also at times in the papers: challenging the definition of sexism and challenging who should be silent are attempts to evacuate the projects' radical politics and dismantle the articulation of a wider counter-hegemonic discourse.

The productivity of "sexism" for feminist politics can be seen in the wide-ranging and intense discussions that take place in the BTL comments. Clearly, the aim of the groups to create dislocations is successful. As identified by Laclau & Mouffe (2001), the more unstable the discursive relations, the more antagonisms will occur. The resolution of dislocations, however, will not necessarily work in the favour of the projects and will not necessarily result in new feminist consciousness because it is impossible to predict how antagonisms will develop and change and how discourses might interact⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ "Everyday" is also a nodal point for both projects, but I do not have space to cover it in Chapter 4 and return to it in Chapter 5; however, the arguments I cover in this discussion stay the same for "everyday".

⁴⁵ See, for example, how the discourse on motherhood and biological femininity present in some radical feminist discourse in Germany in the 1970s related very closely to the pro-motherhood discourse of conservative politicians, despite the fact that the two groups had very different aims and world views (Marx Ferree, 2012).

Many BTL commenters are able to successfully resolve the dislocations of the projects by recourse to existing postfeminist discourses that emphasise individual responsibility to deal with problems, personal choice and the rejection of victimhood. García-Favaro & Gill (2016) frame this situation as ‘new modalities’ of sexism. Rather than seeing attacks on anti-sexism campaigns as a phenomenon of the past, as a ‘backlash’ or as ‘retrosexism’, we should see them as a continuing and modern phenomenon, shaped by contemporary discourses. For example, the push towards individualisation and denial of structural inequality that is characteristic of postfeminist discourse can be seen here in the claims that women can choose whether to be upset or not, or should deal with sexist incidents by themselves. Such suggestions include, for example, physical actions such as slapping, verbal actions such as shouting, insulting back or ‘having a quiet word’, or through the force of the law – anything but collectively organise. Gill (2017) also identifies a resurgence in the ideas of ‘natural femininity’ and ‘natural masculinity’ as a key part of postfeminism, and this is visible in my results through the re-negotiation of sexism as an issue of gendered communication present in the news media and the BTL comments: natural and normal male efforts at flirting go awry, causing the problem; the onus then lies with women to be more sympathetic to this male biology.

Victimhood occupies a shifting position, too. The stories shared on the projects’ websites are, in other words, testimonies from the victims of sexism. The notion of victimhood is present in the BTL comments in a number of ways. Women, it is claimed, should be empowered enough to deal with problems alone when they arise and therefore avoid the status of victim. By contrast, others claim that women enjoy victimhood or too easily take on the status of victimhood, thereby creating the – presumably therefore false – issue of sexism. Additionally, the idea that men are the real victims of sexism is premised on the postfeminist construction that women have achieved feminist goals to the point of controlling society, tipping the scales of oppression back in the opposite direction towards men, in the process oppressing their ‘natural masculinity’. This is also employed in the rejection of the need for collective anti-sexism campaigns in the West because the ‘real’ problems for feminists and for women are elsewhere in the world. As I discussed in my literature review, these themes are particularly prevalent in previous work on BTL comments and feminist discourse (Benton-Greig, et al., 2017; García-Favaro & Gill, 2016), but also found in workplace discourse too (Gill, et al., 2017).

Power dynamics and the mechanisms that perpetuate sexism are found across the data, from the feminist self-representation to the news media and the comments. For #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, the act of silencing and the liberating counter-act of speaking up is vital for understanding power dynamics. Understanding firstly that there *is* silencing (as it is, by definition, invisible) and secondly *how* silencing takes place is a central contribution of the projects and their protest method, a thread which I pick up in the following chapters. These power relations are ostensibly discussed in the news media but then upheld in subtle ways, from trivialising certain sexist acts as ‘funny’, to questioning who the ‘real’ victim might be, to allowing space for the argument that sexism is to be expected in certain jobs (journalism) or amongst certain groups of people (young men).

The overarching finding in this chapter is that the meaning of “sexism” itself is in conflict, both in terms of its definition and associated actions, and in terms of its seriousness and legitimisation. The denotation of sexism is left unstated across the data, built up instead through a chain of equivalence that grows bigger with every story shared on the projects’ websites. These stories link together, for example, jokes and comments drawing on gender stereotypes, employment opportunities, assaults and rape. The relevance of these widely ranging actions to an anti-sexism campaign seems similarly taken-for-granted by contributors, and I think it is not insignificant that the chains are built up in identical ways in both the German and English projects, which opens up opportunities for the building of counter-hegemonic feminist discourses across national boundaries. Founders provide a legitimisation for the chains of equivalence through concepts of structural inequality (#aufschrei) and shared societal ideas and attitudes (the Everyday Sexism Project). These are echoed and developed in the BTL comments, where some commenters go further to draw on established feminist theories of patriarchal oppression.

The grounding collectivity of the projects is lost quite quickly amongst the critical voices of the BTL comments, whose prime angle of attack is to pull the links out of the chain. The commenters question the definition of sexism and the equivocated actions of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape. Similarly, they challenge the relevance of the actions to each other and to the aim of the project. This, too, is at times vague and claims for what and

what is not sexism (or harassment or assault) are often not based on anything other than bare statements of fact or opinion, with the reasoning left out as assumed knowledge. The incompatibility of sexism and crime is an interesting point, particularly for the UK context, where misogyny has been declared a hate crime by some police forces since 2016, and which now directly challenges this construction⁴⁶.

It appears that the discourse of the projects may benefit from more internal stability; “sexism” and “silence” go some way to anchoring the discourse, bringing together real world examples of personal experiences and examples of power relations, but I would argue that there is a level of incoherence around the nodal point of “sexism”. It appears to have two functions: one as a nodal point that condenses the huge range of actions named in the stories, and a secondary function as an action itself, as a normal moment in the discourse, that is, as a sign subordinate to the organising nodal point. This is evident, for example, in the way that the chains of equivalence are built up in some cases, such as in the description texts for the groups, where “sexism” occupies an equal place on a list that might also include “rape” or “sexual harassment”. At the same time, “sexism” also functions as a condensing nodal point in the names of the groups and “rape” and “sexual harassment” are then included in the stories as examples of this “sexism”. As a nodal point, sexism should sit higher in the discursive hierarchy; by occupying two positions, it creates a cyclical relation that does not provide an adequate meaning⁴⁷. Are the stories of rape and sexual harassment examples of sexism? Or is sexism different, but equivalent, to rape or sexual harassment? This relation needs clarification, perhaps with more explicit connections to established feminist theories of gendered oppression.

The biggest contribution of these projects is the wealth of examples of sexism in action, if this is to be the chosen nodal point, rich with activated social action and named social actors. This spontaneous act of sharing, which I discuss in more detail in the following chapters, itself

⁴⁶ Nottinghamshire Police were the first to declare misogyny as a hate crime in July 2016 after local campaigning (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-36775398>), followed by Yorkshire Police in March 2017 (<https://northyorkshire.police.uk/news/misogyny-recognised-hate-crime/>). There is an ongoing discussion about whether to make this a national addition to hate crime policy (<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/sep/10/misogyny-hate-crime-nottingham-police-crackdown>).

⁴⁷ This is different to the pragmatic function of tautology. Compare the sense gained from “no means no” to “sexism means sexism”.

already is contributing to a wider social understanding of the meaning of sexism. To contribute further to radical feminist politics, however, I believe that these stories need to be linked in a coherent feminist discourse that explores why these events occurred in their particularity and the damaging nature of the construction of gender. This final point is one that I return to in the following two chapters. This is not to say that feminist protest should be defined by external criticism or led by outside voices, rather than these critical views being challenged and transformed, but if campaigns against sexism are to be reliant on experiential stories, then we should consider ways to argue for the legitimacy of personal experience in defining sexism and for the equivocation of many actions under this one unifying signifier.

5 #aufschrei and The Everyday Sexism Project: Protest Form

The primary location for both #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project is online, and this is arguably the most divergent feature of the three protest groups in this study (with FEMEN's primary location for protest being on the street). The projects make use of Twitter and their own websites to publish stories publicly. Tweets are limited to 140 characters, so the websites are useful for longer stories as well as for those contributors who do not have Twitter or do not wish to use their public profile to share their stories. The founders of the projects themselves have moved from the internet into other public forums, such as television shows, news media and public seminars and workshops, and have produced books about their projects, but these other textual productions do not form part of this study.

The development of technology and specifically the use of social media is perhaps the most significant change in the socio-economic landscape for contemporary feminism; some scholars go so far as to claim that this technological turn justifies delineating a current fourth wave of feminism (Munro, 2013). Others, however, warn against this, while also warning against the "wave" narrative in general, in part because of the risks of obscuring continuities in concerns and practice (Evans & Chamberlain, 2015). This chapter is focused on the theme of the online protest form of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, for example, what it facilitates and how it is criticised. In the first two sections, I explore the aspects of the "mass" of voices in the projects; in the third I turn to the specifically online nature of the projects; and, finally, in the fourth section I present the issues of proof and truth that arise from the experiential stories of the contributors.

5.1 The Mass of Voices

The projects are clearly founded in their description texts as places for personal experiences and first-hand stories, evident in the use of 'experience' (see examples 1 and 2 from Chapter 4.1) and 'story'/'Geschichte':

- (1) Sexismus ist keine Bagatelle, sondern ein ernsthaftes Problem, das wir nicht akzeptieren wollen.

Eure Geschichten helfen, darauf aufmerksam zu machen (#a description, bold and italics emphasis in original)

- (2) By sharing your story you're showing the world that sexism *does* exist (ESP description, emphasis in original)

As I discussed in Chapter 4, the aim of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project is to break the silence over sexism in Germany and the UK, respectively, and the examples above show that the personal stories of contributors is fundamental, particularly accentuated in (1) with the emphasis with bold type. The accumulation of the stories together serves as the proof of sexism, but the key is getting many stories from many people that cover a range of actions (covered in Chapter 4), locations and perpetrators (Chapter 6). This "critical mass" is attended to explicitly in the #aufschrei open letter:

- (3) Die Heftigkeit entsteht aus der Masse an Erfahrungen, die hier sichtbar geworden ist. Genau deswegen müssen sie ernstgenommen werden (#a open letter)

Personal authority legitimization gains potency from the 'status or role' of the particular person (van Leeuwen, 2008: 106). Anonymous contributors (and majority female ones at that, which I come back to below) do not hold obvious personal authority on their own, so the legitimization must come from the sheer number of these voices.

I would argue that the construction of sexism as a serious problem is related to the use of "everyday"/"alltag", not to the physicality or illegality of the actions. The range of actions that is covered and the groups' rejection of the silencing and trivialisation of those actions suggest that the severity of sexism comes from its pervasiveness in women's lives and its dismissal. Sexism is "everyday", both because it happens all the time, to lots of different people and because it is made banal and ordinary. These two aspects connect the stories together on an equal footing rather than on a scale. In this way, "everyday" is another nodal point of the discourse of the groups, as they fill "everyday" with this meaning. Unlike "sexism", however, "everyday" is in less conflict and the newspapers and the BTL commenters rarely trouble its usage.

Another way that the discursive chain of equivalence for this everyday sexism is built up is through representations of space (van Leeuwen, 2008), that is, through naming the locations where sexism happens. Some stories do not include locations, but those that do are in ordinary – everyday – locations. Similar to the actions, the logic of difference between public and private space, and the functions of locations, such as for education, work or food, are mitigated under the equivalential link of “places where sexism happens”.

Most common are public spaces, such as school (4, 4A) and universities (5, 5A):

- (4) In der Schule nahm ich an einem Schachwettbewerb teil, dort gab es Pokale für den 1., 2. und 3. Platz sowie für “das beste Mädchen”. Den gewann ich leider auch noch, aber damals schien das völlig normal. (#a stories)
- (5) A tutor at my university made remarks in his lectures such as 'And so the economy improved, so women could buy more shoes' or 'Marry a rich man, girls, so you can work part time and never have to pay off your student loans'. (ESP stories)

There are a range of different workplaces such as offices (6) and bars (7):

- (6) Sexismus im Büro? Gibt es nicht angeblich. Daher bin ich ja auch zickig, wenn ich mich aufrege, dass mein Chef im Management "was fürs Auge" will und den männlichen Kollegen gegenüber Verständnis signalisiert, falls die sich hübsche Praktikantinnen holen... (#a stories)
- (7) I am a passionate and talented bartender but I struggled to find a new job because two of the cocktail bars in my city refuse to hire women. (ESP stories)

These same spaces can also be social (8, 8A):

- (8) Ich war vor nicht allzu langer Zeit mit einer guten Freundin in einem Club. Sie ging zur Theke, um uns etwas zu Trinken zu besorgen. An der Theke saß ein Typ, der ihr eindeutig zu nah kam und ihr "I want to see you naked." ins Ohr flüsterte. [...] Den ganzen Abend behielt der Typ sie im Auge und immer, wenn sie in seine Richtung schaute, grinste er sie ekelhaft an. Sie zeigte sehr deutlich, dass sie das nicht wollte. (#a stories)

Other public places, such as garages (example (16) in Chapter 4), banks (9) and shops (10):

- (9) Ich steige letzte Woche aus dem Auto eines Freundes und hebe in der Bank gegenüber Geld ab, es ist 19.30. Als ich die Bank verlassen will, kommt mir ein betrunkenen etwa 35 jähriger Mann entgegen und fast mir an den Busen. (#a stories)

- (10) I was out shopping with my husband, and we stopped into a hardware store so he could pick up some supplies. I held back as the aisles are narrow. A man walking past me grabbed my butt on his way to the aisle. (ESP stories)

Public transport, particularly trains (11, 11A), buses (12, 12A) and planes (13):

- (11) Der Typ, der nachmittags am Bahnhof auf mich zukam und fragte, ob ich ihm in der Toilette einen blasen will (#a open letter)
- (12) I got on the bus on my way home from school, and, as I passed him, a man looked, pointedly, down my legs and back up again. (ESP stories)
- (13) I was 14 on a 6hr plane flight by myself sitting next to a middle aged man. I thought he fell asleep as he was sort of leaning against me and his elbow was nudging me [...]. It got worse and his elbow was almost touching my breast so I was leaning as far into the aisle to be away from him as possible. [...] [H]is hand started moving and eventually started touching my leg. (ESP stories)

What is noticeable about public spaces is how physical assaults and staring are facilitated by the fact that a large number of people can be present in very close proximity or, due to seating arrangements, two people are obliged to sit close together (such as in examples 11A and 13).

Finally, the public space of the street, where women are either followed by men on foot (14), or shouted or honked at by men in cars (15):

- (14) Shout out to the group of men in La Guillotière who made kissing noises and followed me for two blocks. (ESP stories)
- (15) War mit meiner Freundin(ich 15, sie 16)am Abend(gegen 21 uhr)noch draußen, schlapperlook, also Jogging Hose und normales Shirt als ein Auto anhält und fragt wieviel es kostet. (#a stories)

Private spaces are also represented, although in this case the location is often implicit: it could reasonably be assumed that stories detailing sexual assaults and rapes in romantic relationships happen in the bedroom, and family encounters occur in the home:

- (16) Der Ex, der mich jedes Mal bedrängte, wenn ich gerade keine Lust auf Sex hatte, und mich so lange nicht in Ruhe ließ, bis ich endlich nachgab. (#a stories)

- (17) While wearing a backless tshirt and shorts to go to the gym (during the summertime) I am told by my father to change my shirt because I'm "not going to the beach" and "we don't want anything to happen". (ESP stories)

Location also reflects the international reach of the Everyday Sexism Project, with stories coming from a number of different countries, including a number from the USA and Australia (18A), as well as Somalia (18B), India, France and Germany (18). Bates's article in the Guardian (ESP G 3.1) also emphasises this international aspect, crediting press abroad in raising the awareness of the project in their countries. One entry on the Everyday Sexism Project website references the hostile space that #aufschrei had become after gaining wider public attention, mentioned in Chapter 3, and this ended up driving this contributor to the Everyday Sexism Project instead:

- (18) I am German. I was forced to have sex with a guy in 2004. In Germany, this does not even count as rape :/The german #aufschrei (outcry against sexism) is overrun with trolls and antifeminists :/When I report on my experiences with sexual harassment, people ask what I (!) did wrong (ESP stories)

Another construction of the everyday through representations of location is how everyday actions are interrupted by sexism, such as travelling to work or shopping (and also many other examples in Chapters 4-6) (19, 19A):

- (19) **Als ich im Sommer auf dem Weg zur Uni an einer Bahnhaltestelle saß** (Wochenende, hellichter Tag) und ein Spiel auf dem Smartphone spielte, dachte ich erst, der Mann neben mir würde mir quasi über die Schulter beim Spiel zugucken. Bis ich merkte, dass sich seine Hand in der Hose bewegte und ich nochmal richtig hinschaute: ja, er hat masturbiert. (#a stories)

The success of the projects in demonstrating sexism as an everyday problem can be seen through meta-commentary in some of the stories themselves. The most basic is explicit thanks to the founders for creating the space:

- (20) p.s. ich DANKE allen die diese seite hier möglich machen ! (#a stories)
- (21) Thank you I have worked in the public schools for over 20 years and see the pain young girls experience daily (ESP stories)

Contributors describe not realising that what had happened to them was wrong (22), not realising or remembering that it had happened to them until reading other stories (23):

- (22) All of these things happened when I was a freshman in high school, I was only 13, and I had always believed sexual assault was only rape, nothing else, so when this was going on I didn't say or do anything, just went along with it.
[...]
I don't know why it's taken me this long to realize how wrong all of that was, but now that I have I just keep wishing I had been smart enough to stop it, to fight back, or to just tell someone. (ESP stories)
- (23) Es ist erschreckend, wie oft ich auf dieser Seite gelesen habe, dass Männer auf öffentlichen Plätzen Frauen und Kindern ihre Genitalien gezeigt haben. Ich fand es vor allem so erschreckend, weil ich es nie selber erlebt habe. Dachte ich...
[...]
Später stellte sich der Mann 20 Meter weiter weg von uns. Meine Sehstärke betrug damals schon -4 Dioptrien und ich trug meine Brille damals nur in der Schule - trotzdem habe ich erkannt, dass der Mann seinen Penis rausgeholt hatte und ihn mit seiner Hand rieb.
[...]
Erst als ich diese Seite gefunden habe und von mehreren ähnlichen Erlebnissen erfahren habe, tauchte diese Erinnerung langsam auf und mir wurde die Widerwärtigkeit dieser längst verdrängten Situation bewusst... (#a stories)

The space also allows for internal criticism of other contributors in areas such as female body stereotypes (24), judgements on sex workers (25) and victim blaming (26), and self-criticism as they realise that they had harboured sexist thoughts (27, 27A):

- (24) Dass selbst hier im Forum Frauen über eine "natürlich-weibliche Figur" reden wenn sie meinen sie sind nicht total dünn. Ja eh. Deine natürliche Figur vielleicht. Meine nicht! Und trotzdem bin ich kein bisschen unweiblicher. (#a stories)
- (25) Seeing countless stories on here and everywhere else targetting sex workers and models as bad things [...]. As a sex worker it leaves me ostracised from the rest of the female community as I am made to feel ashamed for doing *and enjoying* a job that pays well doesn't effect my moral stance or my complete devotion to feminism. (ESP stories)
- (26) I hate how every other poster on this website describing inappropriate sexual advances by strangers feels the need to give a description of the clothes worn at the time. It shouldn't even frickin' matter. (ESP stories)
- (27) Ich erwische mich auch selbst dabei, sexistisch zu denken. Letztes Jahr habe ich mit ein paar Leuten zusammen in einer kleinen Kunstaussstellung meine Bilder ausgestellt. [...] Ich kannte auch die Bilder der anderen Leute nicht, ging aber unbewusst davon aus, dass der Mann wohl der beste Künstler sein müsse. (#a stories)

5.2 'Das Redebedürfnis der Frauen' in the News Media and BTL Comments

The function of the stories as, firstly, evidencing the existence of everyday sexism and, secondly, as dislocating the normalisation of sexist behaviour comes through most strongly in the papers when the founders are present. As a result, this is visible in Spiegel (28, 29), but largely absent in the other German papers, and present through direct quotes from or interviews with Laura Bates in the UK papers⁴⁸ (30-32).

- (28) Blöde Sprüche, Hände auf Oberschenkeln, herablassende Titulierungen: Wir leben im Jahr 2013 - und in deutschen Büros werden Frauen "Puppe" genannt und angemacht. **Das darf nicht wahr sein? Ist es aber, wie Beispiele der aktuellen Sexismus-Debatte zeigen.** (#a S 3.1)

- (29) Dann twitterte ich, woran ich mich erinnerte, andere machten mit, führten das fort. So wurde aus meinen Tweets eine gemeinsame Sache, **ein kollektives Teilen**. Das soll weitergehen. (direct quote from Nicole von Horst, #a S 3.2)

- (30) The **founder** of a popular anti-sexism blog **has spoken** about her goal of making both men and women understand that **sexism is unacceptable and must be talked about honestly and openly** if it is to ever be stamped out.
[...]
[S]he saw that if she was able to catalogue every woman's story in one place, disbelievers might begin to **acknowledge the severity of the situation**. (ESP DM 1.1)

- (31) **Bates said** that the success of the project was less to do with its popularity, but more to do with the **"sheer mass of stories out there"** that otherwise go untold.

She said: "That these women, and so many more, are suffering these instances of sexism, prejudice, harassment and assault on a daily basis should be an outrage. But it isn't. It's a lifestyle. The society we live in has **normalised the treatment of women as second-class citizens**, as disposable objects, as punchlines for jokes." (ESP Ind 5.1, quoted from ESP G 4.1)

- (32) Before social networks came along, specifically Twitter, there was no easy place for women to catalogue these fairly regular and annoying sexist occurrences en masse. Even just being able to **share your frustrations** at a sexist jibe or exclusion in the workplace because of your gender – at the time it happens with a large group of people – is **incredibly liberating** – for both women, and I imagine men too. Social media has made it possible to do it at large scale. (ESP Tel 6.1)

The final example from the Telegraph is notable in its description of the process of sharing stories as 'liberating', while complimenting social media as a particularly useful medium for

⁴⁸ See Chapter 6 for more on the incorporation of the founders and the projects into the news media.

this kind of project⁴⁹. Like Nicole von Horst in example (29), Laura Bates in the Guardian also mentions the ‘phenomenon’ of the process of sharing stories, and how she has become a personal repository for the stories of ‘nearly every woman’ she has met as they feel brave enough and compelled to share (ESP G 4.1). Anne Wizorek describes this self-perpetuating silence-breaking as a ‘Redebedürfnis der Frauen’ (#a S 3.2). This continues the freedom/oppression evaluation of the contextually constructed opposition of speaking up/silence that I covered in Chapter 4: the freedom to speak up becomes more deeply justified through the construction of a compulsion, desire or need, which draw on ideas of nature and instinct and their corresponding inevitability.

Likely because they are engaged in discussions with other commenters trying to delegitimize the projects, some BTL commenters engage overtly with the aim of the projects. Similar to the story contributors, BTL commenters thank the founders and co-operative newspapers, in particular for speaking up for silent women (35) and silenced women (33), and for demonstrating the existing of sexism as a problem (34, 35):

- (33) Danke, dass das Thema mal auf den Tisch kommt. Ich selber traue mich ja gar nicht, einem Arbeitskollegen / höherrangigen zu sagen, dass das gerade zu weit ging und grenzüberschreitend ist. **Sonst bin ich die Spaßbremse, Emanze oder - ganz beliebt: lesbisch.** Der Kampf gegen diese Attributionen wird quasi als Eingeständnis gewertet. Und ja - es wird als Mittel eingesetzt einen klein zu halten. (#a S BTL 3.1)
- (34) The Everyday Sexism Project is a brilliant idea that continues to **show the extent to which sexism still exists** today. [...] Thank you for doing this - I will continue to tweet you and support you in any way I can. (ESP G BTL 3.1)
- (35) THANK YOU to the Telegraph for publishing this series. Please do continue with it. For every ignorant, pedantic comment, there are doubtless **a thousand women thinking, as I did: "Yes! Finally!"** (ESP Tel BTL 5.-3)

That being said, the most “thanked” person in the German BTL comments corpus was Jan Fleischhauer, the author of a negative opinion piece on #aufschrei in Spiegel⁵⁰:

⁴⁹ See later sections and Chapter 6 for the attempts to delegitimize this particular view of social media.

⁵⁰ I reference this article a number of times throughout the chapters on the hashtag feminist groups, particularly as the author often draws on the same types of delegitimation strategies as BTL commenters. Written in response to the open letter presented to President Gauck, the central thesis of this opinion piece is that the founders of #aufschrei have overreacted and blown Gauck’s comments out of proportion. Fleischhauer links this to wider delegitimation of young people’s contemporary political concerns in general as over-zealous as well as to wider delegitimation of social media as distorting the political relevance of topics.

- (36) danke Hr Fleischhauer
Sie setzen die recht schrillen Damen vom Hype-Status auf die Ebene zurück, die angemessen ist. (#a S BTL 4.3)
- (37) Danke!
Hätte es nicht besser ausdrücken können.
Wenn man sich überlegt, dass sich unterm Strich wohl nur ein paar tausend Leute wirklich aufregen handelt es sich wohl wirklich um einen Sturm im Wasserglas. (#a S BTL 4.3)

BTL commenters recognise the sense of community feeling that comes from sharing stories (38), and the realisation of their own misconceptions about sexism (39) (and (55) below):

- (38) But it's important to share stories where men Are being sexist buttholes. **It makes us feel like we're not alone.** (ESP G BTL 4.1)
- (39) I've had quite a few situations where I've been sexually assaulted, but **I never classed it as assault at the time.** (ESP DM BTL 1.1)

Men in the comments express how the projects have opened their eyes to the problem of sexism (40) (and (54), below), or how women speaking up is perhaps the only way that men will realise the problem of sexism (41):

- (40) As a guy I don't feel I personally have much to add to the comments on this article except to say that articles like these on the guardian have really **opened my eyes** to daily experiences of people that I wouldn't necessarily hear about otherwise. I think it makes me **better informed** and hopefully a better person. (ESP G BTL 3.1)
- (41) Die sarkastischen Bemerkungen auch hier bei der TAZ zeigen nur, dass die meisten Männer diese ziemlich schlichte Empathie-Übung nicht leisten können oder wollen.

Es wäre vielleicht Zeit, dass **die Mütter, Schwestern, Töchter und Partnerinnen ihren Söhnen, Brüdern, Vätern und Partnern endlich den alltäglichen Sexismus, dem sie ausgesetzt waren und sind, nicht ersparen, sondern in allen Einzelheiten erzählen.** Dann nimmt vielleicht das Maß an männlichem Sarkasmus ab und das Maß der männlichen Solidarität zu. (#a taz BTL 5.1)

By contrast, for many BTL commenters, the act of speaking is not liberating for women. They delegitimize the discursive relation of speaking/silence to freedom/oppression by articulating the groups with traditional negative female stereotypes⁵¹ of moaning and whining. Here they

⁵¹ See, for example, Cameron (2007) and Coates & Pichler (2011).

invert the contextually constructed opposition whereby speaking actually becomes a form of oppression for those who have to listen or can hear:

(42) Meine Güte. Die Frauen haben sowieso immer was zu Meckern. (#a S BTL 3.2)

(43) We got the vote - now lets prove ourselves without all the whining (ESP DM BTL 2.1)

In the German dataset, the act of protesting can be represented through the objectivated name “#aufschrei”⁵². Another way that commenters continue the “talk”-based delegitimation is through replacing this name with other objectivated actions that negatively evaluate the act of speaking or talking, a reversed form of moral evaluation legitimation, that is, moral evaluation delegitimation. As can be seen in Table 1 below, some use entirely new terms (‘Gejammer’), some draw on related stereotypical designations of women as hysterical, and some play with the verb ‘aufschreien’ and more negative synonyms (‘Geschrei’, ‘aufkreisch’). Drawing also on naming strategies of the founders which is discussed later in 6.5, it is interesting to note that the sounds used to negatively describe the talk of the groups are often associated with animals, such as ‘kreischen’, ‘meckern’ (both Table 1 below, as (42) above) and ‘schnattern’ (Table 1 in 6.5). This can also be seen through the naming of the founders and participants as goats (see Table 1 below) or geese (Table 1 in 6.5). Within this construction, not only are the sounds made by the women not politically relevant, they are actually outside the boundaries of basic human communication and therefore irrelevant, as well as being unpleasant to hear.

<i>Spiegel</i>	<i>BILD</i>
#Aufkreisch	Gelaaber
Aufgerschrei	
das ganze Geschrei	<i>Welt</i>
das Gejammer	das gekreische
die feministische Heulerei	diese Hysterie
derart hysterische Reaktion	Geschrei
dieses dumme Geschwafel	lächerliches Gekreisch
dieses ganze Twitter Geplärre	Zickengekeife
dieses Gekreische	
dieses#aufschrei- gekreische	<i>taz</i>
	das Sexismus-Genöle

⁵² Sometimes without hashtag, and with or without capitalised ‘a’; the hashtag, while losing its original technological function of ‘tagging’ together disparate texts, travels beyond Twitter as part of the nomination of the protest campaign.

ein paar Aufschreierle Gemecker Geschwätz Hysterie Lamentieren selbstmitleidiges Gejammere	ein ausdrück von hysterie Jungmädchen-Aufkreisch-Material
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Table 1: “Talk”-related Delegitimation in the German BTL Comments

5.3 The Online Location

The online location of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project has a number of benefits, including the longevity and transferability of the stories and the inclusivity of the medium; all that is needed is an internet-enabled device, significantly much less stringent admission criteria than for groups such as FEMEN. This latter point is key to the accumulation of a critical mass of voices to prove the existence of sexism because it opens up participation to many people, including those with offline mobility issues such as physical impairments, financial constraints or age constraints. Actions and locations are evidence of this, and I come back to the actors involved in sexism in Chapter 6. Examples (18), (18A) and (18B) demonstrate that even people from outside the UK, and English-speaking countries, post to the Everyday Sexism Project, perhaps because of English’s role as an international lingua franca.

Another way that the everyday and pervasive nature of sexism is demonstrated through the stories is the way that time (van Leeuwen, 2008) is constructed. Here, the differences in time period or occurrence are mitigated in favour of foregrounding the action of sexism. Although women are encouraged to speak up, they are also “writing up”: the projects become textual repositories for the experiential stories, which would most likely be lost if spoken aloud rather than written down. This archival aspect means that the projects can cross time boundaries and hold together stories from vastly different decades, or repeated occurrences next to those that only happened once.

One off, or unique (van Leeuwen, 2008), events are often evident from grammatical features, namely the use of the past tense, or the adverbs of time ‘als’ or ‘when’ (44, 44A):

- (44) Als ich im Kindergarten war, also ca. 5-6 Jahre alt, musste ich an einem Tag auf die Toilette. Als ich aus der Kabine wieder herauskam, standen dort 3 etwa gleichaltrige Jungs aus dem Kindergarten. Einer davon hielt mich fest und zog mir die Hose samt Unterhose herunter. Die beiden anderen standen vor mir, blickten mich an, deuteten auf meinen Unterleib und lachten dabei. (#a stories)

By contrast, recurring events are referenced through the use of present tense or corresponding adverbs of time (e.g. 'always', 'now') (45) or the adjective 'jede' (45A):

- (45) Dudes I game with online found out I was a woman in real life. Now, instead of treating me like just one of the gang, they always explain everything twice to me as if I'm slow (I've been playing for years, jerks!), and they act surprised when I cuss in chat. (ESP stories)

Large spans of time are covered, too, including the most recent ('gerade' (46), 'yesterday' (46A)) and incidents that happened decades previously.

- (46) Gerade über den "Medizin-Ticker" auf Bild.de gestolpert.. "Weniger Hausarbeit ist der Grund für Gewichtszunahme bei Frauen".. Ein Bild einer hübschen sexy Frau in devoter Putz-Pose gibt es gleich dazu. (#a stories)

The historical incidents are sometimes simultaneously located in the present day by the contributor describing how they are still emotionally affected, and emphasise their relevance (47, 47A):

- (47) When I was 7 I was sexually assaulted in a public toilet by a stranger. Now in my 30s, I've fairly effectively put it behind me. Mum never got over it. We suffered together every time some pervy guy crossed our paths from that day forward. Me as a traumatised child, and her as a woman and as a mother 'failing' all over again to shield her daughter from horrible male behaviour. (ESP stories)

As static texts, the stories are also easy to quote elsewhere, such in the newspapers. In the newspapers, the stories are reliant on the author of the article to construct the discursive framework around them; however, the stories are left to "speak for themselves", as it were, in self-contained units at the end of articles. The most-quoted Tweet from #aufschrei was not a genuine story from a contributor but a joke poking fun at the project by exploiting gender stereotypes, quoted three times in Spiegel and once in taz. Counting how many times it appears in newspapers perhaps says more about how the press recycle the same information

than it does about the quote's impact but it is demonstrative of, firstly, how individual stories can be lost in the mass of voices, leaving the outliers able to attract more attention by dint of being different, in this case, the ones criticising or laughing at the project. Secondly, the transferability of the stories means that it is just as easy to pick up the negative posts as well as the positive ones.

The replicability of the method of sharing stories online is evident not only from the many international feminist campaigns in this vein, which include the two under study here, but also evident from how the BTL comment sections are sources for more stories. BTL commenters continue the same format of sharing personal experiences of sexism in the newspaper forums, even though that is not their function. This again demonstrates the 'Redebedürfnis' and momentum-gathering potential of the projects.

- (48) Even today in London after a business meeting at my age (3 of my children have graduated) a van slowed down and the driver honked his horn. [...] Last year an ex MP (they are often the worst) at the end of a meeting asked me for sex at my age and I'm nothing special. (ESP DM BTL 1.1)
- (49) im Praktikum beim Landtag hatte ich in so kurzer Zeit so viele Hände auf meinem Po wie noch nie zuvor. Politikergrößen haben außerdem von meinem Teller genascht und wie einem kleinen Mädchen in die Wangen gekniffen. Endlich werden Widerlichkeiten wie diese mal öffentlich, endlich wird das mal ein Thema. (#a S BTL 3.2)

BTL commenters positively evaluate the projects for bringing light to a trivialised subject. This is most explicit in the Guardian comments, where the project is described variously and repeatedly as 'good', 'very good', 'great', 'wonderful', 'brilliant', 'awesome', 'amazing', 'intelligent' and 'noble'. Rarely, however, do commenters positively evaluate the medium of social media, with no occurrences at all in the English data and a handful in the German data:

- (50) Die Macht von Netzöffentlichkeiten
[...]
Überrascht die Thematisierung im Netz? Nein. Die große Diskussion von politischen Themen - der #Aufschrei - ist lediglich die Nutzung langgewünschter Kommunikationskanäle. (#a S BTL 4.3)

By contrast, social media is a target of criticism in the German BTL comments. 'Twitter' is used in compounds with other kinds of talk-related delegitimation (see Table 1), the hashtag is

used ironically, such as ‘#shitstorm’ or ‘#Hype’, or commenters use synonyms of rubbish to name the project and the debate around it: ‘Twitterquatsch’, ‘Twittermist’, ‘Twitter-Kram’ or ‘Müll mit Hashtags’ (all Spiegel). Social media is also described as a ‘Parallelwelt’, a ‘Scheinwelt’ (Spiegel), a ‘Parallelgesellschaft’ (52) and a ‘Paralleluniversum’ (taz), meaning that concerns brought up on social media are irrelevant to offline life – the “real” world – and therefore should be ignored. The dynamics of this parallel world are different, too, in that the concerns are fleeting (51) and blown out of proportion (52), which is also related to the construction of #aufschrei as small that I covered in Chapter 4. As (52) illustrates, the newspapers that report on the protests come in for the same kind of criticism: basing articles on ‘village gossip’ (i.e. social media) is poor journalism because it has no political substance or relevance.

(51) Das Schöne an dieser Netzrealität: Sie ist so schnell wieder vorbei, wie sie kommt. (#a S BTL 4.3)

(52) dieses ganze Twitter Geplärre...
... entwickelt sich anscheinend echt zur Parallelgesellschaft... enorm wichtig, wie FB. So wichtig, das jeder kleine Gedankenlose "Tweed" zum Nachäffer "Schitstorm" wird, und der Dorfklatsch des Mobs ist SPON jeden Meldung wert. (#a S BTL 4.1)

Whereas Emma Barnett in the Telegraph (ESP Tel 6.1) describes sharing stories on social media as ‘liberating’, Jan Fleischhauer in Spiegel (#a S 4.4) describes #aufschrei, similar to the comments above, as a ‘Parallelwelt’, where numbers of followers needed for fame is much lower, again reinforcing the idea of offline irrelevance, although this article is the only example of direct criticism of either project in the news media data.

These kinds of criticism are much less prevalent in the English BTL comments data, with (53) being the only example:

(53) The passivity of posting on twitter about incidents that happened years ago doesn't do much to encourage or inform people how to directly tackle sexism when it happens. [...] A broader problem in activist communities anyway. Impotence satiated by clicktivism. (ESP G BTL 4.1)

This same comment is part of a wider discussion in the Guardian comments that ostensibly supports the Everyday Sexism Project but criticises it for not giving guidance on how to deal with sexist incidents; this can be seen in example (54, below) too. Here, the project fails

because it is only talking and this provides no tangible next step, rather than fails because it only talking and this has no real world relevance. Rather than being a project that has over-reached its boundaries and should be small, it is too small and should be much bigger. Nevertheless, there is push back on this criticism, as (55) shows, situating the Everyday Sexism Project as a 'first step' that does not necessarily need to provide anything more than it currently does:

- (54) This is not to belittle the project or the experiences of women (I couldn't believe such stuff went on until coverage of the project made me ask some women of my acquaintance what their experience was ... seldom have I felt more ashamed) BUT: **Now what?** Bad thing is bad. We know this. So what is to be done? That's my only beef with this project. **You collect all these stories, you frequently blog about them here, but then what?** What's the next step to try to change all these knuckle-scrappers' behaviour? (ESP G BTL 4.1)
- (55) I didn't realise how universal my (admittedly mild) experience of harassment on public transport was until I read the Everyday Sexism project. I feel like **this is the first step** in the process to overcoming it - **wake victims up to the fact that they're victims, and wake society up to the fact that there's a problem.** Then we can look to see what's causing the problem, and work out what we can do about it. (ESP G BTL 4.1)

5.4 The Burden of Proof

As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, the legitimisation for claiming sexism as a pervasive, everyday problem and therefore politically and socially relevant comes from the personal authority of the stories. One story alone is not enough, as these voices are either anonymous or members of the general public with no particular standing, as Anne Wizorek and Laura Bates also were prior to starting their projects. The authority comes instead from the accumulation of many personal testimonies. Considering how the issue of sexism is silenced and trivialised, the burden of proof is on women to demonstrate the existence of sexism and therefore warrant a change to the social status quo. In this section, I look at the ways that numbers and quantification of the stories is used and how the truth of the stories is challenged. Quantification of the stories is a common strategy across all media locations for the groups, both as a form of legitimisation by the groups and delegitimation by critics.

When sexism is questioned in the discussion forum below an article (see Chapter 4), BTL commenters use the projects' websites as evidence, in the way that the founders of the projects intended. Commenters implore their peers to read the sites to dispel doubts:

- (56) Ich kann nur jedem empfehlen, mal die Berichte anonymer Frauen auf <http://alltagssexismus.de> zu lesen. (#a S BTL 4.1)
- (57) I suggest you visit the blog. She herself doesn't post but rather, it's a collection of other people posting about their experiences (ESP DM BTL 1.1)

The anonymity of the sites is seen as a weakness, particularly as their effectiveness is entirely reliant on personal authority. Commenters question the truthfulness and authorship of the stories because they are voluntary and not 'verified' (58, 59). Some go so far as to claim they have entered fake ones to prove the flawed system (60). If the stories are not true, or doubtful, then their potency is entirely voided. Similarly, and related to the challenges to the definition of sexism (Chapter 4), some commenters question whether the stories are proof of sexism itself or of other things, such as personal grievances (61) or ageism.

- (58) How does the "everyday sexism" blog **verify any of these claims** are real and not made up? Anyone could submit a supposed sexist incident it doesn't mean it is going to be true. (#a DM BTL 4.1)
- (59) Nein, eben nicht. Sondern anonyme Menschen, die sich als Frauen ausgeben, erzählen Dinge, die sie vielleicht im Fernsehen gesehen haben, oder frei erfunden haben. **Niemand hat das geprüft.** Sicher gibt es auch die eine oder andere reale Geschichte, aber behaupten kann erstmal jeder alles. (#a S BTL 4.3)
- (60) PS To prove a point, **I have just added a fake story**, posing as a woman. (ESP Tel BTL 5.7)
- (61) enjoyed the site however there are loads of stories which are obviously **just personal grievances** - that's the internet for you I suppose (ESP G BTL 3.1)

In the German BTL comments, the reliability of the stories and the overall #aufschrei campaign is also challenged through a number of designations: 'eine verlogene Kampagne', '[die] vermeintlichen #Aufschrei-Stories' and 'Rosinenpickerei' (Spiegel); 'große Augenwischerei' and 'ein mit Scheinargumenten ganz notdürftig verbrämter Männerhaß' (Welt); and 'vermeintliches Jungmädchen-Aufkreisch-Material' (taz). Here, the stories are doubted through adjectives such as 'alleged' or re-named as cherry picking, an act which

distorts the real picture; in some cases the stories are claimed to be a veil for misandry. This kind of naming practice does not manifest in the English BTL comments, where the actual name of the project is generally used.

These claims doubting the stories do not pass without reply. For example, in (62), the commenter situates the argument within accusations of sexism and gender stereotyping, namely, that women's opinions are valued less than men's. This is another example of creating discursive dislocation through highlighting a double standard in treatment between men and women. The commenter in (63) re-emphasises the personal authority of women to decide their own preferences:

- (62) Und warum soll man irgendwelchen Blödsinn einfach so behaupten? Machen Sie das etwa regelmäßig auf Twitter? "Oh, habe gerade den Tatort gesehen, bin auch gerade ausgeraubt worden"? Oder unterstellen Sie das nur, weil es ja Frauen sind, deren kindliches Gemüt die Tragweite des Aufschreis gar nicht versteht?

Wenn ein Mann eine Meinung vertritt (z.B. gegen den Euro ist), dann ist das natürlich ein ernstzunehmendes, wohlüberlegtes Statement. **Wenn eine Frau eine Meinung vertritt, ist es eine Laune, hahaha, hat sie vielleicht gerade im Fernsehen gesehen und dann gleich im Internet weitergezitschert.** Wir wissen doch, wie die Frauen sind, gell? (#a S BTL 4.3)

- (63) **Women all over the internet say that they dislike street harassment**, that they find it offensive and sometimes threatening. Why not be logical and just **take them at their word**?
[...]
I use logic. I figure women are better judges of what they like than you are. (ESP Tel BTL 5.6)

The issue of proof is brought up in the newspapers a number of times. In Spiegel, Jan Fleischhauer closes his opinion piece questioning the 'real' number of victims of sexual assault. This is part of his wider attack on the campaign as overblown and self-righteous:

- (64) Es ist schwer zu sagen, wie viele Frauen am Ende tatsächlich über sexuelle Belästigungen berichteten, aber **die Zahl der Beiträge**, die man wirklich als Aufschrei verstehen kann, **dürfte weit unter den angegebenen 80.000 gelegen haben.** (#a S 4.4)

Bates opens her second Guardian article in the dataset with a statement that re-emphasises the aim of her project as an evidence base for sexism:

- (65) After two years and 50,000 stories of sexual harassment and discrimination, it's time to stop questioning women's stories. (ESP G 4.1)

In the Telegraph, as Emma Barnett asks: 'How can you tell who is telling the truth?' (ESP Tel 6.1). Bates responds:

- (66) Of course it's possible that people aren't always telling the truth and I am weary of that. But, it would be very difficult for 20,000 people to come up with the same stories and words over and over again. (ESP Tel 6.1)

In all three cases, the projects are quantified with numbers: the 80,000 #aufschrei tweets and the 20,000 and 50,000 entries, respectively, on the Everyday Sexism website⁵³. This is aggregation, a form of assimilation, quantifying participants 'as statistics' (van Leeuwen, 2008: 37) and it is important to remember the fact that categories or features are not inherently positive or negative. In the case of aggregation across the datasets, there is conflict about whether particular numbers constitute a large or small number of stories. In examples (65) and (66), Bates uses numbers to bolster the personal authority legitimization she uses to demonstrate sexism. By contrast, in example (64), the problem of fraudulent stories and unsupportive tweets present the use of numbers as a form of legitimization as meaningless.

Before moving onto the BTL comments, it is worth noting that the appearance of numbers in the news data (and subsequently in the BTL comments data, as they are questioned) is due in large part to the data selection process and news values. In the UK, the "milestones" of 20,000 and 50,000 entries are considered newsworthy and it is articles from these events that I selected. What this does show is that those working in the news media considered these numbers significant enough to warrant articles. In Germany, the two events chosen are not related to hitting nice round numbers; however, the number of #aufschrei tweets becomes similarly newsworthy in a combination of the news values of novelty and superlativeness (Bednarek & Caple, 2012) after Spiegel releases data on the project. In this discursive framework, #aufschrei becomes more notable for its achievement as an unexpected socio-political Twitter phenomenon in Germany, rather than as a feminist campaign:

⁵³ Twitter entries get transferred (often in bulk inputs) onto the Everyday Sexism website, alongside stories that were only submitted to the site.

- (67) Sexismusdebatte: #Aufschrei führt zu Twitter-Rekord
Wie heftig war die Sexismusdebatte im Netz wirklich? Nach SPIEGEL-Informationen zeigen erste Analysen: Der #Aufschrei ist **eines der größten deutschsprachigen Twitter-Ereignisse**. (#a S 3.3)

In these articles (#a taz 5.2, #a S 3.3, S 3.4), the numbers of posts and contributors are detailed through aggregation and the aims and the content of the projects and its posts are backgrounded (68). The only quoted example is the tweet poking fun at the project (see Section 5.3), rather than a genuine #aufschrei contribution.

- (68) Ihr Datensatz offenbart, dass rund 15 000 Leute #aufschrei vom 25. bis zum 31. Januar 2013 benutzt haben. Insgesamt wurden 49 000 Tweets und mindestens 30 000 Weiterleitungen ("Retweets") verschickt. (#a taz 3.4)

The struggle over the meaning of the numbers is most prevalent in the Guardian BTL comments. Commenters positively evaluate and construct the project as large through use of phrases such as 'so many' (69) or 'sheer number' (70):

- (69) There are so many stories submitted every day, the stories move down from the first 10 or so pages quite quickly. (ESP G 4.1)
- (70) It started off as a safe place for people to share their experiences, and it has taken off purely by the sheer number of stories. (ESP G 4.1)

Other commenters take issue with the figure of 50,000 that Bates quotes in her article, by re-evaluating it negatively as 'very small' (71) or even 'insignificant' (72):

- (71) The headline asks 'what does that tell you?'. Well it turns out that 50000 is a very small number to accumulate in two years and certainly not sufficient to come to any quantitative conclusions. (ESP G 4.1)
- (72) 50K for a population of 7.3 billion people is nothing. It's 0.0007% of the population so even if every entry is 100% truth that's a very small number. [...]

So that's my point, it's an insignificant number. So it doesn't say anything. (ESP G 4.1)

What is evident from (72) is that the discursive framework of the Everyday Sexism Project as 'small' functions through a comparison to the wider population – in this case, comparison to the world population, because Bates has already positioned the Everyday Sexism Project

internationally in the news article in question. This kind of comparison also takes place in the German BTL comments in Spiegel. Both examples below are engaging with the open letter and its 1,900 online signatures:

- (73) Wie haben etwa 82 Mio Menschen, die hier leben. Diese "Welle" der Empörung vertritt also **0,0007317 % der Bevölkerung** (#a S BTL 4.1)
- (74) **83 Mio Einwohner**, davon etwa 15 Mio Kinder, hat die Bundesrepublik. Bleiben also 68 Mio, davon etwa die Hälfte sind Frauen. Von 34 Mio Frauen finden sich sage und schreibe lt. Artikel die horrende Anzahl von 1900 UnterstützerInnen. Das ist ein Wert von etwa **0,0000058 %**, falls ich mich nicht verrechnet habe. (#a S BTL 4.2)

These attempts to delegitimize the groups are based on a quantitative scientific discourse that requires representativeness and generalisability for its claims. While the founders legitimate the projects through moral evaluation and the *personal* authority of the contributors, bolstered by the simultaneous variability and the similarity of victims, actions, time and space, these BTL commenters attempt to delegitimize the project by articulating it into an *expert* authority framework and demonstrating how it fails to fulfil the requirements of this latter form of legitimation by activating a related scientific discourse. This re-working can be seen in the naming of the Everyday Sexism Project in Table 2, and (75), below:

The Everyday Sexism Project is...	
<i>Daily Mail</i>	
at best biased or agenda based research	
<i>Guardian</i>	
database	this study
data	this survey
a deeply flawed and biased research proposal	anecdotal (x 2)
research (x 7)	anecdotal at best
[it's not, but should be] a quality piece of research	anecdotal evidence
[""] a proper peer reviewed piece of research	a socially scientific experiment
<i>Telegraph</i>	
an unvetted, unrepresentative sample of dubious validity	

Table 2: Science-Based Naming Strategies of the Everyday Sexism Project in the UK BTL Comments

In Table 2 above, the project becomes 'research' and the stories 'anecdotal', and the evidence fails because the stories are either not verified, are experiential rather than objective and the

number is small compared to the general population. Developing on this, BTL commenters also name the stories and/or the contributors as ‘the sample’ and the online forum as ‘the method’, criticising both for being ‘unrepresentative’ or ‘very small’ and suffering from ‘confirmation bias’, whereby sexism is proven because the projects are asking for stories of sexism. The stories, or ‘reports’, can also be attacked for being ‘one-sided’ or ‘unbalanced’:

- (75) There is also the one sided nature of the reports. By its very definition, we are only hearing one potentially biased account. The other parties involved may recall things very differently.

As an exercise for generating column inches, it is a success, but public policy must not be dictated by a piece of research with so many flaws. (ESP G BTL 4.1)

Other BTL commenters attempt to reject this scientific discourse outright, by denying that the project is supposed to fall into this category and therefore be subject to the same rigours (76, and Table 3):

- (76) I'm sorry, you appear to be confusing an online forum for people to share their experiences of sexism and give themselves a voice with a peer-reviewed scientific paper. (ESP G BTL 4.1)

The Everyday Sexism Project is <i>not</i> ...	
<i>Guardian</i>	
empirical data	a scientific study (x5)
clinical research	a scientific survey
a peer-reviewed scientific paper	anecdotal evidence
a clinical study	a definitive list of sexism
research evidence	a scientific experiment (x 2)
a “study”	

Table 3: Rejection of the Science-Based Naming Strategies of the Everyday Sexism Project in the Guardian (UK) BTL Comments

Some, on the other hand, try to work with the expert authority discourse to destabilise it from within, finding a scientific frame that would suit a positive evaluation of the Everyday Sexism Project:

- (77) If you're going to go for scientific language, can I recommend that this has a hypothesis / null-hypothesis:

A number of women suffer from sexual harassment / no women suffer from sexual harassment.

Hypothesis proven. Please stop reading Bad Science until you can actually understand and grasp simple concepts. (ESP G BTL 3.1)

- (78) It's a very small sample of people, and yet still they've received 50,000 entries, when you look at it that way, it's even more disturbing. (ESP G BTL 4.1)

5.5 Protest Form: Discussion

To recap on the findings from this chapter, the driving force of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project is the mass of voices from those who have experienced or witnessed sexism (with the broad definition of sexism from Chapter 4). The many contributors build on the discursive construction of sexism by developing the nodal point of “everyday” through representations of place and time. The aim of the accumulated stories is to add figurative weight to the claim of the founders that sexism exists, it is a problem and it is a pervasive problem. The stories, then, function as the proof to the founders’ claims. Furthermore, the act of sharing stories is constructed across the data as powerful, compelling and self-perpetuating: it is an act of liberation that sets an example for other women to come forward. This adds further depth to the nodal point of “silence”, emphasising the freedom side of the freedom/oppression opposition, that is, the freedom in breaking a silence in contrast to the oppression of maintaining a silence that I covered in Chapter 4.

The online protest form is a useful one for a number of reasons: the accessibility, which is necessary for projects whose existence depends on many contributions; the archival nature that allows contrasting stories to sit together, as well as retaining stories across time; and the transferability of the stories. The stories are easily picked up and incorporated into the news media, and the process of telling stories can also take place in other online forums, such as the BTL forums.

These positive constructions have their own corresponding challenges in the news media and in the BTL comments. By setting “speaking up” as a central moral legitimisation for the projects through the description texts and most explicitly the name #aufschrei, people in the BTL comments are able to then play with meaning of this. They can invert the relation between

“speaking up” and “freedom” by negatively evaluating speaking as oppressive for others. Negative synonyms of “talk” to name #aufschrei appear in the German BTL comments, and commenters in both use traditional gender stereotypes that negatively cast women as moaners or gossipers. In short, the groups’ discursive construction of “speaking” is emptied of its relevance in the BTL comments by removal of the emancipatory politics behind it.

The online location of the protests is delegitimated through criticism of social media as separate and parallel to the offline world and therefore irrelevant. Social media is formed of people’s voices – part of the “just gossip” discussed above – but also the faces behind the voices are invisible and digital (rather than material bodies on the street), meaning that the authenticity of their experiences is open to attack: the projects’ accessibility offers potential for rapid growth and easy addition to the combined weight of voices but it is also vulnerable to claims of false stories, lies and manipulation. While the founders position the stories as a body of proof, BTL commenters and some in the news media challenge this body of proof through introduction of scientific discourses that serve to construct the projects as small, subjective and flawed, and therefore not to be taken seriously. The easy travel of stories from the websites and Twitter to the news media also means that there is no guarantee of which ones will travel and which ones will not, meaning that it is just as easy to take negative stories as contributory ones. I think these points are particular relevant when heeding the call from García-Favaro & Gill (2016) to fully explore the new manifestations of anti-feminism and in light of the use of technology by feminists. Here, we have new technology affording new forms of protest, but also corresponding forms of criticism and delegitimation that may be broadening the scope of anti-feminist discourse rather than replacing old angles of attack.

One particular thread throughout this chapter is that of the function of the stories as consciousness raising. As stated in the introduction, there is tension in existing literature around the waves of feminism and continuities and changes in feminist discourse. Kennedy (2007) has demonstrated how blogs can function as virtual consciousness raising circles for a modern age. The practice of feminist, female-only groups set up to share experiences and problems started in 1970s North America but spread internationally; today, social media is well suited to this form of political engagement due to its ability to easily bring people together across physical boundaries and to allow them to speak for themselves (Kennedy,

2007). She identifies three key parts to the consciousness-raising circles, and to save paraphrasing what has already been written, I quote directly:

First, many women think that the discontent they feel in their lives is a personal problem that is not worthy of a more public recognition or discussion, which in itself can lead women to feel isolated and alone. In the past, consciousness-raising groups helped women understand that experiences were often shared. Second, these feelings and experiences are not self-inflicted, but instead can be attributed to a social system laden with cultural and institutional ideologies that dominate and subjugate women. Third, consciousness-raising groups not only named the issues, but worked to build a community of women who could then collectively advocate for social change. (Kennedy, 2007)

The discourses around and within the Everyday Sexism Project and #aufschrei demonstrate their roles as forms of consciousness raising practice. Firstly, as I have explained extensively, the founders construct the projects within a discourse of publicly breaking a silence. Contributors and BTL commenters develop and validate this discourse by, of course, sharing their own stories and also by openly attending to the positive aspects of the projects: by thanking the founders, by stating that they thought they were alone, that they did not realise it was a problem, or even that they had even forgotten experiences or did not realise that things had happened to them.

When it comes to the second point that Kennedy makes, the wider construction of a social system differs slightly between the groups, with the founders of #aufschrei more explicitly naming power dynamics and structural discrimination in their open letter. Both groups, however, bring together onto the same level a huge range of actions through a discourse of their everyday banality, pervasiveness and trivialisation. The recognition of the equivalential link of “bad things that happen to women”, rather than separating the many actions, is part of this second stage. Related closely to this, too, is the recognition on behalf of the victims that they did not cause the actions and should not be blamed for it; not everyone who contributed to the projects had abandoned this perspective, evident from the internal critique amongst contributors around victim blaming.

The third and final stage or role of the consciousness-raising circles is that of moving beyond talking about the problem and towards a solution. This is one criticism levelled at the Everyday Sexism Project in the Guardian BTL comments: that it has failed because it does not go far enough to provide a prescriptive or normative solution for sexism. With this in mind, the commenters that claim the projects are unscientific would most likely not accept any potential solutions that had been mooted on the back of the projects. Here, the question remains about the ultimate aim of the projects. They were both set up with the aim of breaking a silence and raising awareness; any further developments, if they have come, such as Bates's and Wizorek's publications or the Everyday Sexism Project's role in public policy recommendations, have been organic. It is also beyond the scope of this research to evaluate any potential outcomes or successes of the projects beyond that which is evident from the textual data that I have. From within the data, however, we could raise the point that, as BTL commenters defend, is it not enough for these projects to just bring it back onto the public stage, considering the 'disappearance' (Gill, 2014) of sexism? In 2013, the projects contributed to preparing the ground for future public discussions of sexism, in whatever form they come; indeed, five years on, hashtag campaigns, feminist and not, continue to develop locally and internationally, and sexism continues to be a point of intense public discussion. The groups offer a digital pool of people (both on their websites and in the BTL comments) who have positively evaluated taking part in or reading through these feminist campaigns, people who have material experience of taking part in campaign and who have learned how to break a silence.

6 #aufschrei and The Everyday Sexism Project: Individuals and Collectivity

In this final chapter on #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, I look at the tension between individuals and collectivity in the discourse from and around the groups. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the push towards individualisation and the denial of collective politics is a feature of postfeminist discourse and also some contemporary feminist discourse (Baer, 2016; McRobbie, 2009; Scharff, 2012). This includes coverage produced by the news media, which erases collective politics and nuanced feminist context when reporting on events (Darmon, 2014; Mendes, 2011b, 2015b). The existence and legitimisation of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project are based almost entirely on collective action – the sharing of stories by many people – but these stories are records of individual experiences. Baer (2016) has termed this the contemporary ‘re-doing’ of feminism. Here, the opposition between individuals and the collective is in conflict inasmuch as they do not stand in conventional opposition and are undergoing a form of negotiation. In the next four sections, I investigate this negotiation in more detail, demonstrating through social actor analysis how the collective politics of the protest is built up through the identification of individual social actors, but also how this collectivity is then dismantled by others through either a focus on or, indeed, an erasure of individual social actors: in the first two sections, I cover the victims and perpetrators of sexism, respectively, which addresses the gendered conflict about who carries out and who is on the receiving end of sexism; in the third, I cover the skewing of news media coverage to more newsworthy individual social actors; in the fourth, I cover a wider discussion of the projects’ relations to a feminist context and history; and in the fifth and final section, I return to the BTL naming strategies for the founders, which encapsulate some of the wider angles of criticism that can be found in the news media and BTL comments.

6.1 Victims of Sexism

The success of the Everyday Sexism Project and #aufschrei, as I have discussed, is dependent on the personal testimonies of contributors. In this section, I address the constructions of the victims, which largely revolve around the gendering of these victims. While the stories on the websites allow for anyone to share their story, the papers tend to focus on female victims and

create an opposition between men and women in a kind of 'battle of the sexes', which sits alongside criticism in the BTL comments that men, as victims of sexism, are being ignored.

The vast majority of entries on the projects' websites are indeed these personal testimonies, evidenced by the use of highly personal specification (van Leeuwen, 2008: 35) through pronouns (1):

- (1) Als ich im Sommer auf dem Weg zur Uni an einer Bahnhaltestelle saß (Wochenende, hellicher Tag) und ein Spiel auf dem Smartphone spielte, dachte ich erst, der Mann neben mir würde mir quasi über die Schulter beim Spiel zugucken. Bis ich merkte, dass sich seine Hand in der Hose bewegte und ich nochmal richtig hinschaute: ja, er hat masturbiert.. (#a stories)

Where the victim is not the person contributor the story, then the contributor is either a witness to an incident (2, 2A):

- (2) I was just camping in Kauai, and heard an American family nearby chatting [...]. Their son, who can't have been more than eight, asked them what rape was. The father chuckled and casually said 'Oh, you know, just like if you liked a girl at school, but she didn't like you, so you forced her to do stuff with you'. (ESP stories)

Or demonstrates a personal connection to the victim, often through a relational or functional classification (van Leeuwen, 2008: 42-43), that is, a designation that demonstrates connection through friendship, family (3A), work or education (3):

- (3) der professor im programmierkurs, der einer kommilitonin unterstellte, ihren extrem gute quellcode habe sicher ihr freund für sie geschrieben. (#a stories)

There are some comments left on the sites that are not personal stories; however, these comments still demonstrate some form of opinion, highlighting still the 'personal' aspect of these campaigns (4, 4A):

- (4) the term "tomboy" needs to be eradicated. My daughter doesn't need to become like a boy to be tough and strong. (ESP stories)

In the descriptions for the projects' websites, 'Frauen'/'women' are positioned primarily as the victims of sexism:

- (5) Hier werden Erlebnisse zu Sexismus, [...] den Frauen erleben (#a description)
- (6) The Everyday Sexism Project exists to catalogue instances of sexism experienced by women on a day to day basis. (ESP description)

In the same way that I assume that contributors consider their stories relevant to the definition of sexism regardless of the action described, I interpret the personal specifications of the stories ('I'/'ich', etc.) as most likely being from those that identify with the same category, unless they are otherwise specified. At times, the category of 'woman' is evident from other cues, such as describing their body parts ('Brüste'/'breasts') or incidents that occurred when they were pregnant.

Considering the key positioning of this signifier, it could be argued that "woman", similar to "sexism" and "everyday" functions as a nodal point – a main organising signifier – for the discursive construction of the problem. A highly generalised classification, "woman" can be a key category for feminist discourse (Lazar, 2005a; Ramazanoğlu, 1989). Classifications are the socially and historically contingent categories we organise people by, including nationality and, in this case, gender (van Leeuwen, 2008: 42). Although the category of gender is in conflict like never before in Western societies, it has traditionally been formed out of the binary opposition of male/female; neither this binary opposition of gender nor gendered classification as an appropriate form of classification are challenged in my datas.

I stated in Chapter 4 that the equivalential link that enables a coherent meaning of sexism is "bad things that happen to women". On a handful of occasions, men are identified by contributors as victims of sexism, sometimes by themselves (7) or as parallel victims along with a female family member or friend (7A):

- (7) Ich bin recht klein, auch als Junge gewesen. Diese für männliche Machtdemonstrationen ungeeignete Statur war immer wieder Anlass mich zu erniedrigen machen, verbal von allen Seiten (Eltern, Freunde, Lehrer, etc.), körperlich von Einigen. Es geschah immer in Bezug darauf, dass ich ein Junge war. [...] [I]ch war extrem hart gegen mich selbst, neigte zu riskantem Verhalten, was beides nicht unbedingt gut für meinen Körper war, um beständig ein Bild von harter Männlichkeit zu erzeugen, dass andere Männer davon abhielt, übergriffig zu werden. Im Besonderen bedauerlich war jedoch das wegschieben jeglicher "schwacher" Emotionen, wie Angst, Schmerz, Liebe und Trauer. (#a stories)

The incorporation of these stories into the discursive chain need not threaten the overall discourse, if this equivalential link is part of a feminist discourse recognising gendered oppression, that is, these actions happen *because of* the gender of the victims, that there are certain ways that members of one gendered category should behave that are prohibited for their opposite category. For example, in (7), the contributor suffered for failing to display physical and emotional strength, standards expected of his male gender category.

This is in theory addressed in the #aufschrei open letter: ‘Frauen’ are situated as the primary victims of sexism but this is also at times expanded to include ‘Menschen’ and ‘uns’; the message is that a society that accepts sexism is denying gender justice (‘Geschlechtergerechtigkeit’) is damaging to everyone within it, not just women:

- (8) Sexismus ist ein Thema, das uns alle betrifft. [...] Wer die Debatte in den letzten Wochen aufmerksam verfolgt hat, musste zu der Erkenntnis kommen, dass Sexismus ein gesellschaftliches Thema ist, das unzählige Menschen betrifft. (#a open letter)

This letter remains abstract because it is the function of the stories on the websites to flesh out the details of the dynamics of sexism. While it is not my aim to pass judgement on whether the groups should have a wider discourse of gendered oppression that negatively impacts *all* people, the presumed absence of it is the foundation for many BTL comments. A common claim of anti-feminist discourse is that feminism is flawed due to its failure to take into account the suffering of men, such as the much higher suicide rates amongst young men than young women (Benton-Greig, et al., 2017; García-Favaro & Gill, 2016; Rosenbrock, 2012). A more explicit engagement with demands on both sides of the gendered binary –and the notion of a binary in the first place – would arguably negate the potency of these arguments.

The opposition of male/female is negotiated awkwardly in the news media. The suppression of perpetrators from the description texts for #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project (see the following section) means that the groups avoid setting up an explicit conflict between men and women. In interviews in Spiegel and the Daily Mail, the founders identify a lack of awareness amongst men about the issue of sexism; this becomes headlines in both papers, bringing to the fore a potential conflict between men and women:

- (9) #Aufschrei auf Twitter: "Männer nehmen den alltäglichen Sexismus gar nicht wahr" (#a S 3.2)
- (10) Yes, men, bottom-pinching IS sexual assault - and cat-calling offends us, too: Why it's time to stamp out everyday sexism and stop telling women to 'lighten up' (ESP DM 1.1)

I have already covered in Chapter 4 the construction of sexism as flirting gone awry, and it is this discourse in particular that further sets up an opposition between men and women through semi-parallel structures and the description of the men and women as 'two' sides of a communication failure:

- (11) Was Männer neckisch finden, erleben Frauen als erniedrigend. [...] Beide müssen doch lernen, miteinander klarzukommen (#a W 7.1)

Taz 5.1 opens with the statement: 'Auf dem Kurznachrichtendienst Twitter posteten Frauen und Männer am Freitag Hunderte von Einträgen zum Sexismus im Alltag', but the only quotes from men, towards the end of the article, are critical of the project. On a different note, when quoting stories from #aufschrei, BILD publish one criticising the lack of baby change facilities in male toilets, but these stories sit in a separate feature at the end of the article and are not picked apart or contextualised in detail, meaning that the political potential is lost.

In the Guardian, Bates compares the 'almost identical' or 'indistinguishable' experiences of different victims to create the desired dislocation that comes from collecting many stories together. For example, in (12) below, three people differentiated through their job titles are equivocated together through sexual assault. Women with these different jobs should arguably have consequently very different life experiences, but when it comes to sexism, they do not:

- (12) A video-shop cashier, a midwife and a marketing consultant suffered indistinguishable experiences of sexual assault by senior male colleagues. (ESP G 3.1)

In the BTL comments, the confirmation of the victims of sexism comes through in the recognition of sexism as a problem and the personal stories that commenters share, which I have already covered in Chapters 4 and 5. The problem of the representation of men in the

projects, and the status of men as victims in general also surfaces. Commenters position men as the real victims in society in general, therefore delegitimizing the projects because they focus, or focus too much, on the wrong victimised social group:

- (13) Ja, der Alltag von Frauen ist in der Tat auch 2013 in der Schule, an der Uni, vor Familiengerichten, in den Medien und auch im Büro **voll von Sexismus - nämlich dem von ihnen gegen Jungen und Männer praktizierten**. (ESP S BTL 3.2)
- (14) It's boys doing worse at school now, boys suffering from higher rates of depression, from startlingly high suicide rates - **there's a crisis amongst men**, particularly young men. You only have to turn on the TV to see negative role models - stupid Homer Simpson or Family Guy, idiots abound and, I look at young men and I'm struck by a feeling they're lost. Now, sock it to them, they're sexist pigs to boot, even if they don't know it, because that's what they're gender's like, apparently. (ESP G BTL 3.1)

The projects are criticised for not publishing men's stories or not taking on men's concerns. Through this, the projects' claims to sexism are inverted and turned back onto them:

- (15) Ich schon, und das habe ich auch thematisiert: **Dass Männer die schlechteren Autofahrer sein sollen, ist arg sexistisch**. Und dass Vergewaltigungen, Pädö etc. nur von Männern ausgingen, stimmt auch nicht. Und: **Es gibt auch Mörderinnen. Das sollte mal angesprochen werden!** (#a taz BTL 5.2)
- (16) Hey founder of anti-sexist blog. **Give men a say too. Arent you being sexist by leaving their ordeals out?**and **you cannot say no man has even been inappropriately harassed by a woman**.and whats your purpose anyway....judging by the comments from this article looks like your only success is to get everyone up against each other.....bizarre goal if you ask me (ESP DM BTL 1.1)

This second point is challenged through corrections and exhortations to read the site for real examples of male stories. Tellingly, (18) also criticises the media coverage for creating this impression:

- (17) **Nicht nur junge Frauen ärgern sich über die Aussage von Gauck**. Auf der Internetseite alltagssexismus.de haben inzwischen Hunderte von Unterstützern den Brief unterzeichnet und es sind sehr viele Männer dabei und auch Menschen, die nicht mehr wirklich als jung bezeichnet werden können. (#a taz BTL 6.2)
- (18) And actually, if you followed the wider campaign more closely (and I grant the media coverage and blurb above is a bit misleading on this point), you will see that **instances of sexism against men are also reported** - its just that there are not nearly as many of them. (ESP Tel BTL 5.4)

6.2 'Sexismus ist keine Einbahnstraße': Perpetrators of Sexism

When it comes to analysing the social actors involved in sexism, the victims of sexism are only one half of the issue; in this second section, I turn to the perpetrators of sexism. The stories offer rich examples of perpetrators, but these perpetrators are suppressed in the material produced by the founders of the groups. As well as highlighting men as the real victims of sexism, BTL commenters also build on the corresponding argument that women are the real perpetrators of sexism, either against each other or against men.

Studying the social actors that perpetrate sexist actions in the personal stories is one of the most important aspects to understanding the processes of sexism. Patriarchy, for FEMEN, is an under-defined concept hidden through nominalisation and suppression, and the actors only become clear through their protests (see Chapters 7-9). The perpetrators of sexism in the description texts for #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project are equally invisible, which perhaps reflects the slippery, faceless nature of problems with gender relations, whether these problems are named inequality, lack of gender justice or patriarchy. In the main descriptive texts for Everyday Sexism and #aufschrei, the actors who carry out the act of silencing are linguistically suppressed from the texts through passive constructions (21), or assimilated into the concept of 'society' (19, 20, 21), which denotes something so big and abstract as to be almost meaningless:

- (19) Sexismus [ist] ein gesellschaftliches Thema (#a open letter)
- (20) It seems to be increasingly difficult to talk about sexism, equality and women's rights in a modern society that perceives itself to have achieved gender equality. (ESP about)
- (21) We simply aren't living in an equal society, but we are blasted for 'whining' or 'not knowing how lucky we are' if we try to point it out. (ESP about)

It is through the personal stories of individual incidents that 'society' is fleshed out into identifiable, discernible actors and the suppressed actors who silence women are brought into the foreground. A few stories continue to suppress the perpetrator, but these are rarer occurrences:

- (22) Als Rothaarige durfte ich mir den folgenden Spruch nicht nur einmal anhören: "Rostiges Dach, feuchter Keller" - und das immer mit einem höchst obszönen Grinsen (#a stories)
- (23) Being told to "Cheer up, luv!" when going along minding my own business (ESP stories)

The predominant nomination strategy for perpetrators of sexism is gendered classification, through nouns such as 'Mann'/'man' (24A), 'kerl', 'Typ'/'guy', 'bloke' and 'Junge'/'boy', and their plural forms. The use of these, rather than a relational or functional classification, usually denotes a stranger or someone where these personal connections are weak (for example, a man doing the same hobby, such as rock climbing, who said something within earshot).

- (24) Der Typ, der nachmittags am Bahnhof auf mich zukam und fragte, ob ich ihm in der Toilette einen blasen will (#a stories)

One aspect that the multitude of experiences illuminates is the complicity and active participation of women in sexism. There are almost no singular gender classifications for women as perpetrators, but there are a noticeable number of relational classifications (van Leeuwen, 2008: 43) that simultaneously identify friendship (25, 25A) or familial relations (26, 26A) and female gender. This might suggest that women perhaps participate in fewer of the sexist actions that are also carried out by male strangers, such as cat calling. Within their own relationship structures, however, women can be very capable of reinforcing sexism:

- (25) Liebe Freundinnen da draußen die ich evtl. nicht so häufig sehe...

Ich mache einen Doktor habe einen interessanten Job und hunderttausende Interessen. Ihr müsst mich nicht als erstes fragen, wenn ihr mich trefft, ob ich einen Freund habe und wie meine Familienplanung aussieht. (#a stories)
- (26) I told my family that dad molested (sexually) me. My mum told me to leave the family home and kept him. (ESP stories)

Some women confront the issue of female body hair, a topic which has at times been neglected as a potential point of radical politics for contemporary feminism (Dean, 2009); these women openly challenge the notion that women should remove their body hair. Noticeably, it is other women who are involved in the attempts to make the contributor conform to an image of hairless femininity (27, 27A):

- (27) Ich rasiere mir seit ein paar Wochen nicht mehr die Bein- und Achselhaare. Warum? Weil ich keine Lust dazu und außerdem empfindliche Haut habe, die mit dem ständigen Rasieren nicht so gut klarkommt.

Ich habe vielen Freundinnen davon erzählt und stoße bei den meisten von ihnen auf totales Unverständnis und auf Ekel. Aber was bitteschön ist an Haaren ekelhaft? (#a stories)

There are a number of relational classifications, beyond those mentioned above, that usually demonstrate a level of trust and intimacy between the victim and the perpetrator, be it within families (28, 28A):

- (28) my dad won't send me to another country to study in a university while he told my brother he'll send him to europe to become a pilot if he studies hard at school, and when I tried to talk with my dad about it he said "I don't just simply send a women outside , only men can leave to study outside" (ESP stories)

At school (29, 29A):

- (29) In der Schule der Kunstlehrer, der Bilder von nackten Frauen zeigte und die Schüler explizit beschreiben mußten was gezeigt wurde. Einmal ein Gebäude, wie ein Körper. Der Eingang war zwischen den Beinen. (#a stories)

Between friends (30, 30A):

- (30) A good friend of mine, that I've been friends with since middle school [...] tried to get me to kiss him when he was drunk, and then got angry at me when I refused. This has happened twice. (ESP stories)

Or at work (31A):

- (31) Ich sitze mit einem höherrangigen Kollegen zusammen, irgendwann fängt er an mir Avancen zu machen. Ich erinnere ihn einfach nur kühl an seinen Familienstand (verheiratet, ein Kind), er meint darauf süffisant: "Tja, eine Frau hat eben nur zwei Möglichkeiten: Entweder sie wird betrogen, oder sie ist diejenige, mit der eine andere betrogen wird." (#a stories)

At times, the classification demonstrates the power abuses that can go on within familial relationships, including those that include incest and childhood sexual abuse (32, 32A):

- (32) You might think it's just a sweet over protective father right? Well no, he sexually abused me when I was a very small child. He thinks he owns me. He thinks I don't remember but I do. (ESP stories)

Functional classifications identify social actors according to their function, often a job role (van Leeuwen, 2008: 42). A number of these are also present in my corpus (33, 33A):

- (33) dann wurde ein ausschnitt aus einem video-clip aus Frankreich gezeigt. es geht um sog. schlussverkauf, franz. soldes. was macht MANN also wenn mann keine preisreduzierte rote krawatte will ? ER ERDROSSELT die VERKÄUFERIN ! und "der blogger" kommentiert das auch noch ganz launig mit "ja wer will denn mal nicht die verkäuferin erdrosseln" !!!1! (#a stories)

Various parts of 'the media' are identified as the social actors perpetrating sexism, including newspapers, advertising and television channels/programmes (34, 34A):

- (34) I just found that, if you Google Michelle Obama, the second hit you get is 'Michelle Obama fashion'. The woman went to Princeton and Harvard, for crying out loud, but is reduced to a clothes horse by the media! (ESP stories)

The power dynamics involved in personal, kinship and work relations can offer an insight into how and why women continue to be silenced over sexism. For example, through deference to elders within family structures, children are taught to do what their parents tell them:

- (35) Mutti und Tanten gehen mit kleinem Kind vorbei, die Mutter fordert im Gespräch das sehr kleine Mädchen auf, die Tanten zu küssen - gib der Tante ein Küsschen, gib ihr ein Küsschen!!

Ekelhaft, wie so kleine Menschen ohne einen eigenen Wunsch in eine körperliche Begegnung gedrängt werden. Küsschen geben auf Kommando, komplett falsches Signal an ein kleines Kind. Niemand sollte körperliche Berührungen zeigen und erdulden müssen, nach Aufforderung durch andere, Größere, von denen Kinder abhängig sind. (#a stories)

Within work structures, women can stay silent because they feel protesting against someone higher in the work hierarchy would be useless (see Chapter 4); or they do not want to draw potentially negative attention to themselves with a sexual harassment investigation; or even out of a wish to not upset other women, who might be married to the perpetrator and therefore hurt by the process (see Chapter 4).

The significant presence of actors that share a relationship with the victim (parent, teacher, work colleague and so on) continues to demonstrate the “everyday” nodal point of this discourse about sexism. Contributors share stories that cover many aspects of life and throughout the journey of a life from child to adult: sexism occurs every day, in ordinary situations that women cannot avoid, that are part of their daily routines and obligations.

In the previous section, I covered how men are positioned in opposition to women in some news articles. The issue of female perpetrators is brought up only once, in the Telegraph (ESP Tel 6.1), specifically that of female teenagers attacking each other on social media; Bates describes this as ‘normalisation of sexism’. ‘Normalisation’ is a topic she picks up in the Guardian (ESP G 4.1), but she specifically situates women as the victims and the perpetrators are suppressed through passive constructions, such as ‘are blamed’ or ‘to be touched’, or are identified as ‘faceless’ perpetrators such as the media:

- (36) The society we live in has normalised the treatment of women as second-class citizens, as disposable objects, as punchlines for jokes. Young girls are growing up learning that it is simply normal to be harassed and touched in their uniform on the journey to school. Rape victims are blamed for what happens to them. Women are used, in advertising, TV shows and magazines, as living, breathing decorations. (ESP G 4.1)

It is only in quoted stories elsewhere in the articles that men are identified as the perpetrators. She includes contrasting stories of men as victims ‘derided for seeking paternity leave’ and, in another article, ‘congratulated for “babysitting” his own children’ (ESP G 3.1). These are nestled in amongst other stories about female victims and male perpetrators without explicit recognition, meaning that the connection between gender, victims and perpetrators remains slippery.

The perpetrators of sexism are a contentious issue in the BTL comments. The discourse of men as the real victims and women as the successors in society who are trying to exert power over men is one of the most common themes in previous work on BTL comments (Benton-Greig, et al., 2017; García-Favaro & Gill, 2016). This is also common in my data, in both languages. The corollary to the construction of men as the real victims is the construction of

women as the real perpetrators, visible already in example (13) above. This is manifest in a few ways, including claims that women are sexist towards men (37, 38):

- (37) Sexismus ist keine Einbahnstraße. Gerade die Alpha-Weibchen geizen nicht mit anzüglichen, dominanten und abwertenden Äußerungen gegenüber Männern. (#a W BTL 7.1)
- (38) ... I work in a female dominated environment and have to listen to a drip drip of constant references to 'useless men' 'men can't multi task' (well no...actually we prefer to do 1 thing correctly instead of doing a lot of things wrong) 'Oh well he is a man after all...' attractive young guys are routinely harassed and crass crude comments are made by a large number of the women (I work with) across all levels including management...also for smiling at nay even looking at child with its mother I get looks as if to say 'stay away from my child you peado' and the child is often pulled away (and i'm a young unassuming guy with a non threatening manner)... (ESP G BTL 4.1)

Women do not complain about attractive men being sexist (39, 40):

- (39) Unerwünschte Reaktionen kommen von unerwünschten Männern. Der gleiche kurze Blick den Frauen von Männern Typ Brad Pitt, George Clooney schätzen und fordern ist bei Männern Typ Brüderle unerwünscht. (#a S BTL 3.2)
- (40) the idea of "sexual harassment" seems to come with a sliding scale, if the guy is closer to the Joseph Merrick end of the scale then it's a huge problem, but if the guy is closer to the George Clooney end of the scale then it's often ok. (ESP DM BTL 1.1)

Women allow it or do it to each other (41, 42):

- (41) Männer sind halt wie sie sind, aber das tolle daran ist, dass 95 % aller Frauen uns so mögen wie wir eben sind. (#a W BTL 8.1)
- (42) Might I just say, though, that the only things that have ever left me shocked have been women's magazines and their attitude towards women. [...] In my personal experience, it's seems the 'sexist' pressure put on women comes more often from other women than from men, but everybody's personal experiences are different. (ESP G BTL 4.2)

Finally, women are complicit in sexism through their behaviour or dress (43, 44):

- (43) Sry aber wenn man mit knappen Rock und tiefen Dekolte zur Arbeit geht und dann an ihrer persönlichen Kompetenz gemessen werden möchte braucht sich nicht wundern. Wenn das äussere ja auch förmlich danach schreit respektier meine inneren Werte und nicht meine Äusseren. (#a S BTL 3.1)

- (44) I realise that some men are incompetent and awkward in speaking to women.,however the blurring of roles, sexualisation of British society with many young women dressing and acting like hookers sends out the wrong message. Yes we men can be quite basic and programmed to "put it about" but there are two sides to this coin.

Women dress and act provocatively to engender male attention,if the attention is crude or not to their liking , that's the result. (ESP Tel BTL 5.3)

Supportive BTL commenters, as I have discussed elsewhere, recognise the existence of sexism and support the project without taking issue with the gendered constructions of victims and perpetrators. Others challenge the generalisations taking place through gendered classifications and the subsequent demonisation of all men through the actions of a few. Here, numbers and the scientific discourse come back into play, as the minority of men conceded to be sexist is not quantitatively representative of the whole population of men:

- (45) Aber leider gibt es fast überall ein paar Typen der Sorte, die akzeptieren kein Nein ohne dann kränken zu müssen. **Vielleicht wirklich nur die von Ihnen geschätzten 2%, also definitiv kein allgemeines Männerproblem!**, aber das vermiest vielen Frauen faktisch die Leichtigkeit und Selbstverständlichkeit des freien Ausgehens, ohne immer einen Kumpel oder eine Freundin überreden zu müssen. **Diese 2% sind eben "die Lauten", viel lauter als die netten 98%.** Und die bedrängen oder nerven eben pro Abend theoretisch so viele Frauen, dass ein falscher Gesamteindruck entstehen mag (#a S BTL 3.2)

- (46) It's so easy to canvass the entire global population for examples of bad behaviour,, and then - what? What are you proving? That some people are twats?

It would be just as easy to set up a website inviting men to send in their stories about female colleagues who did stupid things. What would it prove? That women are all stupid? Hardly.

Either you are attempting to use the behaviour of the few to tarnish the majority, or you are simply making the barely relevant point that there are some idiots out there. Neither is really achieving much. (ESP G BTL 3.1)

6.3 Newsworthiness in the News Media and BTL Comments

#Aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project are grounded in collective voices but are driven in practical terms by individuals who came up with the ideas and set up and run the websites. Laura Bates started the Everyday Sexism Project alone in April 2012, but day-to-day running has involved more people as the project has grown (Bates, 2014; Carter, 2015). #Aufschrei was created through a late-night conversation in January 2013 between Nicole von Horst and

Anne Wizorek, who were only friends on Twitter and had not met in person; other women became more closely involved and seven women put together the open letter to President Gauck in March 2013 (Wizorek, 2014). Bates and Wizorek became the public faces of their campaigns, being interviewed by newspapers and appearing on television (Bates, 2014; Wizorek, 2014). Bates was employed by the Independent to write columns on everyday sexism in 2012 and is still employed by the Guardian to do the same; columns can be driven by the stories from the Everyday Sexism Project or by news events or reports. It is through these self-penned pieces and interviews with the founders that the aims of the projects are most clearly conveyed, as I have discussed. These provide the deeper context for stories (silencing, the compulsion to share, and so on) that otherwise goes missing when the stories are left to speak for themselves.

The #aufschrei campaign came to prominence at the same time as a report about sexist comments made to journalist Laura Himmelreich by politician Rainer Brüderle. Wizorek says this is a complete coincidence, as #aufschrei was germinated separately by an online film produced in France about street harassment (Wizorek, 2014). Together, these events provided the “perfect storm” for a wider sexism debate in Germany. Across the news articles in my data, this news report is incorrectly cited as the catalyst for #aufschrei. For example, the first taz article on #aufschrei is headlined: ‘Herrenwitz entfacht Twitter-Sturm’, and subheaded: ‘Nach dem Sexismusvorwurf einer „Stern“-Journalistin gegen den FDP-Spitzenkandidaten reagieren Medienfrauen zwiespältig. Bei Twitter wird wild diskutiert.’ This in turn allows for the sexism debate to be articulated as part of a wider discussion about journalism and the expectations of the job role for young women (see Chapter 4).

Brüderle and Himmelreich become targets for discussion in the BTL comments when the report is present in the news article. This demonstrates how the discussion can be easily skewed towards the more high-profile but tangential actors involved:

(47) Die "Debatte" war von Anfang an einfach nur lachhaft.

Ein angetrunkener älterer Herr versucht gegenüber einer aufreizend gekleideten Journalistin charmant zu sein und macht ihr ein alt-herrenhaftes Kompliment.

Ein Jahr später wird der Vorfall als Wahlkampfauftakt und Wiederbelebung des "FDP Bashings" missbraucht. (#a W BTL 8.1)

This is even more evident in the case of President Joachim Gauck, not surprising considering that he was the addressee of the #aufschrei open letter. In both of these cases, the news value of prominence comes to the fore: the higher status a person has, the more newsworthy they are (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). Gauck, as the president of Germany, is more newsworthy than Anne Wizorek, a feminist almost unknown before #aufschrei. This can be seen in the fact that he appears in headlines in all newspapers and she is suppressed (48) or subsumed into an objectivated action ('Vorwurf') (49).

(48) Gauck kriegt Stress (#a taz 6.1)

(49) Sexismus-Vorwurf wegen Gaucks "Tugendfuror" (#a W 8.1)

Gauck's newsworthiness is strongest in Spiegel, with the newspaper running three news articles on the open letter and one critical opinion piece: one news article reports on the open letter, a second on the criticism of the open letter and a third on Gauck's response to the open letter. While it is too small a dataset to be generalisable, it is noticeable that the only two articles critical of #aufschrei (there are none of Everyday Sexism) are in Spiegel. Looking at the headlines, the article built around the criticism of the #aufschrei from politicians and people on Twitter is titled: 'Reaktionen auf #Aufschrei-Brief: "Jetzt hacken sie auch noch auf #Gauck herum"' (#a S 4.1). This quotes a comment in the article and they create distance through scare quotes (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Richardson, 2007), but its position in the headline means that they give prominence to the image of 'nagging women' regardless. Gauck followed up the open letter with a speech where he recognised the ongoing discrimination against women in Germany and the need for both men and women to continue the discussion, which was the aim of #aufschrei in the first place. In Spiegel's headline, Gauck is presented as demanding a continuation of the sexism debate (50). By contrast, in taz, although he remains the only named actor, prominence is given to criticism of Gauck in a quote from Wizorek that accompanied the open letter, giving her some level of voice (51).

(50) Reaktion auf #Aufschrei-Brief: Gauck fordert nun auch Sexismusdebatte (#a S 4.3)

(51) „Gauck sendet gefährliches Signal“ (#a taz 6.2)

All four newspapers had access to the same open letter (it was published online as well as a printed copy given to Gauck), but differences can be seen between all four of them in the sections of the open letter that they chose to quote. BILD quoted nothing; Welt, taz and Spiegel all publish the main criticism of Gauck from the letter: the use of the word 'Tugendfurore' and the negative connections to historical female stereotypes of virtue and terms such as 'Furie' (in relation to 'Furore'). Taz also quote the sections on gender justice, the constitution and Gauck's previous comments on political engagement that I presented in Chapter 4 (#a taz 6.1). Spiegel quote a number of times the negative emotions that the founders describe in their open letter: 'verblüfft' (#a S 4.2, 4.4) and 'erschüttert' (#a S 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4). Comparing these two, it is evident that taz considers the impersonal authority legitimization of gender justice more newsworthy and Spiegel the moral evaluation legitimization of negative emotions. While I do not wish to make big claims about whether Spiegel or taz covered #aufschrei better (for example, Spiegel had the highest number of articles and included a detailed interview with three members), it is noticeable that Spiegel still overall focused on the emotions of the women involved. The paper quoted the open letter criticising Gauck for making women's anger 'lächerlich'; however, this sits awkwardly next to the space given to claims of 'nagging women' (#a S 4.1) and an eviscerating opinion column that diminishes the anger of the women as overblown, dogmatic and ironic proof of the 'Furore' (#a S 4.4).

Similar to Brüderle and Himmelreich, Gauck becomes the target of many comments. This can take the form of support for him or rejection of him (52); neither position necessarily means rejection or support for #aufschrei, as both Gauck and #aufschrei can be rejected in the same comment (53). Other times, he is identified as the wrong target for the right cause (54).

- (52) Marina Weisband sagt, was viele (Frauen) denken. Es gibt noch viele andere Punkte, die man an Gauck kritisieren könnte. Gauck ist nicht mein BuPräs. (#a B BTL 2.1)
- (53) Moralist Gauck war mir schon immer zuwider. Aber die unsägliche Sexismusdebatte ist eines modernen Staates, der ansonsten sexuell fast schrankenlos ist, nicht würdig. Wir haben in unserem Land andere Probleme, als Pipi-Erbsen zu zählen. (#a W BTL 8.1)
- (54) Die "Aufschrei"-Damen haben den falschen "Aufhänger" benutzt, haben aber Recht darin, daß es Fälle von Geschlechter-Diskriminierung gibt, die man benennen muß und die auch geächtet gehören. (#a S BTL 4.2)

This section reinforces previous concerns, made by scholars such as Mendes (2012) and Schowalter (2012) and raised in Chapter 2, that the news media can be a barrier to accurate representation of feminist protests. The founders of #aufschrei attempt to use a single case of the German president's comments to make visible the real and continued trivialisation of sexism. His profile works for them by getting column inches, at the very least, but he becomes the focus of articles. BTL commenters pass judgement on his value as a president and ignore the aims of the project. In the same way, the newness and fast growth of #aufschrei on Twitter means that it was the novelty and the growth of the project that ended up foregrounded in some articles and the content of the stories were lost (see Chapter 5). Additionally, the conventions of newsworthiness can hinder the nuance that is needed for explaining the concerns of the groups and results in headlines that pitch men against women, which negatively affects the victim/perpetrator discourse (see Section 6.1).

6.4 The Campaigns as Feminist Politics in the News Media

I have demonstrated the collective potential of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project throughout Chapters 4 to 6: the accumulation of stories, the power of many voices, the momentum of the 'Redebedürfnis', and how the "mass of voices" is discussed and troubled in the news media and BTL comments. In this final section I cover how the projects are related to feminism in the news media, in light of the pre-existing work on feminism in the news media.

The founders either background or entirely suppress themselves from the description texts on their websites, and are absent from the stories because there is no comment or reply function. As I discussed earlier, however, they are key to effective communication of the aims of the project in the news media. Through direct quotes and interviews, the Everyday Sexism Project is presented by Laura Bates as a 'community' (ESP Tel 6.1) and a place of 'community and solidarity' (ESP DM 1.1) and #aufschrei by Nicole von Horst as 'ein kollektives Teilen' (#a S 3.2).

The threat of trolling to this community is articulated in the Telegraph and the Guardian. In the Telegraph, the resolution to the trolling is described as ‘calming down’ due to the ‘higher profile’ of the site (Tel 6.1); however, in the Guardian, Bates specifically identifies the collective ‘movement’ of feminism as a working resolution providing strength to her, through a rise-and-fall narrative structure that culminates with the success of the Everyday Sexism Project (55). ‘Feminism’ and ‘movement’ are de-personalised and generalised references that obscure individuality (van Leeuwen, 2008), but the aim of these linguistic features is precisely to demonstrate collectivity and connections between people and suppress differences between them.

- (55) But as the threats worsened, I discovered **the most incredible support network**. Anyone who describes **feminism** as an in-fighting, back-biting movement has clearly never been as lucky as I was, at those lowest moments, to discover in it the strength and kindness, advice and support of so many other women and men. (ESP G 3.1)

That being said, as I identified in Chapter 4, Bates highlights the use of anti-feminist labels such as ‘bra burner’ without interrogating *why* these labels became negative and using that instead as a form of feminist dislocation. The same process takes place in the Telegraph (6.1), where Bates is put forward as a new kind of feminist who is no longer ‘ugly, angry and old’; rather, she is ‘attractive’, ‘blonde’ and ‘young’. This constructs a discontinuity in feminism, a kind of contextual opposition according to generation or wave, with past feminists as undesirable and contemporary feminists as desirable. In the following section, I show how anti-feminist criticism in the BTL comments is based on rejecting founders’ and contributors’ behaviour as over-the-top, controlling or calculating and professional, but the issues of their bodily image never came up.

This Telegraph article is the only news article in the dataset to assign the label of ‘feminist’ to Bates, although it is implicit in her Guardian articles (see example 55). Elsewhere, she is nominated (van Leeuwen, 2008: 41) and marked by location or age: ‘Laura Bates, 26, from London’ (ESP DM 2.1). There are no more references to feminism apart from those detailed in the two paragraphs above.

It is a similar story in the German news media coverage of #aufschrei. As I have already indicated, the wider context of #aufschrei is not identified as feminism, either historical or contemporary. Instead, #aufschrei is connected to the debates about professional journalistic conduct, the wider sexism debate⁵⁴, the novelty of its social media environment and its record as a socio-political phenomenon in general. When covering #aufschrei, Spiegel nods to feminist struggles in the past by re-affirming the existence of sexism in 2013 (as if women needed reminding; see example (28) in Chapter 5). In (56) through the conjunction 'doch', the author sets up an opposition between past feminism and contemporary feminism, with a gaping hole in time between the two.

- (56) Man könnte meinen, das Thema Sexismus sei spätestens seit den sechziger Jahren, seit dem Feldzug der Frauenbewegung, keines mehr. Doch die Tweets und Dutzende Leserbriefe zeigen: Es gibt noch immer Chefs, die glauben, Puppe, Püppchen, Maus oder Hase sei der Name der Mitarbeiterin. (#a S 3.1)

Five times throughout the articles, Anne Wizorek is named as 'Feministin' (#a S 3.4, taz 5.2) or the authors of the open letter are named as 'Feministinnen' (#a taz 6.1, x 3). 'Feminismus' is not mentioned once. #Aufschrei is described as a 'feministisches Anliegen' in Spiegel (#a S 3.4, taz 5.2), but as one that is not supported by all:

- (57) Nicht alle unterstützten dabei feministische Anliegen, auf Platz sieben der häufigsten Retweets lag der Machospruch: „Meine Frau wollte auch etwas zu #aufschrei twittern. Das WLAN reicht aber nicht bis in die Küche.“ (#a taz 5.2)

Similarly, Wizorek and the other founders are identified in Spiegel as part of a collective 'feministisch bewegten Teil der Netzgemeinde', but this is in the highly critical opinion piece by Jan Fleischhauer who entirely rejects the relevance or seriousness of this online community and contemporary protest, feminist or not. This is an example of a postfeminist resolution, which invokes feminism to deny its relevance (McRobbie, 2009). It is developed by drawing on a wider discourse that rejects the concerns of young people as a whole as over-the-top, the same kind of contemporary discourse that has given new meaning to the signifier "snowflake": young people, or "millennials", are over sensitive and unable to cope in the real world.

⁵⁴ I do not have space to cover this wider sexism debate in Germany, but no doubt it would provide interesting further explorations into the relation between sexism and feminism.

The representation of feminism follows similar patterns to that identified in research on feminism in the news in 2008 (Mendes, 2012) and coverage of SlutWalk (Mendes, 2015a). Mendes (2012) found that feminism was often portrayed as a personal attribute, fitting well with individualistic neoliberal discourse. Feminism is more often something that individual people take up or take an interest in, than a collective movement amongst many women or many people fighting for a common good. Feminism and related linguistic terms (feminist, etc.) are conspicuously absent in coverage of the SlutWalk, a series of feminist street protests aimed at challenging slut shaming and rape myths (Mendes, 2015a). She cautions that it is not clear whether feminism is absent because the protests are assumed to be feminist, or because feminism is being deliberately erased. Of course, the result remains the same. In the results I have presented here, the terms feminism or Feminismus are almost entirely absent, with the 'Frauenbewegung' in the 60s referenced once in Spiegel; this particular reference sets up a void between 60s and contemporary feminism and implies that one might have thought the women's movement in the 60s had been entirely successful in its aims. Once, in the Guardian, Laura Bates writes positively of feminism as a movement that was supportive in her time of need, demonstrating, I think, how key it is to have feminist voices in the papers to ensure the message reaches beyond the original feminist sources. On most occasions when feminism is present, it is in the categorisations given to the founders, specifically Anne Wizorek of #aufschrei: 'Feministin' or 'Feministinnen'. Here, feminism becomes a personal attribute of these women rather than a collective, growing movement. This may also contribute to the image of feminists as 'professionals' which appears in the BTL comments.

6.5 Professional Victims and Chattering Geese: Naming Feminists in the BTL Comments

In van Leeuwen's theory of texts as recontextualisation of social practice, a number of processes can take place, including substitutions, deletions and additions, the latter of which includes legitimations and evaluations (van Leeuwen, 2008: 17-21). Social actors are the participants of actions and the ways that they are represented can be illuminating. The basic act of representing a social actor through a semiotic element adds meaning (van Leeuwen, 2008: 17), for example, the use of generalising and aggregating terms for migrants ('large numbers', 'hordes', even the category of 'migrants') can be de-humanising and potentially hide the suffering and stories of individual people who migrate. I have already discussed the

representations of social actors in the stories earlier in this chapter; in this section I demonstrate the different ways that the founders of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project are named in the BTL comments. The naming of the founders⁵⁵ often includes elements of delegitimation and negative evaluation which relate to wider discourses that I have identified throughout these chapters, such as the attempts to minimise, or make small, the projects.

The first naming practice I have identified is that of compounding 'aufschrei' with other references such as classifications of women or synonyms (for more discussion on this latter naming strategy, see below):

<i>Spiegel</i>	<i>taz</i>
deutsche Frauen aus der „Aufschrei“-Abteilung die #aufschrei Damen x 3 die #aufschrei Initiatoren die #aufschrei-Frauen x 7 ⁵⁶ die Aufschrei Mädels die Damen von #Aufschrei diese Aufschrei-Grazien	Aufschreimädchen die #Aufschrei-Aktivistinnen die #aufschrei-Damen x 2 die Damen von Aufschrei diese schnatternden #aufschrei Gänsen
	<i>Welt</i>
die "aufschreienden" Frauen die aufschreienden Damen die Aufschreienden x 3 die Aufschreierinnen x 3 die ganzen spätpubertären #aufschreierinnen die hysterischen #aufschreierinnen diese aufschreienden Feministinnen	die #aufschrei-Damen x 2 die #aufschrei-Weibsbilder die ach so um Frauen besorgten Initiatorinnen von "Aufschrei" die Aufschrei-Feministinnen diese #aufschrei-Komikertruppe

Table 1: Word Formation in the German BTL Comments with 'aufschrei'

Many of these compounds are not necessarily negative or positive, and can be used in both comments that support and reject #aufschrei; others, however, are more overtly negative, such as 'Komikertruppe' and 'Gänsen' (see below for more on this latter compound). Some commenters also use the verb 'aufschreien' and form the nouns 'Aufschreierinnen', using the

⁵⁵ In this thesis, I have used both particularised nominated references (i.e. Anne Wizorek, Nicole von Horst, Laura Bates) and assimilated functional references that identify these social actors in their capacity as founding the projects under study (i.e. the founders).

⁵⁶ These multiple references are formed of the basic compound of '#aufschrei' + 'Frauen', and includes a range of realisations, including those that do not use the # for #aufschrei, speech marks (""), the use of spaces rather than hyphens, or full compounds.

female plural marker ‘-innen’, and ‘Aufschreienden’, using the present participle that avoids gender marking. Both of these, and most likely the latter, are perhaps an attempt to mock feminist linguistic recommendations in German which either aim to make the female more visible or aim to remove explicit gender reference, depending on preference or context. Grammatical gender is built into the German language, unlike English, meaning that feminist linguistic recommendations have different solutions to those in English⁵⁷. Compounding to create new words is also a notable feature of the German language, which perhaps explains why there are no similar compounds with the Everyday Sexism Project in the English data. Other examples of attention to gender neutral language can be seen in Table 2 below, which verge on the ridiculous (‘MännerInnen’) and demonstrate lack of genuine concern for the practice.

<i>taz</i>	<i>Welt</i>
die kleine Gruppe der Initiator*_Innen ⁵⁸	diese MenschlInnen Feministen/-innen MännerInnen

Table 2: Gender Neutral Naming Strategies the German BTL Comments

Two examples from Spiegel in Table 3 use overtly negative adjectives ‘spätpubertär’ and ‘hysterisch’ to construct the founders as immature or over the top. While the latter of these has already been discussed as a negative discursive construction, particularly for #aufschrei, delegitimizing the founders as immature is not very common. Bates and contributors to the Everyday Sexism Project are referred to once as ‘cry babies’ in the Daily Mail BTL comments, which perhaps has just as much to do with the notion of ‘whining’ (see below) as with age. By contrast, the delegitimation of Josephine Witt from FEMEN as immature is much more common (see Chapter 9).

Nominated references to the founders can be seen in Tables 3 and 4. The high usage of Laura Bates’s first name only in the Guardian, which are from positive comments and demonstrates a higher level of intimacy, is most likely because the corresponding news articles are penned by her and she is an established writer for the newspaper. In all, references to Bates are far

⁵⁷ See, for example, work and recommendations by German feminist linguist Luise Pusch.

⁵⁸ * and _ are both characters used in text to demonstrate non-binary gender reference.

less common than references to the founders of #aufschrei. References to the Everyday Sexism Project itself, the website and its Twitter feed are much more common (see previous chapters); this may be down to a more entrenched knowledge of the project.

<i>Spiegel</i>	<i>taz</i>
Anne Wizorek x 11 die Empörte Frau Wizorek Fraeulein Wizorek Frau Wizorek x 10 Wizorek	Anne Wizorek frau wiezorek

Table 3: Nominated References in the German BTL Comments

<i>Daily Mail</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Telegraph</i>
Laura Bates Laura x 2 Ms Bates x 2	Laura x 16 Laura Bates x 2 Miss Bates	Laura Laura Bates

Table 4: Nominated References in the UK BTL Comments

In Table 6, the struggle over the gender identities of the victims can be seen in the Guardian, with some of the generalised gender classifications modified with ‘mainly’ or avoided with the non-gender specific ‘people’. Synonyms of ‘Frau’ or ‘women’ are also found, especially in the German BTL comments in Table 5, ranging from the mildly patronising ‘Damen’ or ‘ladies’ to the overtly pejorative such as ‘Schreckschrauben’ and ‘harridans’. The use of ‘Mädels’ is an example of the ‘girlification’ (Gill, 2007) of women. While not necessarily casting the founders as children and therefore immature, it is to some extent infantilising and carries less gravity compared to the adult classification of ‘Frauen’. Delegitimation according to negative constructions of talk is covered in the previous chapter, but the long-standing stereotype of women’s talk as illegitimate is tapped into again with ‘Hysterikerin’, suggesting an over-the-top reaction, and ‘schnatternde Gänsen’ in Table 1. In Spiegel, the founders are also referenced as ‘schrill’, ‘kreischend’ and ‘Jammergestalten’; in the Daily Mail, BTL commenters to the Everyday Sexism Project are called, as well as ‘cry babies’, ‘whingeing women’, ‘whiners’ and in the Telegraph BTL forum ‘moaners’.

<i>BILD</i>	<i>Spiegel</i>
“Promi”-Weibchen Damen	Damen x 12 ein paar hysterische Weiber

Mädels Schreckschrauben Tanten	Frauen x 17 hysterische Frauen Mädels x 6 Tussen Twitter-Tanten Weiber
<i>taz</i>	<i>Welt</i>
“Damen” “jungen Frauen” Damen x 3 diese dämlichen Flintenweiber Frauen Hysterikerinnen Krampfhennen Mädels x 3 Weiber	“Damen” “Frauen” Damen x 4 Frauen x 2 Mädels x 2

Table 5: Classifications of #aufschrei Founders in German BTL Comments

<i>Daily Mail</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Telegraph</i>
haridans love silly women lady	(mainly) women ladies men men and boys men and women people x 9 people, mainly women women and girls women x 3	ladies women x 2

Table 6: Classifications of ESP Founder and Contributors in UK BTL Comments

Other commenters use speech marks to articulate a distance from the reference used; this has the overall effect of questioning whether the founders really fulfil the required femininity for their female titles, which is an attempt at negative representation. This usage of speech marks can be seen elsewhere, questioning whether the founders really are feminist or activists: “Aktivistinnen”, “Feministinnen” (*taz*); “Aktivist” (for AW) and “Aktivistinnen” x 3 (*Spiegel*).

Similar to ‘woman’ is ‘feminist’ and the range of associated synonyms, seen in Table 7 below, although references that suggest women are militant or aggressive in Tables 5 and 6 can also fit roughly within this category, such as ‘Flintenweiber’. There are only a handful of references

to Laura Bates or contributors as ‘feminists’ in the English BTL comments, and no other synonyms, therefore there is no table for English BTL comments. These various references encapsulate a number of different delegitimizing articulations that I have already identified for #aufschrei, as well as some not covered, which I turn to now.

<i>Spiegel</i>	<i>taz</i>
Berufs-Emanzen die feministische Fraktion diese abgetackelten Feminismus-Fregatten diese neuen Päpstinnen des Feminismus ein kleiner Teil von aktiven Feministinnen Emanzen x 2 Feministinnen in Minirock Feministinnen und Feministen Feministinnen x 6 Feministinnen-Tussen feministische Karriereweiber Frauenrechtlerinnen fundamentalische Emanzen Neofeministen Riot Pussys Stadt-Emanzen x 2 Twitter-Feministinnen	Amokfeministinnen die Feminismusgeschwader ein paar Femtrolle Feministinnen x 2 junge Feministinnen
	<i>Welt</i>
	"Emanzen" der Feministinnen-Pöbel die Schönwetter-Feministinnen eine kleine radikalfeministische Minderheit Feministinnen x 3 Frauenvorkämpferinnen

Table 7: ‘Feministinnen’ and Synonyms in the German BTL Comments

To start, founders and contributors are identified as a group through the generic reference ‘Feministinnen’, grouping them together according to their support for feminism. Alone, this is not necessarily negative or positive, but other synonyms, such as ‘Emanzen’ and ‘Femtrolle’ are overtly negative.

A traditional anti-feminist stereotype is that of militancy and aggression (Huhnke, 1996; Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012; Rhode, 1995), which can be seen here in compounds using, for example, ‘Geschwader’, ‘Pöbel’ and ‘Amok’. The negative construction of anger is further realised through drawing on religious discourse (‘Päpstinnen’, ‘fundamentalisch’, and ‘quasi-religiös’ in Table 8, below), bringing in ideas of feminists being dogmatic, controlling and rigid in their beliefs, which are perhaps not evidence-based. This is developed in BTL comments following the news articles that cover the open letter:

<i>Spiegel</i>	<i>taz</i>
die neue Zeigefinger-Generation die selbsternannten Gesinnungstalibaninnen die Sittenpolizei diese neuen Päpstinchen des Feminismus eine bundesweite Gesinnungsgestapo eine hysterische Tugendwächterin (AW) Gesinnungspolizei Gesinnungstaliban	die nicht demokratisch legitimierte Sprachpolizei diese Tugendwächterinnen eine unsichtbare Benimm-Polizei auf Korrektheit Terroristen WächterInnen des Sexismus
<i>BILD</i>	<i>Welt</i>
die deutschen Blaustrumpf-Tugendwächter	Tugendterroristen

Table 8: Discursive Construction of Control in the German BTL Comments

Here, commenters create compounds with nouns describing behaviour ('Gesinnung') and functional nouns identified with policing institutions ('Polizei'); however, commenters feel that they are being unfairly policed by a force which is 'selbsternannt' and 'nicht demokratisch'. This also demonstrates the split between what might be "normal" policing and this alternative form of policing that requires a new compound. Although not explicit, this could tie in to the discursive opposition between sexism and crime identified in Chapter 4: sexist language requires a new police force because the existing police force that upholds the current law is not appropriate for it. At the most extreme end of the spectrum, founders are identified as terrorists ('Taliban'). Elsewhere, #aufschrei is re-named as terrorism with 'Zickenterror' and 'Jugendterror' (Spiegel) and "Tugendfuror" is re-named multiple times as 'Tugendterror' (taz) because commenters claim 'Furor' was not extreme enough. García-Favaro & Gill (2016) identified in their English corpus that commenters constructing feminists as extremists is a strategy to dismiss them without engagement in their ideas. They are irrational by virtue of being on the fringes of society and therefore outside of the "everyday norm" of debate and political ideas. Along these same lines, a few commenters negatively describe the founders as radical (Table 7), such as 'Radikalen' in both taz and Spiegel, which taps into a discourse of feminism being extreme rather than the specific political designation of radical versus liberal feminism.

While one commenter in 7 describes the feminists as worn out ('abgetackelt', presumably 'abgetakelt'), and therefore not relevant, a number of commenters draw on the idea of #aufschrei being part of a new contemporary feminism ('neu', 'Neo-'). This has two strands:

one relating to the postfeminist idea of sexism as a ‘Luxusproblem’ (Chapter 4) and one relating to the technology of social media (Chapter 4).

Firstly, the designation of ‘Schönwetter-Feministinnen’ suggests that they are only concerned with “soft” issues, rather than more serious issues, perhaps FGM or violence, and ‘Feministinnen in Minirock’ identifies a contemporary feminism that is perhaps hypocritical for not challenging beauty standards. In taz comments, the term ‘Mittelschichtsprinzessinnen’ is used, along with Anne Wizorek described as a ‘Prinzessin’ in Welt comments, bringing in elements of class and fragility of sensibility; in the Daily Mail comments, contributors to the Everyday Sexism Project are once identified as ‘middle class’. German feminism, compared to English feminism, is more associated with academia (Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012), a position which differentiates feminists from everyday women who do not have the same level of educational privilege (Lind & Salo, 2002). The founders are named a handful of times with the functional classification of ‘Akademikerinnen’ (taz and Spiegel), as well as ‘bourgeois’ (taz) and ‘Elitefrauen’ (Spiegel).

Secondly, ‘Twitter-Feministinnen’ and ‘Stadt-Emanzen’ articulate #aufschrei’s form of feminism with technology which, as I covered in the previous chapter, is irrelevant because it is virtual and not part of the offline, and therefore real, world. These feminists are happy to protest on their laptops but not on the streets. Other references that construct a technological discourse can be seen in Table 9 below, and Laura Bates is once referred to with the functional classification ‘blogger’ in the Daily Mail:

<i>Spiegel</i>
#-Menschen „IT-Girls“ Bloggerinnen die "Generation Facebook" diese Netzfurien dieses twitter-völkchen ein paar quasi-religiöse Twitter-Jünger Eine kleine Schar von medienpolitisch versierten Frauen einigen wenigen medienbenutzenden Selbstdarstellerinnen und Twitterbenutzerinnen IT-Girls der Facebook Generation mediengeile Jungschreiberinnen Nerdetten x 4 Profilneurotiker

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Table 9: Discursive Construction of Technology in the German BTL Comments

The neologism ‘Nerdette’ is at times used positively by the founders themselves, as well as negatively by others in the BTL comments, depending on the surrounding arguments. Elsewhere, users of social media are negatively portrayed as being self-serving and attention seeking (‘mediengeil’, ‘Profilneurotiker’), concerned with media exposure and their social media presence. The familiarity of the founders with social media is also drawn upon a number of times in Table 9, for example ‘medienpolitisch versiert’ and the idea of a social media ‘Generation’, which draws on the negative “millennial snowflake” discourse that I discussed in the previous section. This discourse of “professionalisation” is a negative one, whether it is applied to ‘professional victims’, ‘those who are professionally angry’, ‘professional feminists’ or ‘professional social media users’:

<i>Spiegel</i>	<i>taz</i>
Berufsdemonstranten x 2 Berufsempörten die ewig geknechteten Frauen feministische Karriereweiber unsere Berufs-»Emanzen«	Empörungsbeauftragten
	<i>Welt</i>
	die berufsempörten Damen x 3

Table 10: Discursive Construction of Professionalisation in the German BTL Comments

<i>Daily Mail</i>	<i>Telegraph</i>
a budding career feminist in the making (LB) moral entrepreneurs professional victim (LB)	professional moaners

Table 11: Discursive Construction of Professionalisation in the UK BTL Comments

This discursive construction delegitimizes the projects through suggestions that the founders of the projects did so because of work-related necessity and not through conviction or passion, similar to needing to hit a deadline or produce a project to justify your own employment. Many feminist campaigners would no doubt love to be able to be ‘professional feminists’ because one of the barriers to continuing protest work, such as blogging, is the lack of payment for a huge amount of effort (Lopez, 2014; Petray, 2011); here, however, professional is a negative construction. Similarly, the expertise of the founders of #aufschrei

is not evaluated as a positive, bolstering the potential of the project as being run by people who understand the protest form and surrounding environment. It is evaluated as a negative because of the professional impetus just mentioned, or because of a presumed desire to attract attention to their social media profiles regardless of the seriousness or their own conviction of the content. The discourse of authentic activism that these commenters are potentially constructing is that activism that should be taken seriously is carried out spontaneously by amateurs in unfamiliar environments.

6.6 Individuals and Collectivity: Discussion

As discussed in Chapter 2, the feminist groups in this study dislocate existing postfeminist discourse by claiming a collective politics that recognises pervasive gendered inequality. Similar to the conflict over the meaning of sexism, the discursive construction of the victims, perpetrators and gender is unstable in the feminist groups' self-representation and then subject to antagonism in the newspapers and BTL comments, demonstrating some of the difficulties that the groups face in constructing their collectivity. I believe that the missing articulation of gender contributes significantly to the instability in the nodal point of "sexism" that I highlighted in the discussion in Chapter 4. In this final discussion, I explain this in more detail.

To return to Chapter 4, I described the equivalential link in the groups' discourse as "bad things that happen to women", which was over simplified, but I think captures the problem of instability I want to discuss here. There seems to be a desire to identify sexism as primarily affecting women in the description texts written by the founders, and the contributors to the stories tend to not mention their gender unless it is different from expected, that is, when a contributor is not female. Despite this, men do contribute stories, and their stories are included in the newspapers, for example in BILD or in the Guardian, although these are not explicitly mentioned. This demonstrates an implicit understanding of gendered oppression damaging all people, but it is not enough to include one man's story in a sea of women's stories: either sexism is something that happens just to women or it is something that

happens to men and women. If it is the latter, then this should be clearly attended to in order to articulate a more robust counter-hegemonic feminist discourse.

The same problem occurs when looking at perpetrators, although it manifests linguistically slightly differently. In the description texts, perpetrators of sexism are suppressed. In the newspapers, the opposition of men and women is articulated in a number of ways, for example with sexism as failed male flirting, men not taking sexism against women seriously, or men as perpetrators and women as victims. In the BTL comments, the problem of victims, perpetrators and gender is a common line of attack, perhaps worsened by the opposition emphasised in the newspapers: who are the real victims? Who are the real perpetrators? The projects just serve to demonise all men, and so on. Although the projects do not create an opposition between men and women, the fact that they suppress perpetrators and do not have a clear, encompassing, explicit construction of gendered oppression means that BTL commenters have more freedom to interpret the discourse presented to them. If they see the available options as men = perpetrators and women = victims and they do not identify with these categories, then they will not recognise any associated dislocations created by the projects and the projects' claims can be dismissed as irrelevant without further engagement.

This is an issue addressed in the abstract by Laclau & Mouffe (2001) when elaborating on their theories of populist political struggles and democratic political struggles. The key difference between populist and democratic struggles is that the former simplify the political landscape into a simple opposition between "us" and "them", for example in anti-immigrant discourse or during wartime, and the latter diversify the political landscape. Without wishing to distract from this study with a discussion of populism, Laclau and Mouffe identify the new social movements of the 80s and onwards as democratic political struggles, including anti-racism, environmentalism, recognition for sexual identity and feminism. These are issue-based political struggles that have no clear locus for antagonism (such as "the immigrant") but instead are formed of a multiplicity of positions and practices. These political struggles get into trouble when they behave as if they were populist and focus on a simple antagonism, such as "white people" versus "black people". The Everyday Sexism Project and #aufschrei come in for their biggest criticism when they behave or are *interpreted as* behaving like populist political struggles and creating a simple antagonism of men = perpetrators and

women = victims. Creating a gendered split allows further developments that I have covered in this chapter, such as using negative female stereotypes to invert the construction of silence as freedom.

On closer inspection, the stories provided by contributors make the political landscape incredibly diverse. I have already mentioned that men share their stories as victims, but contributors also identify women as perpetrators against male and female victims, including friends and family, and contributors even identify themselves as being sexist to themselves and others. This, again, is the radical potential of the projects and their clearest value to feminist politics. Through the many stories, the projects allow the complex and pervasive mechanisms and practices of sexism to come to the fore and the split between men and women is broken down. What the stories perhaps need is clear articulation from the beginning into a wider feminist discourse of gendered oppression that damages all people, so that the problems I have identified throughout the chapters on #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project (the instability of the meaning of sexism, the opposition of men and women) are more easily avoided.

7 FEMEN: Construction of the Problem

7.1 Introduction to the FEMEN Chapters

In this part, I present the results of the analysis of the texts produced by FEMEN, the news media articles and the corresponding BTL comments. The part contains three chapters that relate to the themes identified in the research questions in Chapter 3: first, the construction of the problem, that is, how the dislocation of the feminist group is constructed and then negotiated (Chapter 7); second, how the protest form of the group, known as ‘sextremism’ is constructed and then negotiated (Chapter 8); and finally the tension between individuals and collectivity in the discourse around the group (Chapter 9). Each chapter is structured according to smaller sections that emerged during the process of analysis and ends with a wider discussion drawing together the results and the issues raised in the literature review (Chapter 2).

7.2 Construction of the Problem: Introduction

This chapter deals with the discursive construction underpinning FEMEN’s protests, which is built around the three nodal points of “oppression”, “the female body” and “patriarchy”. The manifesto provides the richest material for investigating their discourse but it is also developed and reinforced in the reporting on their individual protests. This chapter is split into four sections: in the first, I cover FEMEN’s discourse as constructed around the nodal points of “oppression”, “the female body” and “patriarchy”; in the second, I look more closely at the negative construction of patriarchy in FEMEN’s texts; in the third section, I cover the issues thrown up by FEMEN’s highly abstract theoretical grounding and their visceral protests against concrete targets; finally, in the fourth section, I focus on the newspaper coverage of the protest action compared to the protest aim.

7.3 ‘MY PUSSY MY RULES!’: the Female Body, Oppression and Patriarchy

The opening of FEMEN's manifesto serves to establish the group through mythopoesis, or, legitimation through storytelling (van Leeuwen, 2008: 117), in this case an abstract moral tale of the history of 'the woman' which is simultaneously the history of FEMEN:

- (1) In the beginning, there was the body, feeling of the woman's body, feeling of joy because it is so light and free. Then there was injustice, so sharp that you feel it with your body, it immobilizes the body, hinders its movements, and then you find yourself your body's hostage. And so you turn your body against this injustice, mobilizing every body's cell to struggle against the patriarchy and humiliation. You tell the world: Our God is a Woman!
Our Mission is Protest!
Our Weapon are bare breasts!
And so FEMEN is born and sextremism is set off. (F manifesto)

While there are other elements here that I return to, such as patriarchy (below) and conflict metaphors (Chapter 8), this text illustrates the basic discursive structure of FEMEN's self-representation: "the female body" is subject to "oppression" through "patriarchy" and, crucially, "the female body" should be used in the struggle against "oppression" by "patriarchy"⁵⁹. This structure can be found throughout the manifesto:

- (2) In this world, a woman is a slave, she is stripped of the right to any property but above all she is stripped of ownership of her own body. All functions of the female body are harshly controlled and regulated by patriarchy. (F manifesto)
- (3) Complete control over the woman's body is the key instrument of her suppression; the woman's sexual demarche is the key to her liberation. Manifestation of the right to her body by the woman is the first and the most important step to her liberation. (F manifesto)

This discourse is also reliant on a number of contextually constructed opposites (Jeffries, 2010) to further establish the legitimation of FEMEN's feminist struggle, such as women/patriarchy, religion/science, and past/modernity, which I come back to through this chapter. Through these oppositions, FEMEN almost exclusively rely on moral evaluation

⁵⁹ FEMEN do not use the exact term "oppression" in the texts studied in this thesis. I, as a researcher, have chosen this term to describe the act of removing the freedom from women's bodies that FEMEN claim is carried out by "patriarchy". As I discuss later in this section, FEMEN use many multiple nominalisations to describe this process ("suppression", "exploitation", and so on), rarely repeating the same one, but which all link through the same underlying concept of control and limitation. "Oppression" is an established feminist term, so provides some access for readers; at the same time, the analysis presented here demonstrates how FEMEN fill this nodal point with their own particular meaning.

legitimation (van Leeuwen, 2008: 109) to positively present the female body and its associations of women and FEMEN and to negatively present patriarchy.

Looking again at examples (1), (2) and (3), it is noticeable that FEMEN's linguistic representation of women is abstract and general, often referring to 'the/a woman' in the generic singular, a highly generalised gendered classification (van Leeuwen, 2008: 42). Through the use of the second person pronoun 'you', FEMEN address their readers as the very same oppressed 'woman'. Later in their manifesto, 'women' in the plural appears six times, modified twice with the adjective 'modern'. There are scant geographical markers for anchoring this oppressed modern woman, suggesting that FEMEN view women as a universal as well as contemporary category. Looking deeper at representations of place (van Leeuwen, 2008), there are conflicts in this universal construction, particularly when it comes to FEMEN protesters, but I return to these in later chapters.

Women, universal and contemporary, are put in opposition to patriarchy. In examples (1) to (3), the classification of woman is subject to further division through 'somatisation' (van Leeuwen, 2008: 47) or reference to a social actor through a body part, in this case, the whole body. It is not explicit whether this split is between the material body and some other psychic or cognitive existence, but the ultimate role of this somatisation is to present the female body as the item over which women and patriarchy are struggling for control. In this way, FEMEN are able to access the moral legitimation of oppression and its conventional opposite of freedom: freedom is having control over something that belongs to you; oppression is being controlled by an external actor. For example, the semantic triggers in (1), of 'joy', 'free' and 'light' of the free female body contrast against the 'hostage', 'sharp' and 'injustice' of the oppressed female body; in (3), the parallel structural trigger of 'key to her X' develops this opposition further. Oppression and freedom are also referenced through synonyms such as 'suppression' (3) and 'liberation' (3).

Through this somatisation, FEMEN also establish the boundaries of the oppressed woman along biological lines. This is why "the female body" functions as a more effective nodal point for them rather than "woman" because it is this biological aspect that provides their main targets for protest and their main justification for their protest form. The biological function

of sexual reproduction is the central site of oppression, manifested in issues such as prostitution, pornography and access to abortion:

- (4) Separated from the woman, her body is an object to monstrous patriarchal exploitation, animated by production of heirs, surplus profits, sexual pleasures and pornographic shows. (F manifesto)

While none of the protest events I cover here address prostitution or pornography, the Cologne Cathedral protest is described as being against 'Vatican lobbying to criminalize abortion' (F 4.4, 4.5) and they criticise the 'maniacal desire [of the Catholic Church] to control [female] fertility' (F 4.1). In addition, the first text finishes with the exclamation 'MY PUSSY RULES!', a vulgar reference to biologically female genitals⁶⁰.

But who or what is patriarchy? FEMEN state their ultimate aim in their manifesto:

- (5) FEMEN's Goal: Complete victory over patriarchy (F manifesto)

Feminism is founded on the basic belief that something is wrong with gender relations, but how that manifests itself in theory and practice is almost as variable as there are feminists (Jonsson, 2014; Ramazanoğlu, 1989). I do not want to go into a discussion here about what patriarchy has meant for feminists throughout history, but instead focus on what it means for FEMEN through investigation of the social actors and social action.

In their manifesto, FEMEN name three 'fundamental institutes' of patriarchy (6), which subsequently correspond to their 'Requirements' (7), (8) and (9):

- (6) the fundamental institutes of patriarchy – dictatorship, sex-industry, and church (F manifesto)
- (7) immediate political deposition of all dictatorial regimes creating unbearable living conditions for women, first of all, theocratic Islamic states practicing Shari'ah (F manifesto)
- (8) extermination of prostitution as an egregious form of exploitation of women (F manifesto)

⁶⁰ This particular slogan is often used by FEMEN elsewhere, although it only appears once in my chosen texts.

- (9) to universally and completely separate the church from the state (F manifesto)

When it comes to more specific actors, they name 'the clients, investors and organizers' of the sex industry, but on the whole, individual patriarchal actors are assimilated (van Leeuwen, 2008: 37) into the abstract nouns 'dictatorial regime', 'Islamic states', 'Church' and 'state', which removes agency or identifying features from specific people who comprise these institutions. Their physical protests do narrow down on targets, such as Vladimir Putin, but these are still placed within their wider framework, in this case anti-dictatorship:

- (10) Just right now sextremists FEMEN did an anti dictatorial attack of Putin. (F 2.1)

FEMEN's individual protest targets have all been men: beyond Putin, they have included Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, French politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. This is perhaps not surprising, as high profile religious leaders and politicians are most often men. The adjective 'male' is used twice in the manifesto:

- (11) We live in the world of male economic, cultural and ideological occupation (F manifesto)
 (12) Sextremism is the woman's mockery of vulgar male extremism and its bloody mayhems and a cult of terror (F manifesto)

The generalised gendered classifications of 'man' or 'men' are never used in the same way as 'woman'/'women' explained above. For this reason, I would be hesitant to suggest that FEMEN construct patriarchy as equivalent to 'men', certainly not 'all men' in a universal or biological sense as they do for women; here, it seems to serve a slightly different purpose of continuing to characterise patriarchal oppression as taking place in the biological realm, working with a strict binary of male/female. It does not appear to situate all men as active exponents and supporters of patriarchy.

When it comes to the actions carried out by patriarchy, FEMEN rely heavily on nominalisations, that is, broadly put, nouns describing processes (Billig, 2008; van Leeuwen, 2008). Van Leeuwen (2008: 63) identifies this as a form of deagentalsed and objectivated action, whereby a process is transformed into an object or entity. The actors involved in the

action (who is oppressing, who is oppressed) are removed and are grammatically non-essential, unlike in a verbal construction. FEMEN rely heavily on nominalisations to conceptualise the actions of patriarchy, including the already cited examples (1) ‘humiliation’, (3) ‘suppression’, (4) ‘exploitation’, (8) ‘prostitution’, (11) ‘occupation’ and (12) ‘extremism’:

- (13) activists are ready to withstand **repressions** against them (F manifesto)
- (14) to prohibit any **intervention** of the religious institutions in the civic, sex and reproductive lives of modern women (F manifesto)
- (15) Shari'ah and other forms of **sadism** regarding women (F manifesto)

The act of removing the actors from an action is not inherently negative (van Leeuwen, 2008), such as the sense of community and togetherness that can come from assimilating large numbers of actors in, for example, ‘feminist movement’ (Chapter 5). That being said, the amount of nominalisations when constructing the actions of patriarchy gives FEMEN’s manifesto an appearance of being under-theorised and hard to engage with on a level of practical feminist action: it removes any pressing grammatical need to include details of actors and processes, which is something that contributors to #aufschrei and The Everyday Sexism Project provided with their stories. It does perhaps highlight the difficulty in pinning down the exact processes of problems with gender relations, particularly when FEMEN are working on such a large and abstract scale, and it does connote patriarchy as a universal, globally oppressive force. It also keeps open the possibility for women to be complicit in patriarchal oppression, although this is not a thread that FEMEN pursue in the texts that I cover here.

Going back to FEMEN’s nodal point of the female body, the Catholic Church’s strict anti-abortion stance is one of the clearest patriarchal actions, alongside what appears to be anything that might be considered sex work, including pornography and prostitution. It would appear that FEMEN consider access to abortion for women a central feminist objective, therefore any attempts to limit access it is a concrete and, for FEMEN’s audience, graspable example of patriarchal power over women. The definitions of pornography and prostitution are not discussed further in the manifesto, and I do not have protest events covering these issues in my corpus; exactly *how* connecting sex, money and women’s bodies is an expression

of patriarchal action is not explained. From contextual knowledge of feminist theory and anti-pornography and prostitution protests, we could perhaps reconstruct more details, but this would be extending beyond what is actually contained in FEMEN's texts. The same is true, again, for the 'Islamization' of the Tunisian state (48, below), the 'sadism' of Shari'ah law (13) and for the 'dictatorship' of Vladimir Putin: activated descriptions of the processes of patriarchal power are suppressed and replaced by deagentified and objectified action.

7.4 Negatively Constructing Patriarchy

Rather than the details of the mechanics of female bodily oppression, the main theme of all of FEMEN's protest texts is the explicit delegitimation of their protest targets, meaning that we can consider these texts as a continuation of their protest, as well as informative about the actions of the protest event itself. They rely largely on negative moral evaluation, particularly through contextually constructed opposition and negative appraisal of social actors (van Leeuwen, 2008: 45).

In (1), the mythopoetic opening of FEMEN's manifesto, patriarchy is first introduced to us as 'injustice' and the 'humiliation' of women. Throughout the manifesto, FEMEN continue to construct patriarchy through adjectives with a pre-existing negative evaluation ('rotten' in 16, but also examples (4) 'monstrous' and (12) 'vulgar') or equivocation with other negative concepts, such as slavery, genocide and evil (17, 18, 19):

- (16) rotten patriarchal culture (F manifesto)
- (17) To recognize that sex-industry is the most large-scale and long-term genocide against women (F manifesto)
- (18) patriarchy as the historically first, and last, existing form of slavery (F manifesto)
- (19) to instill in modern women culture of active opposition to the evil (F manifesto)

I have already presented an example where FEMEN use vulgar language to describe their own biological womanhood ('pussy'), and vulgar language is something that they return to when refer to Russian President Vladimir Putin in their Hanover Fair protest texts. He is negatively

appraised as 'the bastard' in the first text (F 2.1 and this and the second text are titled 'FUCK YOU, PUTIN!' (F 2.1, 2.2). Their slogan during the protest was 'fucking dictator', which is repeated in four of the five texts as they re-tell the events of the protest (F 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4). The construction 'fuck + noun' is also used again by FEMEN in the Hanover Fair and the Cologne Cathedral texts:

(20) Fuck Kreml, FSB, Russian Orthodox Church and other groups of offenders (F 2.1)

(21) FUCK RELIGION! (F 4.3 x 3, 4.5)

Putin, as well as being named as a 'dictator', is further negatively appraised as a 'thief' and a 'liar': according to FEMEN, the protest took place 'when Putin was watching what to steal from Volkswagen 4' (F 2.1). It is not possible for the author to know that this actually what Vladimir Putin was doing at the time and, as such, is an addition to the source practice (van Leeuwen, 2008: 18) designed to further delegitimize him. The fourth text (F 2.4) is entirely built around negatively constructing Putin, titled 'Putin is lying'. The text is structured by four denials quotes from Putin which, while not cited, can be extrapolated from the text itself. Each paragraph begins 'Putin is lying that...' and followed with an explanation of how the quote must be false:

(22) Putin is lying, that he knew in advance of about the protest, then how can be explain the helplessness and confusion of his security, how they fall on the ass under the feet of Merkel and Putin? (F 2.4)

In the Cologne Cathedral protest texts, FEMEN negatively appraise Church figures as 'paedophiles' (F 4.1), referring to the cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by Catholic priests globally that have increasingly come to light in the past decade or so. The mental health of Catholics is called into question, as Church figures have a 'maniacal desire' to control women's fertility, and their followers are 'fanatical' (F 4.1).

FEMEN give atheism equal weight as feminism and they attempt to delegitimize religion by articulating traditionally religious language and scripture into their anti-religious discourse. This is present in FEMEN's manifesto from the very start: the opening line 'in the beginning, there was...' (1) is a parallel of the opening line of the Book of Genesis. Most clearly, they try

to destabilise religious discourse by articulating the central figure of worship as 'woman', not 'God': 'Our God is a Woman!' (1). This also explains the slogan 'I AM GOD' worn by protester Josephine Witt at the Cologne Cathedral protest. Furthermore, they justify their threats of retribution on the Catholic Church if charges are pressed against her by quoting the Old Testament: 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' (F 4.2). This is delegitimation through inverting the impersonal authority of religious scripture, as they attempt to show its hypocritical nature and therefore its failure as a legitimate authority. Along the same lines, during the protest, Witt was punched by a church-goer after being apprehended by security. This man is ironically referred to as a 'pious man' (F 4.5) and a 'lost sheep separated from the flock' (F 4.3), drawing on Christian notions of preaching peace and meekness in order to highlight this 'double standard' (F 4.3) and 'double morality' (F 4.5) of his personal authority as a supposedly peaceful Christian.

The opposition of past/modernity is another key strategy in delegitimizing the Catholic Church and religion in general. As noted by Jeffries (2010), contextual opposition can become clearer when linked to more conventional opposition. While past/modernity is not an unconventional opposition, the positive or negative evaluation of either side can depend on the particular discourse it is associated with, for example, a conservative political discourse would arguably value past in a positive way, such as linking to established tradition. FEMEN evaluate past and modernity by equivocating FEMEN with modernity and the Catholic Church and religion more generally with the past; this, in turn, connects back to their underlying opposition of oppression/freedom, and provides the contextual evaluation of the opposition. They return to this again in the Cologne Cathedral protest texts:

- (23) **Everything smells of rot should be buried** immediately ! Long live woman ! Long live the **science!** MY PUSSY MY RULES! I AM GOD! (F 4.1)
- (24) FEMEN requires the Vatican elders and their fanatical followers to stop producing **medieval chimeras** and edit their **rotten dogma** in accordance with the **modern world** and **human rights** (F 4.1)
- (25) Maniacal desire to control fertility ability of women have in common religion with **national socialism , nationalism and other antediluvian anti-humanist ideologies** (F 4.1)

- (26) The women's movement FEMEN calls upon humanity to **move along the path of progress and humanism by abandoning religion** (F 4.5)

As I mentioned in the previous section, FEMEN aim to stand for 'modern women'. In the examples above, they equivocate modernity with 'science' (23), 'humanism' (26) and 'human rights' (24). Additionally, they state that 'progress' is incompatible with 'religion' (26). On the other half of the opposition, the Church is equivocated with the past movement of National Socialism (25), described as 'antediluvian' (25) and associated with rotting and decay (23, 24).

In their texts covering the Tunisian protest, FEMEN continue their anti-religious construction through layers of contextual opposition:

- (27) To all supporters and those who are not ignorant to fight between **slavery and freedom!** [...] We strongly call everyone not to pass through the tomorrow's fight **between patriarchy and women's liberation, between traditions of Middle Age and modern time** (F 3.5)

Here, slavery, patriarchy and 'traditions of Middle Age' are clearly put in opposition to freedom, women's liberation and 'modern time'. In this way, FEMEN articulate Christianity and Islam together as equivocal examples of religion. This is consistent with their universal view of patriarchal oppression, but it presents a number of issues when put into practice because geographical differences destabilise this chain of equivalence. FEMEN are unable to completely mitigate their geographic particularity as a Europe-based group, an area which is historically predominantly Christian. As I explain more in Chapter 9, they choose to emphasise these European roots when they wish, and Tunisia becomes equivalent to 'barbarism' and Europe with 'modernity' and 'freedom'; similarly, they do not equivocate Christianity with Western countries or Catholicism with Italy. When, however, they equivocate Christianity and Islam, FEMEN ignore the racial dynamics of discrimination that are evident in their negative evaluation of Islam. This is something they actively and uncritically partake in (i.e. 'barbarism'), and it opens up a discursive space for others, such as BTL commenters, to do the same, which I introduce in the following section. This construction also creates a clear incompatibility for woman who are religious and allows no space for the voice of Muslim women in particular, who are not just negatively constructed along religious lines but also along racial lines by FEMEN.

7.5 Engaging with FEMEN Below the Line

FEMEN's discursive construction of the female body, oppression and patriarchy is dependent on a classification of "woman" as universal, contemporary and biological. These three aspects prompt a diverse range of responses in the BTL comments, with differing levels of engagement.

Commenters express outright support for FEMEN across the papers, some recognising the existence of patriarchy:

- (28) Frauen wenden sich zu Recht gegen ...
... patriarchiale Unterdrückung. (F S BTL 2.1)
- (29) GO FEMEN!!!
Fuck the patriarchy and long live joyful subversion (F G BTL 3.1)

Support for FEMEN is complicated by their protest form, as I come back to in the following chapter: at times it is not clear cut when support for FEMEN is support for their beliefs or a positive, sexualised affirmation of their bare breasts. Despite the few open declarations of support, the nodal point of "patriarchy" is much less conflicted than the nodal point of "sexism" for the hashtag feminism groups. Perhaps as a result of FEMEN's physical protests and discrete targets, the chosen 'institutes' of patriarchy are more likely to be the subject of discussion, but without a wider discussion of their connection to patriarchy. For example, FEMEN's anti-dictatorship protest against Putin allows expressions of support or rejection for Vladimir Putin, and other politicians, without necessarily engaging with any of FEMEN's claims:

- (30) Why is Putin so awesome? If only Call me Dave was like him. (F DM BTL 1.1)
- (31) Putin constantly subjects the rest of the world to the sight of his sagging man boobs. (F DM BTL 1.1)

The biological aspect of FEMEN's discursive construction of "woman" is not subject to interrogation in the BTL comments in the same way that it might be in an academic or more

explicitly feminist setting⁶¹. For the hashtag feminist groups, there is conflict below the line over gendered categorisation of men and women in their relationship to their status as victims or perpetrators, but the very notion of gendered categorisation is left untouched; the latter is also true for FEMEN. The status of victims and perpetrators is also absent in BTL discussions about FEMEN, again perhaps as a result of the high-profile and specific targets, meaning that biology according to gender categorisation appears to be the least political part of FEMEN's discourse. Where biology does come into play is in direct reference to their protest form, which I return to; however, as an example, BTL commenters criticise the specific look of FEMEN protesters:

- (32) Vor allem diese tollen Feministinnen... Gegen die diskriminierung der Frau aber dann dicke frauen ausschließen beim Protest. (F W BTL 6.3)
- (33) if you're really up to challenging the patriarchy why don't you stop putting women who conform to conventional male 'good looks' stereotypes at the forefront and lead your media stunts with women who would be considered 'ugly', maimed, obese? (F G 1.1)

Patriarchal oppression of the female body as a contemporary phenomenon is similarly untroubled, although the contemporary nature of the protest *form* is questioned, as I cover in the following chapter. Space, rather than time, appears to be more important to the BTL commenters, that is, geographical location and a corresponding sensitivity to cultural differences. The universal component to FEMEN's category of "woman" is most pertinent here: for FEMEN, a universal view of oppression means that it is unproblematic for them to protest in countries other than those where their branches are based or where their protesters come from. This, coupled with their anti-religion and anti-dictatorship discourse and tendency to abstraction, leads them to equivocate 'Islam' and 'Tunisia' (which they claim is a theocracy) and then the entirety of 'North Africa', as I discuss in the following section. Here, 'Islam' can be interpreted as a marker of geography or nationality rather than a religious category, in a way that never occurs with Catholicism and Italy or Europe, for example. The most prominent point of conflict for BTL commenters during the Tunisia protest is this relationship between geography, religion and protest.

⁶¹ See, for example, discussion in Ramazanoğlu (1989) or Tong & Fernandes Botts (2017).

Some BTL commenters support FEMEN by recognising the same universal categorisation or, alternatively, by constructing women's rights as human rights, thereby equivocating 'woman' with 'human' in a way that FEMEN do not explicitly do:

- (34) Wieso ist ein menschlicher Körper ein öffentliches Ärgernis? Es darf keine "muslimischen" Länder geben, in denen Frauen ihre Rechte an der Grenze abgeben müssen. Menschenrechte sind universell! (F S BTL 2.4)
- (35) This one IS our business. Women are a Global people and all oppressed women need our full support. (F DM BTL 2.1)

In return, other BTL commenters do not reject necessarily the universal categorisation of woman, but they reject the actions of FEMEN members protesting in Tunisia by constructing it as a privileged cultural imposition:

- (36) 'FEMEN' Frauen sollten evtl. akzeptieren, dass sie ein gesundes Phänomen der westlichen Kultur sind, und sollten etwas mehr sensibel- emphatisch sein gegenüber den moralisch- ethischen Grenzen in anderen Kulturen! (F taz BTL 4.2)
- (37) what do they [FEMEN] give you hope about? Imposing western standards on non-western cultures? (F G BTL 3.1⁶²)

Many BTL commenters in the German data delegitimize the FEMEN protesters with a similar argument, represented most commonly with the idiom 'andere Länder, andere Sitten': in this case, they deserve no sympathy for being incarcerated for carrying out a protest in a country that carried that risk.

- (38) Na und ?? muss man nicht in fremden Ländern demonstrieren - andere Länder, andere Sitten (F B BTL 1.2)
- (39) 4 Monate sind viel zu wenig.
Ich würde 4 Jahre für angemessen halten.

Einfach mal so großkotzig in eine andere Kultur einbrechen und die eigene (körperliche) Auffassung als die absolute Wahrheit präsentieren - das ist verdammt arrogant.

Andere Länder, andere Sitten. (F S BTL 2.5)

⁶² This article was in response to the Hanover Fair, but the discussion was fairly wide-ranging and included discussion of protests in Tunisia.

Whether the same argument would be used as much with a different event that did not involve FEMEN, topless protest or feminism remains to be seen. This scepticism is raised by a handful of BTL commenters, expressing concern that potential differences between a Muslim country and Germany that commenters might otherwise highlight are being mitigated in order to denigrate feminism, in a 'Hierarchie der Feindbilder', which is the heading for (40) below:

- (40) Interessant. **Wenn es sich bei den Geschädigten um Feministinnen handelt, dann haben auf einmal alle ganz, ganz viel Verständnis mit den armen Moslems und ihren religiösen Gefühlen.** Dann ist es natürlich vollkommen angemessen, Menschen für Graffiti und entblösste Brüste monatelang in den Knast zu sperren. Man muss sich nur mal die Qualen und Traumata vorstellen, unter denen die Zuschauer bestimmt heute noch leiden - gleich drei halbnackte Frauen, das ist schon ein Schock, von dem man sich nicht so leicht erholt. **Was die Foristen wohl gesagt hätten, wenn ein deutscher Mann wegen eines Verstosses gegen irgendwelche beknackten Sittengesetze dieselbe Strafe kassiert hätte?** (F S BTL 2.5)

BTL commenters often draw on the same contextually constructed opposition of past/modernity and the same ideas of 'barbarism' and lack of 'civilisation' that FEMEN employ to delegitimize religion and then Tunisia by extension in their own self-representation texts, although it is not clear whether commenters engage with the same explicitly racialised anti-Islam stance as FEMEN:

- (41) Ein "Sittenstrafrecht" ist steinzeitlich und eines modernen Staates, der die Menschenrechte zu respektieren hat, unwürdig. (F S BTL 2.5)
- (42) What a barbaric backward nation,stone someone to death,what for exactly.The rules made by men to control women (F DM BTL 1.1)

Finally, FEMEN's equivocation of Christianity, Islam and religion as examples of oppression is supported by some BTL commenters (43), and others support FEMEN's direct protest against Catholicism in the Cologne Cathedral (44):

- (43) All religions oppress women. (F DM BTL 2.1)
- (44) Protest durch Frauen gegen die Kirche finde ich legitim. Diese hat jahrhundertlang die Frauen unterdrückt. (F W BTL 7.2)

A few BTL commenters in the German papers continue FEMEN's re-articulation of religious discourse by hypothetically putting Jesus on the side of FEMEN:

- (45) Ganz sicher würde Jesus heute auf der Seite der Femen stehen und nicht auf der Seite der katholischen Kirche. (F W BTL 7.3)
- (46) Jesus Christus übrigens würde wohl die Hände über dem Kopf zusammenschlagen, würde er heute leben und diese Kirche sehen. So wie ich ihn einschätze, hätte er sich wohl zu der Femen-Aktivistin auf den Altar gestellt und mitprotestiert. (F S BTL 3.1)

7.6 Abstract Theory and Concrete Targets

FEMEN's texts function as reporting on physical protest events; the three protests I have chosen all took place in locations specifically designed to fit within their discourse, either because the location – in front of the Tunisian justice ministry, in a Catholic church – or the person present – Vladimir Putin, Archbishop Joachim Meisner – were connected to the aim of the protest. As I explained in the first two sections of this chapter, FEMEN's manifesto is based on abstract and largely empty notions of patriarchy and oppression, but these nodal points are increasingly filled out with meaning from the physical protest events and the subsequent reporting. The group consistently draws on big concepts and binary opposition and have little problem in connecting abstract theory with concrete practice, such as the idea that their protesters' own bodies stand for women's universal and biological liberation. In this section, I explore in more detail how this approach manifests in the mainstream media coverage of FEMEN and how they complicate their own coverage, both in their self-reporting and the news media reporting.

The coverage of the FEMEN protest in Tunisia has by far the most texts of my chosen events, therefore the most space for continued discursive construction. The protest took place on the 29th of May 2013, a day before the trial of FEMEN Tunisia member Amina Tyler⁶³, who had been imprisoned for writing "FEMEN" on a wall of a religious building in Tunisia ahead of a meeting of religious leaders. FEMEN had already held a "Topless Jihad Day", with members

⁶³ She is also referred to as Amina Sbouï elsewhere.

from its branches in different countries protesting for her release and attempting to raise international awareness of her imprisonment (Thomas & Stehling, 2016). The three FEMEN activists who carried out the protest in Tunisia were also then imprisoned there for a month, before diplomatic intervention secured their release.

In the first short text (F 3.1) covering the protest, the purpose of the protest is identified as exclusively in demand for 'the release of FEMEN Tunisia activist Amina Tyler' ahead of her trial the next day. In the following texts, the subsequent arrest and imprisonment of the three FEMEN protesters is equivocated with increasingly abstract concepts that link back to their manifesto and basic construction of female oppression and patriarchy:

- (47) FEMEN urges all women of the world stand up to fight with breasts against Shariah and violence **for democracy and freedom of women!** (F 3.3)
- (48) To all supporters and those who are not ignorant to fight between slavery and **freedom!** [...] We strongly call everyone not to pass through the tomorrow's fight between patriarchy and **women's liberation**, between traditions of Middle Age and **modern time** (F 3.5)
- (49) Nor any threats, imprisonment and harassment will not force FEMEN activists to stop fighting **for the liberation of women of Maghreb!**
Freedom **for FEMEN!** Freedom **for Amina!** Freedom **for women!** (F 3.7)
- (50) Only immediately release from prison activists of FEMEN will better demonstrate a real desire of Tunisia **to move in the direction of European standards of democracy** (F 3.10)
- (51) The FEMEN movement asks you not to remain indifferent to the plight of the female prisoners of the Tunisian state, who fearlessly fight against the threat presented by **Islamization to the rights of women in the East** (F 3.11)
- (52) The story of the prisoners of FEMEN reveals to the world ugly picture of the rapid **Islamization of Tunisia's Islamist regime** and the movement toward **shariatization of law** (F 3.22)

Here, the FEMEN protesters' imprisonment is equivocated with patriarchal oppression in its particular expression through religion and their construction of Tunisia fits within two of FEMEN's 'fundamental institutes' of patriarchy: dictatorship and religion. FEMEN draw on the contextually constructed oppositions between oppression/freedom and past/modernity (48), but they also draw on a partially constructed opposition of East/West (51), or at least, in explicit terms, Tunisia/Europe, where 'Europe' is also positively equivocated with 'democracy'

(50). This view of Europe as democratic is also expressed, with caveats, in an article in the Guardian, highlighting the unevenness of their universal construction of oppression:

- (53) "We had a beautiful image of Europe with its democracy and human rights, but then we discovered that the salary difference between men and women is 30% – the same as in Ukraine – and that countries like Germany have legalised prostitution, the first and last form of slavery on Earth, and we realised things here are far from being rosy for women after all." (F G 3.2)

The social actors involved in the arrest and imprisonment are assimilated into 'Islamist regime' (52), 'state' (51) and 'Tunisia' (50) as a whole, with no nominated references for Tunisian social actors throughout the texts. Consistent with their world view, FEMEN articulate all women together as victims of patriarchy: the protesters are identified, but only in their role as representatives of the 'fight for the liberation' of Amina (49), the women of the Maghreb (49), women of the East (51) and all women (47, 48, 49). While FEMEN are attacking the role of religion in national government and the judicial process in Tunisia, their assimilation of the social actors into Tunisia as a whole and their use of the same contextually constructed opposition to delegitimize religion in general means that this could easily be interpreted as an attack on Islam as a whole, or a xenophobic attack built on an East/West opposition. This access to an East/West or Tunisia/Europe opposition is not available in their attempts to delegitimize Christian denominations, where they are reliant instead on oppositions – past/modernity, religion/science – that do not assimilate nations or entire regions into the negative half of a construction.

Across all eight newspapers, the aim of the initial protest is situated only as a protest for the release of Amina Tyler. As the case develops, it is repeated in a formulaic manner, perhaps due to the earlier coverage of Tyler's case and the concrete nature of her incarceration:

- (54) In Tunis haben drei Aktivistinnen der Frauenrechtsorganisation Femen für **die Freilassung einer inhaftierten Tunesierin demonstriert** – mit nacktem Oberkörper (F B 1.1)
- (55) Three feminist activists have been arrested for holding a topless demonstration outside a court today in protest against **the jailing of a Tunisian member of Ukrainian feminist group FEMEN**. (F DM 2.1)

At times the case is furnished with additional, more abstract aims for fighting against patriarchy and for women's rights which come directly from FEMEN, but the context does not go beyond the direct quotes; this is a similar theme across the coverage of all three protests in both languages.

- (56) [Anna Khanova] „Wir kannten das Risiko der Aktion, aber der Kampf für **die Rechte der Frauen** ist das Risiko wert.“ (F B 1.2)
- (57) Die Hamburger Femen-Aktivistin Josephine Witt, die derzeit in Tunesien inhaftiert ist, will mit ihrem Protest «**die patriarchale Gesellschaft stürzen**» (F B 1.6)
- (58) A member of FEMEN who identified herself as Inna told The Associated Press that the activists were protesting **the treatment of women in the Arab world**. (F DM 2.1)

Earlier in this chapter, I explained how FEMEN employ a number of linguistic strategies to delegitimize the Catholic Church in the reporting on Josephine Witt's protest in the Cologne Cathedral. In terms of purpose, in two texts the protest is constructed as against 'Vatican lobbying to criminalize abortion' (F 4.1, F 4.5) and as against 'Vatican sexist propaganda' (F 4.4). They criticise the Church's 'maniacal desire to control fertility ability of women' (F 4.1); this gains more credence when understood alongside their manifesto, which structures their belief in the female body as the primary site of patriarchal oppression: denial of access to abortion is a demonstration of this oppression.

Across the four German papers covering the protest, a wide range of slightly different issues are claimed as the target of the protest, almost all through quotes from the protester herself Josephine Witt or an unnamed FEMEN source. In the interests of space, I have listed these below:

Abtreibung	<i>taz</i>
das Frauenbild der Kirche	<i>Spiegel, taz, Welt</i>
der Machtmonopol der Katholischen Kirche	<i>Spiegel, taz, Welt</i>
die Ausgrenzung bestimmter Gruppen von der Kirche	<i>taz, Welt</i>
die Kirche	<i>Bild</i>
die Unterdrückung der Frau weltweit	<i>taz</i>
Diktieren der Kirche	<i>Bild</i>
Entscheidungen über eigene Körper treffen	<i>Spiegel, taz, Welt</i>
Frauenrechte	<i>Spiegel, Welt</i>
Meisner als erzkonservativ	<i>all</i>
Meisners Aussagen über Abtreibung	<i>Bild</i>

Meisners Aussagen über die Antibabypille	<i>Bild, Welt</i>
Meisners Aussagen über Minderheiten	<i>taz</i>
Menschenrechte	<i>Spiegel</i>
Patriarchat	<i>taz</i>
Patriarchie und Sexismus	<i>taz</i>
religiöse Unterdrückung	<i>Bild</i>
Sexismus	<i>taz</i>
sexistische und patriarchalische Haltung Meisners	<i>Bild, Welt</i>

Table 1: Aims of the Cologne Cathedral Protest in the German Newspapers

In light of their manifesto, every purpose listed above can be related coherently to the basic world view of FEMEN, even if it is indeed missing from the specific texts on the Cologne Cathedral protest. For example, in quotes in *Spiegel*, *taz* and *Welt*, Witt claims her protest to be directly challenging the image of women in the Catholic Church, particularly the sexualised images of the female virgin which tie into their basic discourse of the oppression of the female body. Witt also situates the protest on numerous occasions as against Cardinal Joachim Meisner (who was conducting the Mass at the time), as an embodiment of the Catholic Church, and a particularly hardline example of the Church hierarchy. In *Bild*, she implicitly raises the same issue of female bodily control through a comparison of the image of her on the altar, which is condemned by the Church, to a similarly-undressed Jesus on the cross, which is instead worshipped; this is another way that FEMEN attempt to destabilise religious discourse by re-articulating themselves into it:

- (59) „Ein blutender, am Kreuz hängender Jesus ist doch viel grausamer als eine nackte Frau auf dem Altar.“ (F B 2.3)

FEMEN perhaps suffer from lack of clarity in the mainstream news media because so much is contained within their criticism of one very large, very influential institution: depending on which article one reads, the same protest has a number of different targets, which risks giving FEMEN the appearance of incoherence. This type of expansive world view is likely to carry inconsistently into mainstream newspaper coverage, as traditional hard news conventions favour information that is short, clear and easily communicated (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Mendes, 2011a; Richardson, 2007).

The clarity, or lack thereof, of FEMEN's message is something touched upon by BTL commenters (60, 61), although it is not a prominent feature of discussion in the comment sections:

(60) Ernsthafte Frage: Wofür stehen eigentlich die Femen? (F W BTL 6.3)

(61) Femen's agenda is so confused as to be incomprehensible (F G BTL 3.1)

Other commenters push back on what is constructed as a lack of engagement (62, 63); these commenters highlight the need to go beyond the basic reporting and look elsewhere on the internet for information on FEMEN, or at least draw on more contextual feminist knowledge:

(62) Sie sind im Internet, das Internet erzählt ihnen viel über Femen, wenn sie danach suchen, vielleicht begreifen sie es dann. Viel Glück! (F W BTL 7.3)

(63) it appears you have simply chosen to ignore the written messages adorned on their bodies - they are hardly subtle. Claiming not to understand their message is willful ignorance and you know it. (F G BTL 3.1)

Table 1 also includes the only two examples of 'patriarchy' being explicitly named outside of a FEMEN quote in the entire newspaper coverage of both languages, from the same taz article:

(64) Oben ohne gegen das Patriarchat (F taz 6.1)

(65) Sie protestierte gegen Patriarchie und Sexismus (F taz 6.1)

As the most left-leaning newspaper of all eight in my corpus, this use of FEMEN's radical language is perhaps not surprising, but patriarchy is not revisited within the article, unlike in FEMEN's manifesto. As I explain in Chapter 9, I do not believe that taz in general is supportive of FEMEN as a feminist group and seems unable to engage with the feminist implications of the most radical content of FEMEN's protest, that is, the topless imagery.

FEMEN articulate Vladimir Putin as the target of the Hanover Fair protest, with their ultimate aim appearing to be the removal of him as leader of Russia and the overthrow of other Russian institutions, namely, the FSB, the Orthodox Church and the Kremlin (F 2.1, 2.2); at the very least, their protest is designed to demonstrate discontent with his continued leadership of

Russia, constructed as a 'dictatorship'. What constitutes dictatorship and how it contributes to the oppression of women on both abstract and concrete levels is left unexplained; indeed, example (66) suggests that FEMEN have moved away from their explicit feminist aims and articulate all Russians, regardless of gender, as victims of dictatorship:

- (66) FEMEN calls Russia to scream "Go to hell, dictator" with all 150 millions of voices! (F 2.1, 2.2)

The basic purpose of the protest can be found all four UK papers, although the level to which the purpose is explicit and then detailed varies quite widely. In the Daily Mail and the first article from the Telegraph, the purpose of the protest as against Putin needs to be inferred from a description of the actions of the women 'confronting' him:

- (67) Russian president confronted by topless demonstrator in Germany (F DM 1.1)
- (68) The Russian president was confronted by a topless protester with an obscene slogan insulting Mr Putin painted on her back (F Tel 6.1)

Once identifying FEMEN as the protesters, their historical protests against the treatment of Pussy Riot (a female Russian band imprisoned after performing in a church) are often cited, potentially facilitating the connection that this protest is related to this historical context, although this is not present in FEMEN's original texts:

- (69) The members of the women's rights group Femen, which has staged protests against Russia's detention of the feminist punk band Pussy Riot around Europe, appeared as he visited a trade fair in Hanover (F DM 1.1, Ind 5.1)

The purpose of the protest is given more substance in the Telegraph and the Guardian through direct interviews with FEMEN members after the event. The most detailed descriptions of the purpose of the protest and reasons for taking an anti-Putin stance are found in these articles, not in FEMEN's own texts. One of the protesters, Alexandra Shevchenko claims, in an abstract manner characteristic of FEMEN:

- (70) "The most important [criticism] for us is human rights, the rights of women, this situation with Pussy Riot. Of course we don't want to say this is all he's done – he has committed a lot of other crimes..." (F Tel 7.3)

Inna Shevchenko, the current leader of FEMEN and no familial relation to Alexandra, penned a Guardian article (F G 3.1: “We are FEMEN, the naked shock troops of feminism”). In it, she calls him a ‘fucking dictator’, reminiscent of the texts from their website, as well as negatively appraising him as a ‘homophobe’ and an ‘oligarch’ who is ‘embodying the merger of church and state’ and ‘putting his personal interests before’ 150 million Russians.

FEMEN choose to take an open approach to the mass media, which they cover in their book (FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014) as well as their manifesto:

- (71) FEMEN movement stands to the principles of openness and commitment to media to ensure maximum coverage of its revolutionary and advocacy activities in mass media (F manifesto)

Their willingness to engage with mainstream media as well as news conventions of providing ‘balance’ means that on occasion, although not always, FEMEN are able to refute attempts to delegitimize them and their protests. For example, Vladimir Putin was the most influential actor involved in the Hanover Fair protest, and his own particular view of the protest is prominent in the papers. His comments trivialise both the protest itself and the women who protested, through the use of humour and through constructing them as ‘girls’ or ‘lasses’ who need to be treated ‘gently’ rather than taken seriously on a political level:

- (72) He added: “To be honest, I didn’t really hear what they were shouting because the security [guards] were very tough. These huge guys fell on the lasses. That seemed not right to me, they could have been handled **more gently**.” (F Tel 7.1)
- (73) But a smiling Putin shrugged off the protest and said 'As for the action, I liked it.' **'You should be grateful to the girls, they are helping you make the fair more popular.'** (F DM 1.1)
- (74) **"I did not catch what they were shouting, I did not even see if they were blondes, brunettes or chestnut-haired ...** I don't see anything terrible in (the protest), though I think ... it is better to be dressed if one wants to discuss political matters." (F Ind 5.1)

In the Telegraph, Alexandra Shevchenko, one of the protesters, was given a chance to reply to Putin’s comments:

- (75) "I think his answer was really stupid. It was really in this Russian, post-USSR style. The president of a European country would never say something like – I like her, in such a sexual way. He does it because he's a stupid man." (F Tel 7.3)
- (76) "Topless protest – I think this is the only effect that can work," Ms Shevchenko said. [...] "When a woman's nudity is not controlled by men [...] when she's using her sexuality for her own aims, political aims – that really makes patriarchy irritated. And you can see the result." (F Tel 7.3)

This demonstrates the importance of grassroots groups like FEMEN interacting directly with mainstream news media in order to get their more complicated views across. FEMEN do in general take a pro-media stance⁶⁴ and this strategy appears in general to work in their favour. Communication and explication of the purpose of the protest and the nuanced aspects of FEMEN's protest method (see Chapter 8) is almost entirely done through FEMEN's own voices, the need for which is perhaps compounded by the often abstract, multi-layered nature of FEMEN's protests.

7.7 Protest Action and Protest Aim

All three protest actions carried out by FEMEN are named as 'protest'/'Protest', 'demonstration'/'Demonstration' or 'Aktion' in the papers. The protest in the Cologne Cathedral alone, however, is also referenced throughout the four German papers with nouns that obscure the 'protest' nature of the event:

der Skandal	<i>Bild</i>
der Sprung	<i>Welt</i>
der Vorfall	<i>Spiegel, taz</i>
der Vorgang	<i>Spiegel</i>
der Zwischenfall	<i>Spiegel</i>
die Einlage	<i>taz</i>
die Störung	<i>Bild, Welt</i>

Table 2: Nominalisations of the Cologne Cathedral Protest in the German Newspapers

Without wishing to overstate the importance of this, this is the only protest out of three to be described in such a way and is also the protest that is most criticised across the papers;

⁶⁴ Except for when alerting the media beforehand thwarts their protests (FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014).

these findings perhaps demonstrate that it is viewed as less legitimate as a political protest than the other two protests in the corpus.

In their manifesto, FEMEN focus more on linguistic strategies designed to delegitimize patriarchy rather than detailing the mechanics of female bodily oppression. This holds true, too, for the texts covering their protest events. The action of the protest itself is backgrounded in favour of negative construction of the targets: Vladimir Putin, the Catholic Church, the Tunisian authorities. By contrast, the newspaper coverage prioritises the physical actions of the protest, including any police or security reactions, over the purpose or FEMEN's world view. This finding is reflective of the conventions of hard news reporting, which is designed primarily to communicate information about events beyond the reader's own personal experience (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Richardson, 2007). This differs slightly in the interviews and more explanatory articles built from in-depth interviews where FEMEN's perspectives are foregrounded and the order of events has already been established through earlier articles.

Examples (54) and (55) are typical of sentence constructions across the newspaper coverage of the Tunisian protest, where the action of the protest and the purpose of the protest consistently occur very close together. By contrast, examples (64) and (65) are the only examples of this close proximity of action and purpose in the Cologne Cathedral protest news articles. In all other cases, the chronological sequence of events appears first, with the purpose coming later in the article through quotes from FEMEN and Witt which provide a second layer of distance. According to the established conventions of hard news reporting, information on an event is ordered according to level of importance, with the less important coming later, or further down, in the article (Bednarek & Caple, 2012), making the purpose of the Witt's protest in the cathedral less important than the physical act of her protest.

For another example, compare the two extracts below from FEMEN's own text (77) and Spiegel (78):

- (77) In the presence of thousands of audience activist climbed onto the altar of the cathedral, protesting against the Vatican propaganda about criminalization of abortion. (F 4.1)

- (78) Kurz nach Beginn der morgendlichen Weihnachtsmesse im Kölner Dom stürmte die 20-jährige Femen-Aktivistin Josephine Witt aus der ersten Reihe nach vorne und sprang nur mit einem Slip bekleidet auf den Altar. Sie hatte sich die Worte "I am God" ("Ich bin Gott") auf den Oberkörper gemalt. Vor den Augen von Erzbischof Joachim Kardinal Meisner wurde die Frau von den Sicherheitskräften im Dom abgeführt. (F S 4.1)

This example from Spiegel is the leading section, designed to garner interest in the reader in order to encourage them to read the rest of the article (Bednarek & Caple, 2012); the action-based nature of the lead simultaneously reinforces and reflects the importance of action over the feminist purpose or context of the event. The rest of the Spiegel article comprises six paragraphs, one which places Witt in the context of her previous protests (see Chapter 9), one which names Meisner as the target of the protest, one which then gives background to Cardinal Meisner, and three which cover the order of events: what Witt was doing before the protest; the act of taking off her clothes and climbing on the altar; being taken away by church security and held in a separate room; Meisner cleaning the altar with holy water and recommencing the service.

In FEMEN's text, they do not develop on the protest action itself, but develop on their negative construction of the Catholic Church. FEMEN return to the chronological order of events when it can be used to support their world view or further delegitimize their enemies. For example, the church-goer who punched Josephine Witt in the face after being apprehended by church security becomes representative of the 'double moral standard' of religion, and the imprisonment of the protesters in Tunisia becomes representative of global patriarchy in action.

7.8 Construction of the Problem: Discussion

FEMEN have a comparatively clear basic discursive construction of the problem that they are confronting: the female body is oppressed by patriarchy and must be freed. According to FEMEN, women across the world are, or should be, engaged in a struggle against patriarchy over control of their biological bodies, manifested in the reproductive and sexual issues of abortion, pornography and prostitution. For FEMEN, patriarchy is largely represented in physical protests by individual male actors, such as Putin, but FEMEN do not articulate an

opposition between women and men, which carries through the newspapers and BTL comments. Patriarchy is far more abstract, represented through negative nominalisations that remove the exact processes of oppression. Through contextually constructed opposites in their protest texts, FEMEN build up a moral opposition between oppression and freedom: patriarchy/women's liberation, past/modernity, religion/science, dictatorship/democracy, whereby those occupying the positive poles are equivocated together, and likewise for the negative poles. Patriarchy is further equivocated with negative concepts such as National Socialism, slavery and genocide.

The nodal point "patriarchy" is far less productive for FEMEN in comparison to the nodal point "sexism" for the hashtag feminist groups: it features little in the newspaper coverage and, subsequently, little in the BTL comments. This is perhaps in part due to the uneven representation of FEMEN's aims and objectives in the newspapers, which is often complicated by quotes from FEMEN members themselves. For example, the protest in the Cologne Cathedral had a potentially clear, graspable target of universal access to abortion but in FEMEN's texts this issue is backgrounded in favour of negative evaluation of the Catholic Church and religion in general; abortion barely surfaces in the BTL comments and the stated purpose of the protest varies widely even within a single newspaper, ranging from a specific protest against Meisner up to a general anti-religious protest on the basis of quotes from FEMEN. On a related note, FEMEN use specific targets as concrete representations of patriarchy but external coverage in the newspapers and in BTL comments can then drift into focusing on these specific targets without a wider, more abstract discussion of patriarchy. The additions to and organisations of the reporting of events in the newspapers also demonstrate what is considered newsworthy and relevant contextual information for FEMEN in this medium: the time and locations of past protests, the style of protests (topless, see Chapter 8) and the physical target of the protest, if it is a person. The wider aims of the protest are presented as secondary to the action of the protest, sometimes absent, and almost entirely reliant on FEMEN's own voices for clarification. A context of past topless protest or other contemporary feminist protest is also left out of details about FEMEN.

While it may be possible to view FEMEN's abstract theorising and lack of clarity in their protest aim in the papers as a negative, limiting their long-term impact, it is also worthwhile to

consider the additional aim of FEMEN to be provocative and shocking. This is evident in their approach to protesting and in the vulgar language used to attack the ‘institutes’ of patriarchy. What should be the ultimate aim of protesting? Is it enough to draw attention to female bodies and feminist ideas, to provoke discussion, as FEMEN clearly do, evident from the amount of comments left below the line? The aim of this thesis is to understand the boundaries and form of this discussion and identify what appear to be the most conflicted aspects of FEMEN’s discursive construction of the problems they are opposing.

Woman as a biological category is untroubled in the BTL comments, and there is no conflict between the categorisation of men and equivocation with patriarchy or oppression; this is most likely because a conflict between men and women is not constructed in the news coverage in the same way as for the hashtag feminist groups, perhaps because mentions of patriarchy itself is almost entirely absent, along with the subsequent need to define it. As a result, the issues around democratic and populist political struggles that I discussed in Chapter 6 do not manifest in the same way for FEMEN. The biggest point of conflict for FEMEN’s discursive dislocation, visible in the BTL comments, is the construction of woman as a universal category. Through this category, FEMEN articulate people together according to biology and mitigate geographical location, and then place them in direct opposition to a similarly universal patriarchy, which, as mentioned, includes world religions and sex work. They are simplifying the political landscape into a binary opposition between women and patriarchy, but the chain of equivalence that receives the most attention is the one linking women together, not the one linking together the ‘institutes’ of patriarchy: BTL commenters challenge the legitimacy of their protest in Tunisia by foregrounding national differences, at times also constructed as cultural differences. They also demonstrate support for the protesters’ jail sentences along the same lines. This is further complicated by the fact that FEMEN, at times, equivocate their anti-religion and anti-dictatorship stance with a negative construction of an entire country, i.e. Tunisia, which ignores the potential racial intersections of an anti-Islam stance. This contributes to the point raised by feminist researchers such as Davis & Zarkov (2017) and Weber (2015) for more work into the complexities of a Muslim identity in Europe: my work demonstrates how FEMEN’s anti-religious discourse is at the same time a racist discourse when connected with Islam, and their act of speaking for Muslim women further genders this construction.

By making the identity of a woman incompatible with a religious identity, FEMEN cause a potential conflict for people who might consider themselves a woman and not a victim of religious oppression. It must be said that these criticisms are already established, and have come from within the group as well as without: later in 2013, Amina Tyler rejected her associations with FEMEN, citing Islamophobia as a central problem in the group⁶⁵. Baer (2016) documents the Muslima Pride protest held in Berlin, also in 2013, which directly rejected an anti-Islam/anti-hijab protest held by FEMEN the previous week. Standing in the same location, they held up placards defending their choice to wear hijabs. Because FEMEN cannot “see” the differences between women, they cannot recognise dynamics of oppression perpetrated by women or how a religious identity can be compatible with an identity as a woman: the reasons behind wearing a hijab are often complex, and can stand as much for defiance of anti-Islam discourses upheld by non-Muslim women, for modesty or for feminist expression as it can for religious expression (Betz-Bornstein, 2015; Duits & van Zoonen, 2006). This study, however, contributes to the existing work on FEMEN’s patronising and oppressive attitude to Muslim women by demonstrating the linguistic constructions of this silencing, most clearly, for example, through the use of the highly generalised classification ‘woman’, and compounded further with the use of the definite article ‘the’. Problematically, this construction is essential in order for them to build their political discourse in the way that they have chosen. Similarly, and as I show in the following chapter, FEMEN also linguistically suppress Muslim women from their textual coverage of protests and the subsequent incarceration of their protesters alongside many Muslim women.

As already highlighted by Baer (2016), FEMEN are pushing back on the intense individualisation of postfeminist discourse, and claiming a universal category of woman is one way that they do this. This category has been broken down in more modern feminist discourses through intersectional critiques, as I discussed in my literature review, but some feminist theorists claim that this makes the political potential of feminist ungraspable as groups are divided into ever-increasing categories (Tong, 2007; Tong & Fernandes Botts, 2017). Although FEMEN eschew established feminist theory (FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014), their

⁶⁵ Her current status with the group is unclear, as she has since been linked to FEMEN protests in France (Thomas & Stehling, 2016).

own discourse and the reactions to them in the news media and the BTL comments in particular throws into relief the tensions around building chains of equivalence for political projects and the potential problems around mitigation and suppression of difference in the service of these projects.

8 FEMEN: Protest Form

In this chapter I address FEMEN's protest form in more detail, although I have already touched on some aspects in the previous chapter. FEMEN utilise topless protest, followed up by online reporting through their website. The protests take place in public spaces, sometimes in front of the high-profile politicians that they are criticising, and usually involve shouted slogans as well as slogans painted on their bodies. Protesters are usually forcibly removed by security or police and protesters are physically trained up in FEMEN headquarters to fight back. FEMEN have a number of branches worldwide, having started out in the Ukraine, but their total number of protesters is far smaller than the number of stories shared on #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project because of the commitment required for a protest, as well as the engineered look of protesters. This chapter is split into four sections and concluded with a discussion: firstly, I explore the discursive construction of the protesters themselves, without delving into media evaluations of the protesters, which comes in the following chapter, and their protest form of 'sextremism'; secondly, I detail the conceptual metaphor of war that FEMEN employ throughout their texts, which develops on their existing discursive construction of patriarchy and the female body; in the third and fourth sections, I cover how the protest form of toplessness and its shock value is reported across the texts in this study, separating the two sections into newspaper and BTL comments, respectively.

8.1 FEMEN Protesters as Manifestations of Liberation

Returning to the discursive structure of FEMEN's world view, if women are in a struggle with patriarchy over control over their bodies, then FEMEN situate themselves as female bodies who consciously fight against patriarchal oppression: they have regained control of their bodies and, as such, are human representatives of women's liberation.

Returning to the mythopoetic opening of the manifesto, we can see that 'FEMEN is born' once women decide to mobilise their bodies to fight against patriarchal control:

- (1) In the beginning, there was the body, feeling of the woman's body, feeling of joy because it is so light and free. Then there was injustice, so sharp that you feel it with

your body, it immobilizes the body, hinders its movements, and then you find yourself your body's hostage. And so you turn your body against this injustice, mobilizing every body's cell to struggle against the patriarchy and humiliation. You tell the world: Our God is a Woman!
Our Mission is Protest!
Our Weapon are bare breasts!
And so **FEMEN is born** and sextremism is set off. (F manifesto)

This use of a birth metaphor presents FEMEN as a logical and, above all, a natural consequence of patriarchal control and female consciousness; it also reinforces their biological categorisation of women and oppression. It is a naturalisation (van Leeuwen, 2008: 68), whereby the agency of an action is removed and replaced with an agent-less natural process, which can give the 'air of inevitability'. Of course, this opening functions as a myth, and does not match the material reality of their origin, which can be found in FEMEN & Ackerman (2014) and the brief history given in Chapter 3. The point of the myth, however, is not to obscure the material origin, but to cement FEMEN's discursive construction of unequal gender relations and to legitimate the group through a logical and natural beginning.

FEMEN establish themselves as a group comprising female activists (2), who are women who have gained control of their bodies through the initial recognition of oppression (1) and then subsequent training (3, 4):

- (2) FEMEN is an international women's movement of brave topless female activists (F manifesto)
- (3) FEMEN female activists are the women with special training, physically and psychologically ready to implement the humanitarian tasks of any degree of complexity and level of provocation. (F manifesto)
- (4) FEMEN is the special force of feminism, its spearhead militant unit, modern incarnation of fearless and free Amazons. (F manifesto)

In (2), FEMEN describe themselves as an international movement, consistent with their universal view of female oppression; on two further occasions in the manifesto, they refer to themselves as 'international', and claim that they are, 'by strength of courage and personal example', initiating 'global women's mob law over patriarchy'. They are, then, examples for the rest of the women in the world to follow.

FEMEN call their topless protest actions 'sextremism', a portmanteau of "sex" and "extremism". In their protest texts, they also develop the corresponding 'sextremist', which they often use when they refer to their protesting members, particularly in the Cologne Cathedral and Hanover Fair protests. Here, FEMEN attempt to create a new word, a practice which has been identified as a particularly useful tool for exercising power (Billig, 2013; Fowler, 1991), as outsiders to the group have to work to gain knowledge of the meaning of the new word. By creating the word 'sextremism' and its related 'sextremist', FEMEN are attempting to exercise their own particular discourse about gender relations and protest. They furnish the manifesto with descriptions of the meaning of 'sextremism', as can be seen in (1), (5) and (6) (and (32) and (33) below). Note here how these examples continue to construct the opposition women/patriarchy through who has control over 'female sexuality':

- (5) Female nudity, free of patriarchal system, is a grave-digger of the system, militant manifesto and sacral symbol of women's liberation (F manifesto)
- (6) Sextremism is female sexuality rebelling against patriarchy and embodied in the extremal political direct action events (F manifesto)

Sextremism is two-pronged approach to protest, designed on the one hand to provoke patriarchy to anger (7, 8):

- (7) to provoke patriarchy into open conflict by forcing it to disclose its aggressive antihuman nature (F manifesto)
- (8) to ideologically undermine the fundamental institutes of patriarchy [...] putting these institutions through subversive trolling to force them to strategic surrender (F manifesto)

On the other hand, it is designed to draw women together through FEMEN's 'strength and personal example' in a form of feminist consciousness raising and solidarity leading to collective action (9, 10):

- (9) to initiate global women's mob law (F manifesto)
- (10) to instil in modern women culture of active opposition to the evil and of struggle for justice (F manifesto)

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, FEMEN members have a specific look, which has developed into something more akin to a brand (Thomas & Stehling, 2016): young, overwhelmingly white, slim and conventionally attractive with long hair, flower wreaths, bare breasts and slogans painted on their bodies. This image, coupled with their discursive claim to represent all women across the world, has come under fire (Channell, 2014; O'Keefe, 2014; Reestorff, 2014). Reestorff (2014) describes it as the issue of the 'recognisable' female body: either it is 'too recognisable' as the universalising historic white and Western approach to feminism, or 'too unrecognisable', as these bodies are placed in public situations of protest and open rebellion against conventional female behaviour, in a way that is unattainable for most others. In (11) and (12), FEMEN demonstrate that they are aware of potential criticisms of their actions:

(11) Sexist style of the actions is a way to destruct the patriarchal understanding of what is the destination of female sexuality (F manifesto)

(12) to promote new revolutionary female sexuality (F manifesto)

As representatives of all biological women through the most 'recognisable' image of a woman, FEMEN members become decoupled from their individual bodies, their bodies instead standing for the discursive construction of 'the woman' (cf. Mouffe, 1995). They situate their actions within a rejection of patriarchal images of women's bodies, found for example in mainstream pornography. Sextremism is designed to be an aggressive rejection of the heteronormative gaze (Athanassiou & Bury, 2014) and gives the stereotypical passive female body agency by articulating it into unexpected locations carrying out unexpected actions, such as political protest that involves vulgar language, body slogans and shouting.

The success of the neologisms 'sextremism' and 'sextremist' appears to be very limited. Neither 'sextremism' nor 'sextremist' appears in any of the BTL comments in my corpus. In the newspapers, 'sextremist' only appears three times, only in the German papers and each time with a distancing strategy that signals that the term is FEMEN's alone (speech marks (13, 15) or with the adjective 'selbsternannt' (14)):

(13) In erster Instanz waren die selbst ernannten „Sextremistinnen“ zu vier Monaten Haft ohne Bewährung verurteilt worden. (F B 1.9)

- (14) Vielleicht überschätzen sich die selbsternannten Sextremistinnen. (F S 3.4)
- (15) Mit ihren barbusigen Aktionen könnten sie größere Aufmerksamkeit erzielen als angezogen, verteidigen sich die "Sextremistinnen" gegen Kritik. (F W 7.1)

‘Sextremism’ is only present once, in the Guardian, tellingly misspelled (16):

- (16) [FEMEN’s] raison d’etre is to protest against patriarchal individuals, organisations or institutions using their nakedness in what the group unashamedly describes as a militant fashion or "sextrism". (F G 3.2)

Here, it is equivalent to protesting in a militant fashion against patriarchal elements in society, and the deeper meaning of sextremism as a concept of consciousness raising and female bodily empowerment in light of sexualisation and commodification of women’s bodies is not explored.

The basic premise of sextremism as a form of female bodily liberation does appear a few times in the BTL comments (17, 18):

- (17) Kämpft da jemand mit Waffengewalt für Frieden? Nein - da setzt nur jemand ein Zeichen für die Gleichberechtigung der Frau... und zwar **mit den Waffen einer Frau**. Und völlig ohne Blutvergießen. Das verdient Respekt. (F B BTL 1.2)
- (18) That's only because you have been conditioned to view nudity as synonymous with sexuality.

It doesn't have to be.

Femen are showing that women should stand firm and strong **by reclaiming their bodies from men**. (F G BTL 3.1)

On a related note, the point is raised that female breasts, as natural anatomical feature, should not be shocking (19, 20):

- (19) Wir leben in einer Welt, in der man ein Körperteil, das der Ernährung dient und das fast 100% der Menschen monatelang im Mund hatten und das 50% allein im Spiegel betrachten können, verdecken muss, wenn man nicht ins Gefängnis will? (F S BTL 2.2)
- (20) Breasts are modified sweat glands which feed newborns, it's the same in ALL mammals. WHY have they been made out to be the devil? EVERY FEMALE MAMMAL HAS THEM. If

you can't get over your infantile paralysis and crave to be once again stuck to the teat, then grow up! (F DM BTL 1.1)

These comments, however, are far outweighed by commenters who delegitimize FEMEN through trivialising their protest form and ignoring the more complex meaning that they give to topless protest. Commenters demonstrate ostensible support for FEMEN, but this appears to be an ironic support that is most likely based on their topless protest method:

- (21) Was muss man tun...
Damit die auch bei mir Zuhause so demonstrieren???
Ich mache gleich ne Party draus (F S BTL 2.1)
- (22) What marvellous young ladies. They can protest in my street any time they like. (F DM BTL 1.1)

Commenters evaluate the breasts and bodies of the protesters, both positively (23) and negatively (24):

- (23) Also ich finde sie hat eine hübsche Figur; es hätte ja viel schlimmer kommen können. (F W BTL 7.2)
- (24) BTW, they may be very nice-looking but why are they all flat-chested? (F G BTL 3.1)

Furthermore, commenters engage in breast-related puns and wordplay:

- (25) Sie demonstriert mit ihren Brüsten? Das ist in etwa so sinnvoll wie...:Fighting for peace, is like fu**ing for virginity!Tja.. andere Länder, andere Sitten - anderer Demos, andere _itten ;) (F B BTL 1.2)
- (26) It's all a bit of a storm in a D cup. (F G BTL 3.1)

BTL commenters also challenge FEMEN's articulation of protesters as female bodies liberated from patriarchy by claiming that they are simply engaging in self-sexualisation by using the same heteronormative female bodily imagery. Here, the sexualised body fails as a political body:

- (27) Feme ist meiner Meinung nach eine einzige Lachnummer die **die Frauen mehr sexualisieren als ihnen helfen**, sei es in Deutschland Tunesien etc. (F S BTL 3.1)

- (28) There is a slight disconnect here isn't there? While I can see every point in trying to make the odious Putin uncomfortable and to humiliate him if possible it does seem rather odd that **the only tool apparently at Femen's disposal is to exploit the very sexualisation they despise.** (F G BTL 3.1)

This is sometimes delegitimated as contradictory through the use of analogy, rather than more detailed or descriptive explanations (and (25), and implicitly in (17), above):

- (29) Ach sooooooooo. Mit Brüsten gegen Pornos. Jetzt wird mir einiges klar. Ich **protestiere auch gegen Walfang, indem ich Wale töte.** (F W BTL 7.2)

- (30) I can't help thinking this is **like protesting slavery by working for free.** (F G BTL 3.1)

The protest in Tunisia gains a further element of “counter productivity” through sexualisation of female bodies by comparing Western women and ‘Islamists’; this draws again on an implicit East/West constructed opposition where Islamist is equivalent to East:

- (31) Super, Wasser auf die Mühlen der erzkonservativen Islamisten, die Bikinis und der gleichen verbieten wollen. Darüber hinaus Wasser auf die Mühlen all jener Islamisten die behaupten westliche Frauen würden sich wie Huren kleiden/verhalten. (F S BTL 2.1)

8.2 Women's Liberation is War

FEMEN have a narrow definition of violence which can be explained through the nodal point of “the female body”. Sextremism is designed to be provocative (‘mockery’ (32)) through its imagery of the topless female body as a tool of protest in a public space, but FEMEN create a distinction between violence and aggression for this protest form (33):

- (32) Sextremism is the **woman's mockery** of vulgar male extremism and its bloody mayhems and a cult of terror (F manifesto)

- (33) Sextremism is a **non-violent but highly aggressive** form of provocation (F manifesto)

The training that FEMEN activists undergo is designed to help them fight back against security or police attempting to remove them or cover them up, once the latter have already physically touched them. FEMEN situate violence as only physical contact, excluding verbal or visual

aspects from this definition, articulating these latter aspects as ‘aggression’ instead. This bodily construction of violence is consistent with their biological categorisation of women and oppression and allows FEMEN to use violent language coherently because there is no physical contact of bodies, such as the vulgar language aimed at Vladimir Putin and the Catholic Church.

The consistent conceptual metaphor that helps to structure FEMEN’s discourse is LIBERATION IS WAR. A conceptual metaphor is ‘one that identifies a pattern of thought from a number of actual instances of metaphor’ (Charteris-Black, 2011: 2). Conceptual metaphors are useful strategies for persuasive genres of text (spoken or written), as they provide an ‘anchor point’ for the audience to start from, in order to make a complex situation simple (Charteris-Black, 2011; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). We, for example, may not immediately know how to understand freedom and oppression from a feminist point of view. FEMEN provide more access to this with their metaphor LIBERATION IS WAR (ON PATRIARCHY), which links to our pre-existing knowledge of conflict: two sides, a winner (which should be FEMEN and thus women) and a loser (patriarchy), there are soldiers and weapons, it can be messy and tough, and so on.

Metaphors linking social actors with conflict can be found consistently across FEMEN’s texts, extending the metaphor in a number of directions. Firstly, patriarchy is an occupying force that must be fought against and defeated:

- (34) We live in the world of male economic, cultural and ideological **occupation** (F manifesto)
- (35) FEMEN’s Goal: Complete **victory** over patriarchy (F manifesto)
- (36) to provoke patriarchy into open **conflict** (F manifesto)
- (37) by putting these institutes through subversive trolling to force them to strategic **surrender** (F manifesto)

Secondly, during this occupation, women become hostages, which is where the split between the woman and her body occurs:

- (38) you find yourself your body’s **hostage** (F manifesto)

Thirdly, and most importantly, FEMEN become the soldiers of this feminist conflict, emphasising in particular the quality of bravery (39, 40, and 41):

- (39) FEMEN is an international women's movement of **brave** topless female activists (F manifesto)
- (40) Flower crown is a symbol of femininity and **proud insubmission**, a crown of **heroism** (F manifesto)

They are feminism's elite soldiers rather than its foot soldiers, thanks to special training (41, 42, 43, 44):

- (41) FEMEN is the **special force** of feminism, its **spearhead militant unit**, modern incarnation of fearless and free **Amazons**. (F manifesto)
- (42) to create the most influential and **combat-effective** women's union in the world (F manifesto)
- (43) Extremal nature of sextremism demonstrates **intellectual, psychological and physical superiority** of female activists from FEMEN (F manifesto)
- (44) FEMEN female activists are the women with **special training, physically and psychologically ready** (F manifesto)

Claiming physical superiority through training alone might threaten FEMEN's crafted imagery of exemplary feminine bodies, but they draw on the myth of the Amazons and their flower wreath to create a uniquely feminine elite soldier. FEMEN proudly take on the mantle of militant, aggressive feminists, a well-known construction of feminists that has been used to demonise them in the past, particularly in the news media (Rhode, 1995). Their emphasis on training could also help to mitigate any potential associations with lack of control that might come from taking on aggression and militancy by situating FEMEN within an established discourse of mental and physical conditioning.

Fourthly, the weaponry that FEMEN use is their protest form, sextremism, and its use of female breasts:

- (45) Our Mission is Protest! **Our Weapon are bare breasts!** (F manifesto)

- (46) the woman's **sexual demarche** is the key to her liberation (F manifesto)
- (47) FEMEN's **naked attacks** is a naked nerve of the historic woman-system conflict (F manifesto)
- (48) [Sextremism] is an **all-powerful demoralizing weapon** (F manifesto)

FEMEN's physical construction of violence means that it is arguably not problematic for them to verbally threaten violence towards Vladimir Putin in the Hanover Fair texts:

- (49) FEMEN calls Russia to scream "Go to hell, dictator" with all 150 millions of voices! If he will not hear that then to **send him there** against his will. (F 2.1)
- (50) Criminal prosecutions will not stop FEMEN sextremists' fight against Putin **until he is destroyed!** (F 2.5)

Moreover, the protest is called an 'attack' in all five texts, as well as the description of the protesters 'screaming' at him. The protesters were subsequently arrested, and FEMEN defend their actions by claiming freedom of speech and expression (F 2.3):

- (51) FEMEN **doesn't agree that our action was against the law**, only if German law has an article that forbid **freedom of speech!** [...] Freedom of expression! No dictatorship! (F 2.3)

Similarly, their coverage of the Tunisian protests situates the protest as 'peaceful' (examples (38) and (40) in 9) with the imprisoned activists as heroes and freedom fighters:

- (52) we hope very much that on 5th of June our **heroes** will be released [...] WE MUST SAVE OUR HEROES! [...] We ask you to join our resistance (F 3.4)
- (53) We call on world to stand up for the bravery of its **freedom fighters!** (F 3.16)

The 'peaceful' aspect of their protest is highlighted against the 'barbarism' of their imprisonment to delegitimize the Tunisian government, but nonetheless, it is only possible for FEMEN to claim peace and freedom of speech with a concept of violence which does not extend beyond physical contact.

Through FEMEN, the conflictual metaphor of LIBERATION IS WAR can be found in the newspapers, most obviously in Inna Shevchenko's self-penned piece in the Guardian, which

largely resembles their manifesto, but also in quotes from Josephine Witt in the German papers (64), below):

- (54) Femen is at war with a patriarchy that sees women as sex objects. What weapons do we have? Our bare breasts
[...]
Femen is our attempt at rethinking the history of feminism in its entirety. We believe that if women are left with little more than satisfying sexual desires as a life purpose, then our sexuality must become politicised. We are not denying our potential to be treated as sex objects. On the contrary, we are taking our sexuality into our own hands, turning it against our enemy. We are transforming female sexual subordination into aggression, and thereby starting the real war. (F G 3.1)

8.3 Style, Substance and Shock Value I: Newspapers

The justification for FEMEN's protest method in their own texts comes almost entirely from their manifesto. In the texts about the protests, the descriptions of their protesters or protests as 'topless' is variable: no mention is made of Witt being topless during the Cologne Cathedral protest; the Hanover Fair protest is once called a 'topless attack' on Putin. By contrast, the information becomes much more salient in the texts covering the Tunisian protest, as FEMEN repeatedly situate this particular protest as the first of its kind in a Muslim country:

- (55) Today, FEMEN activists held their first topless protest in an Islamic state. (F 3.1)

Despite the theoretical grounding of their protest method, FEMEN still appear to be drawing on the sensational aspects of the protest method in practice, demonstrating an awareness of established news values. In their book, they situate their protest method historically as an attempt to attract more media attention and theoretically as an expression of the liberated woman (FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014); in their protest texts, they continue to endeavour to balance the two.

All articles in all papers make some form of linguistic reference to the topless nature of FEMEN's protests. This is most often in connection to descriptions of the actions of the

protest, but sometimes is done through the nomination of the protesters; this is another form of somatisation, referring to the protesters through their bodies, although it also occurs in combination with gendered classification (57, 58), functionalisation (59) and membership classification (56). In (56), Witt is entirely reduced down to her topless 'state':

- (56) Liebe Femen-Nackte im Dom (F B 2.2)
- (57) Da kommen die barbusigen Damen aus dem Westen (F S 3.4)
- (58) the three topless women (F DM 2.1)
- (59) Topless protesters confront Vladimir Putin and Angela Merkel (F Tel 7.2)

Representation of social action is also key to foregrounding the topless aspect of the protests. The protest action is nominalised and then modified with various references, through somatisation, to breasts, toplessness, semi or even full nakedness:

barbusige Protestaktion	<i>Spiegel, Welt</i>
barbusiger Protest	<i>Spiegel, Welt</i>
Busen-Skandal	<i>Bild</i>
halbnackter Altar-Sprung	<i>Spiegel</i>
Nackt-Protest	<i>all German</i>
Oben-Ohne-Protest	<i>all German</i>
topless protest	<i>all UK</i>

Table 1: Somatisation of FEMEN's Protests in the German and UK Newspapers

Similarly, the topless nature of the protest is displayed through adverbs:

- (60) Vergangenen Mittwoch **protestierten sie** vor eben jenem Justizpalastoben **oben ohne** für die Freilassung der tunesischen Femen-Aktivistin Amina (F B 1.1)
- (61) Kurz nach Beginn der Weihnachtsmesse im Kölner Dom stürmt eine Aktivistin der Frauengruppe Femen aus der ersten Reihe nach vorne und **springt nackt** auf den Altar. (F taz 6.1)

There are various different aspects of the protests that could be highlighted through linguistic reference, such as the location (e.g. Tunesienprotest), the time (e.g. Weihnachtsprotest), the group carrying out the protest (e.g. Femen-Protest), the aim of the protest (e.g. Abtreibungsprotest) or the wider feminist context of the group (e.g. feministischer Protest).

The method of the protest, instead, is consistently given prominence. This in itself would not be problematic, as the topless protest method gives a clear entry into the world view of FEMEN and their bodily view of female oppression, but this connection is rarely made in the papers and when it is present, it is left to the interviews rather than the direct reporting of events (see following chapter).

Activated representations of the protest bring to the fore the imagery of breasts that are naked and the act of exposure, which potentially adds an element of sexualisation that FEMEN are overtly attempting to challenge. The protesters' topless protest state is highlighted or contrasted against their previous clothed state:

- (65) Sie trugen **nichts außer Shorts und Transparenten**. (F S 3.1)
- (66) Bis zum Beginn des katholischen Gottesdienstes saß Witt nach Polizeiangaben **mit einem Ledermantel, einem Kleid und Kopftuch bekleidet** (F S 4.1)
- (67) Die damals 20-Jährige saß am ersten Weihnachtsfeiertag 2013 **in einem Ledermantel und mit Kopftuch bedeckt** in der ersten Reihe (F taz 6.5)
- (68) Feminist protesters strip off in Tunisia; The trio, one German and two French, approached the entrance to the ministry **wearing coats which they took off** (F DM 2.1)

The physical act of removing their clothing is described; in the UK papers this is often referenced with the verb 'to strip', which can have sexual connotations:

- (69) als eine junge Frau aus der ersten Reihe auf ihn zustürmt und **sich das Oberteil vom Leib reißt** (F B 2.1)
- (70) The activist was with two other women who also **stripped to the waist** (F Ind 6.1)
- (71) They **stripped off to the waist** (F DM 1.1)
- (72) Three Femen activists **disrobed** in front of the ministry of justice (F G 4.1)

Subsequent attempts to cover them up are also present:

- (73) Eine Frau und ein Mann versuchten, die nackten Oberkörper **mit den eigenen Jacken zu bedecken**. (F B 1.1)
- (74) They stripped to the waist and shouted slogans calling the Russian leader a "dictator" before **being covered up** and bundled away by security men. (F Ind 5.1)

The provocative and therefore newsworthy nature of the protests is at times broached in the newspapers, articulated as a form of ‘attention seeking’:

- (75) Regelmäßig **sorgt Femen-Aktivistin Josephine Markmann** mit ihren Aktionen **für Aufsehen**. [...] Seit Anfang dieses Jahres ist Josephine Markmann [...] bei den Frauenrechtsaktivistinnen von Femen aktiv. Seitdem **sorgte die Hamburger Philosophiestudentin immer wieder für Schlagzeilen**. (F taz 6.2)
- (76) Das Markenzeichen der Femen sind kurze Parolen auf blanker Haut. Was in der Regel **große Aufmerksamkeit nach sich zieht**. (F W 8.1)
- (77) In Europa sind ihnen Coups gelungen, doch bald dürfte der Abnutzungseffekt eintreten. In arabischen Ländern hingegen scheint **das Schockpotential noch groß**. (F S 3.4)

Clearly, FEMEN are seeking to provoke, it is a central premise of their protest method. They do so within a discourse of female bodily oppression and ideas about where and when the naked female body is “appropriate”, that is, sexualised, objectified and largely in private, and certainly not with political agency. In the newspapers, there is a systematic failure to connect these threads together and ask the question of why their protest method gets attention, provokes interest and is shocking and newsworthy. Josephine Witt’s quote in example (59) in Chapter 7 comes close to exploring this viewpoint with a comparison of the acceptability of Jesus topless on the cross with the unacceptability of her protest; however, this occurs within a vehement and angry rejection of her protest by two journalists in the paper (see Chapter 9) and earns no further attention. This is supported by previous research that has found more radical feminist views are rarely found in mainstream newspapers, with individualised perspectives and views that are less challenging to social and global structures preferred instead (Dean, 2010; Mendes, 2011a).

The shock value of FEMEN’s protests is also conveyed in different ways in the Hanover Fair and Cologne Cathedral protest coverage, both of which contribute to trivialisation of FEMEN’s protest through a superficial engagement with their protest method. Firstly, Cardinal Meisner turned 80 on the same day as the protest, a fact which supposedly added to the sensational aspect of the protest, demonstrated through the term ‘ausgerechnet an’, and the ironic reference to a ‘Geburtstagsüberraschung’:

- (78) Busen-Skandal am Altar – ausgerechnet am ersten Weihnachtsfeiertag, ausgerechnet bei einer Messe mit Joachim Kardinal Meisner an dessen 80. Geburtstag. (F B 2.1)
- (79) Schockierender Moment für Kölns Kardinal: Ausgerechnet an dessen Geburtstag sprang vor seinen Augen [...] eine nackte Femen-Aktivistin (F S 4.1);
Für den bald aus seinem Amt scheidenden Kölner Kardinal Meisner, der die Messe las, war der Zwischenfall eine denkwürdige Geburtstagsüberraschung (F S 4.2)
- (80) Ausgerechnet an Meisners Geburtstag (F taz 6 .1)
- (81) Die Aktivistin Witt war ausgerechnet am 80. Geburtstag von Kardinal Joachim Meisner halbnackt auf den Altar gesprungen (F W 8.4)

Secondly, Vladimir Putin's reaction to the protest was a clear reference point for the UK newspapers. There appears to be no clear consensus even within the same article on his immediate reaction to the protest: bemused or amused (82) or startled (83) or one of enjoyment of the spectacle of the topless protest (82-85), which the Telegraph (F Tel 7.1) also describes as showing 'a flash of his well-known salty humour':

- (82) Bemused Vladimir Putin and Angela Merkel confronted by topless Femen protester in Hanover;
Vladimir Putin appears to have at last found a form of anti-government protest that he can support;
the woman tried to push her way through to an amused-looking Mr Putin (F Tel 7.1)
- (83) That's an eye-opener for Putin!;
Mr Putin looked startled three members of the women's rights group Femen;
a smiling Putin shrugged off the protest (F DM 1.1)
- (84) Putin laughs off topless protest
"Regarding this performance, I liked it," grinned Putin (F Ind 5.1)
- (85) In what will likely be judged one of the most prominent news pictures of 2013, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin [...] seems to push his chest out, raise his eyebrows and purse his lips, producing a double chinmed smirk (F G 3.1)

The protest is also trivialised through wordplay (83), typical of a tabloid newspaper, and irony (82). His facial reaction was something that was also a particularly popular point of discussion in the BTL comments, while disregarding other political commentary:

- (86) Dunno which face cracks me up most here - Putin's or Merkel's - one chuffed and one extremely not chuffed! (F DM BTL 1.1)

- (87) i do like putins face
don't look down, don't look down don't look etc etc (F G BTL 3.1)

8.4 Style, Substance and Shock Value II: BTL Comments

The protest method is the aspect of FEMEN's discourse that is the most conflicted in the BTL comments and provokes the widest range of opinions, the majority of which are negative. Rejection of FEMEN's protest method occurs along a number of lines, some of which I have already covered, such as the image of the protesters and the claims that it is counter-productive and self-sexualising. The relation of shock value and the effectiveness of the protest features prominently in the BTL comments, which I now discuss.

One delegitimation of FEMEN's protest method is the claim that their protest method, the bare breasts in particular, distracts from the message that they are trying to convey:

- (88) Ein T-Shirt mit den Femen-Sprüchen hätte es doch auch getan. So liest keiner die Sprüche und glotzt nur auf die Titten. (F B BTL 1.2)
- (89) To be completely honest, whenever I see one of you guys, my eyes get fixed on your breasts and completely miss everything else. (F G BTL 3.1)

The 'slippery slope' argument focuses on the sexual articulation of breasts by anticipating increasingly sexualised protests because shock value wears off over time:

- (90) Ausserdem, welche Blüten soll der Kampf gegen das Patriarchat/ die Unterdrückung der Frau noch treiben: Live-Wet-T-shirt-Contest...Live-Damen-SchlammcatchenLive-Paarung auf dem Altar? (F W BTL 7.3)
- (91) The next step may be 9 inch strap ons when the patriarchs become used to the tit thing. Here's hoping, though I think the targets may like it. (F G BTL 3.1)

Similarly, some commenters also reject FEMEN for not going "far enough" in their bodily exposure; (92) appears more obviously to be an ironic comment, rather than a genuine exhortation to remove more clothing, but the rejection of female bodies as political bodies remains the same:

- (92) wenn schon denn schon auch die höschen runter. (F B BTL 1.4)
- (93) Why stop at tits? Get stark naked if you are convinced that nudity somehow helps your cause although I'll be damned if I can see how. It just does not make any sense. (F G BTL 3.1)

On the other side of the coin, the shock value of the protests wearing off is represented through negative evaluation of the protests being old or boring, drawing on linguistic representations of time (van Leeuwen, 2008):

- (94) Und ich sage ganz eindeutig: Gääähnn.....**laaangweilig**..... [...] Liebe Femen-Aktivistinnen, entweder Ihr denkt euch jetzt bitte mal **was Neues** aus oder Ihr schickt mal ein paar neue Mädels raus..... (F S BTL 3.1)
- (95) This kind of protest makes no sense to me. In fact, it's getting **kind of old**. (F DM BTL 1.1)

The shock value of the protest form is sometimes also related to constructions of time and its relation to fashion, with disagreement whether the protest form is something of a fad, and therefore contemporary but also fleeting and time-bound (96, 97), or if it is in fact 'nothing new' (98, 99):

- (96) Aber mit nackten Brüsten gegen Sexismus zu protestieren, scheint **momentan in Mode zu sein** - und wird als cool verkauft. (F taz BTL 5.2)
- (97) The suffragettes had dignity and style, and won through courage that gained respect. **This fad** seems very poor stuff by comparison. (F G BTL 3.1)
- (98) Ist ja **nicht ganz neu**.. die Nummer mit den nackten Titten... (F taz BTL 5.1)
- (99) It's **nothing new** to use your breasts to sellout (F G BTL 3.1)

Location (van Leeuwen, 2008), instead of time, plays a role in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the protest form, particularly when comparing Europe or 'the West' against Tunisia and 'other Muslim countries' during coverage of the Tunisian protest. Again, there is disagreement over whether this form of protest is too shocking (100, 101), and therefore ineffective, or just shocking enough to be productive in Tunisia (102, 103). This relates, too, to the delegitimation of FEMEN on the grounds that they needed to respect cultural differences in other countries that I covered in Chapter 7.

- (100) Man kann nicht in allen Ländern/Kulturen mit den gleichen Mitteln kämpfen. Was in dem einen Land funktioniert bewirkt in einem anderen Land das völlige Gegenteil. (F S BTL 2.2)
- (101) They're trying to run before they can walk. Too much for this country [Tunisia]. They should protest in a more modest way to start with as it would probably help their cause more than this extreme overexposure. (F DM BTL 2.1)
- (102) Oben ohne im linksliberalen Berlin ist weder mutig noch protest noch irgendwie produktiv. In Tunis können sie die patriachalische Gesellschaft bekämpfen, in Berlin gehören sie zum Etablissment. (F taz BTL 4.2)
- (103) i can understand the shock value of females in places like saudi arabia etc using their breasts as a means to liberate themselves from the oppressive customs placed upon them -- but in the western world, bare breasts are just not shocking at all. (F G BTL 3.1)

In the examples above, the value of topless protest in Tunisia is compared to the ineffectiveness of the protest method in the West (102, 103) because it is no longer shocking; the commenter in (103) later links it to the accessibility of pornography over the internet⁶⁶. Others express a contrasting view that breasts remain shocking in the countries of origin of the discussion (Germany and the UK); however, shock value does not necessarily translate to effectiveness of the form:

- (104) Ich finde, diese femen Bewegung nutzt sich ab. Mit Brüsten allein gewinnt man halt auch keine Inhalte, sondern nur Aufmerksamkeit - war so, ist so, bleibt so! (F S 3.1)
- (105) I was challenging the point you made that bare breasts in public are not shocking. They clearly are.

But I agree that for the message which femen are trying to get across, I don't think this is the best kind of shock. (F G BTL 3.1)

In support of FEMEN, however, are BTL commenters who emphasise the political aim of sextremism. For them, FEMEN are effective because they fulfil their aim of being provocative and provide a starting point for discussion, or draw attention to an issue:

- (106) Die Aktivistin wird für ihren Regelbruch den Preis bezahlen müssen und wird ihn auch zuvor einkalkuliert haben. So weit, so gut.

Die Provokation war jedoch kein Selbstzweck. **Es gehört zum Wesen und Ziel einer solchen Aktion, verborgene Eigenschaften ans Licht zu bringen.** (F W BTL 7.4)

⁶⁶ See also example (84) in Chapter 9.

- (107) Der schäumende Stammtisch mitsamt seinen sexistischen Möchtegernmachos und reaktionären RKK-Hardlinern ist Beleg dafür, daß **die Aktion sowohl notwendig als auch erfolgreich war.** (F S BTL 3.1)
- (108) Newsflash - most activists who do street protests or demo's don't get much done in terms radically reforming certain problems. But it's important **to keep the pressure up to remind us all of how unfair and cruel this world is to the disempowered.** (F G BTL 3.1)
- (109) [E]ssentially it is **an admonishment that the patriarchy will only see the nudity and not the message.** They daub their bodies with simple slogans and the press takes pictures because they are nude, but ultimately that does not then erase what is written on them. The politician subjected to the protest does not mention the slogan only references the female nudity, so each incident exposes subtly the attitude and easy dismissal of women by those in power. **The ultimate aim is to continually expose this until critical questioning of this attitude becomes the consensus.** (F G BTL 3.1)

This point about attention-seeking is developed ironically in the German BTL comments with the observation that the coverage gained from the Tunisian protest will secure professional benefits, presumably for the German protester Witt:

- (110) Ist doch bestens gelaufen für das Mädcl. Jetzt sitzt sie erst mal die 4 Monate ab (für arabische Verhältnisse eine sehr milde Strafe), wahrscheinlich zu Vorzugsbedingungen und noch wahrscheinlicher kaum mehr als zur Hälfte, und schon kann sie sich hier als Märtyrerin und weiblicher Mandela mausig machen, wird in Talk-Shows herumgereicht, schreibt ein Buch (oder läßt es schreiben) und **die anschließende Traumkarriere als Berufsfeministin - aka "Gender-Wissenschaftlerin" - ist so gut wie gesichert.** (F taz BTL 4.2)
- (111) Die mediale Aufmerksamkeit haben sie schon ! Vom Prozess wird auch groß berichtet .Und nach dem Jahr Knast schreiben sie ein Buch (mein Leben im islamischen Knast) und werden steinreich . **Hupen raus und Karriere machen .** (F B BTL 1.1)

FEMEN's aim for media attention, in particular, is also negatively constructed as attention-seeking without political content:

- (112) Daran sieht man, dass die Aktionen der Femen **reine Selbstdarstellungsaktionen** sind. Ohne Sinn und Verstand und ohne irgendwie auf den sozialen und gesellschaftlichen Kontext einzugehen. (F S BTL 2.4)
- (113) They are **just looking for attention** for themselves, if they were serious about their causes, they would know this is not the way to "protest". (F DM BTL 1.1)

In contrast to the negative construction of the hashtag feminists as “clicktivists” and online protest as worthless, BTL commenters praise FEMEN for being active and doing something other than sit at the computer:

- (114) Finde ich weitaus lobenswerter als Oberlehrer-Kommentare vom PC aus zu schreiben. (F W BTL 6.3)
- (115) Love these women. They have real nerve while the rest of us just moan to the DM. (F DM BTL 1.1)

After the Tunisian protest, the three FEMEM members were sentenced under a decency law, prompting a discussion about men and the German law of exhibitionism. In this discussion, which drifted from engagement with FEMEN directly, this law was framed as sexist because it only applies to men and therefore does not apply to FEMEN if they were to protest in Germany (116). In a similar vein, and more generally, commenters claimed that FEMEN are able to carry out their protests only because they are female, or are at the very least treated more leniently (116, 117). This is the most consistent example of where FEMEN were brought into a discourse of sexism; the group themselves were not accused of sexism in the same way as the hashtag feminist groups.

- (116) "Exhibitionisten in der BRD werden auch bestraft"..
..aber nur wenn Sie dem männlichen Geschlecht angehören. Soviel zur Gleichberechtigung in UNSEREM Land. (F W BTL 6.1)
- (117) A man behaving like the members of FEMEN do would probably get shot for his trouble, and no one would care. (F G BTL 3.1)

8.5 Protest Form: Discussion

FEMEN develop on the nodal points of “the female body”, “oppression” and “patriarchy” through the discursive construction of their protest method, known as sextremism. Having already located the female body as the main site of patriarchal oppression, FEMEN then locate the female body as the main site of liberation, with liberation in clear opposition to oppression. FEMEM members are the leaders of this struggle for liberation, regaining control of their bodies and thereby fighting patriarchy. Rather than being divorced from their bodies,

as women are under patriarchal oppression, their bodies transcend them and come to stand for all women and therefore “embody” women’s liberation. The biological construction of women is evident in their topless protest method, and they achieve their universal construction of women through both biology, the exposure of breasts, and through the specific body image of the protesters. As ‘recognisable’ bodies (Reestorff, 2014), they stand for the sexualised female body but these bodies are removed from a discourse where they are passive and sexually available and articulated into the discourse of sextremism where they are active and aggressive. This aggression is reinforced through the sustained metaphor of war that FEMEN use to construct the struggle against patriarchy: protesters are elite soldiers; patriarchy is the illegitimate invading force. They develop their own specific discourse of war, however, dividing violence and peace along biological lines and emphasising the femininity of their own soldiers. In this way, sextremism is central to FEMEN’s radical politics, creating new connections for the ‘sexist’ female body in our current time⁶⁷.

Sextremism is the heart of FEMEN’s radical politics, and it is radical because it is articulated within the wider political project of feminism and is considered by FEMEN to be their form of both challenging patriarchy and global consciousness raising. #Aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project’s radical politics comes from mass voices acting as a large consciousness-raising group where other women, and men, are invited to join in the process; FEMEN work more as feminist leaders or feminist examples, perhaps even feminist sacrifices considering the physical and legal consequences of their protests. In this way, sextremism creates dislocations and new articulations along a number of lines that are different to the hashtag feminist groups.

As I explained in the literature review, Dean (2009) identifies an ‘ossified’ view of radical feminist politics as only possible through public protests, anti-statism and female-only spaces. Well-established and pervasive negative images of feminists as strident, angry, ugly and hairy are also well documented and feed into this same image (Rhode, 1995; Scharff, 2012). These can be considered in discourse theoretical terms as sedimented discourses, or at least subject to processes of sedimentation. Sextremism more clearly “fits” the image of feminist protest

⁶⁷ Although, of course, they did not invent topless protest and it is not limited to Europe (Jacobs, 2016; Salime, 2014).

compared to the technologically-driven protest of the hashtag feminist groups; to reinforce this point, and as I explain in more detail in the following chapter, FEMEN are also more clearly accepted into the chronology of feminist history by BTL commenters. Through sextremism, FEMEN break apart sedimented discourses around feminism by challenging the equivocation of “feminist” with “ugly” and “hairy” and by articulating in their conventionally attractive bodies that are hairless in the right places – armpits, legs but still with long hair on their heads. At the same time, they retain the equivocation of “feminist” with “angry” and “militant” but also articulate it into a positive discourse that validates and celebrates female anger with conceptual metaphors of war and vulgar and aggressive language. This is not to say that FEMEN are the only group that have done or do this, but they receive the most mainstream media coverage, which is significant considering the importance of the mainstream media in communicating events and ideas to the wider public.

While FEMEN challenge postfeminist discourse by affirming that feminism is necessary and relevant, their bodies do not challenge the postfeminist image of a female body. This is picked up by BTL commenters in a way that their challenge to the negative image of a feminist body is not. Their slim, white bodies match those identified in postfeminist advertising that I covered in Chapter 2 (Gill, 2007; Lazar, 2009; McRobbie, 2009); FEMEN attempt to make this body political through its positioning in public spaces, as a form of protest, painted with vulgar and/or feminist slogans and they rely on its ‘recognisability’, that is, the sedimented discourse of the acceptable female body, as a key part of the dislocation.

In the newspapers, the topless protest method is foregrounded above all other aspects of FEMEN’s discourse, through various linguistic strategies such as the representation of the protest action and the naming of the protesters. The newsworthiness of the shock value of the protests is not a surprise given existing news values; however, the coverage tends towards sexualisation of the protesters by emphasising the act of exposure and reports on the shocked reactions of others present at the protest. What is missing in the news reporting is an interrogation of why topless protest is shocking. The interviews provide more of an insight into FEMEN’s discursive construction of protest and protesters, through the words of FEMEN themselves, but this requires engagement from the reader to get beyond the initial shock value and sexualisation in the news reporting. It is evident that FEMEN’s radical politics

struggle, despite FEMEN's engagement with the mainstream media, to gain traction in the news reporting because the protest method is implicitly constructed as a titillating experience rather than as a vehicle for social change.

BTL commenters also focus most clearly on the protest method, with a wide range of discursive constructions, ranging from trivialisation of the method through puns and sexualisation of the protesters by evaluating their bodies, to legitimating the method as radical and powerful, reflecting the same views as FEMEN express in their manifesto. Again, similar to the newspapers, the radical politics of the topless female body is much less visible, as FEMEN are often dismissed as attention seekers or too shocking without questioning why they might gain attention or be shocking. When FEMEN are articulated into a discourse of sexism, it is to claim that they are treated more leniently than men would be if they protested in the same way, or naked, in public; while this may or may not be true, the question of *why* this might be treated more leniently is largely untouched.

The lack of travel of FEMEN's neologism 'sextremism' demonstrates the relative failure, so far, of FEMEN's radical political project, or at the very least the barriers that they face. Their protest form needs more explanation than the stories of the hashtag feminist groups, which are more obviously an affront to common moral and social standards. The stories can be picked up and placed into news articles with little explanation and the overall sense as an anti-sexism campaign is reasonably clear, if not fleshed out and fully articulated as a radical, collective feminist project. This is demonstrated further by the fact that comment sections organically become a continued site of the same kind of protest. A description of FEMEN's actions or a picture of their protest action, although I do not cover multimodal analysis, is not enough to convey their message, particularly when the descriptions in the news media emphasise sexualisation. Sextremism is designed to be a form of consciousness raising amongst women because it highlights the patriarchal control over female bodies. Patriarchal control is demonstrated by FEMEN protesters when they place themselves in situations where their bodies are not supposed to be, but also by the subsequent removal and repudiation of those bodies, by their censorship. The problem for FEMEN is that this dislocation fails when people agree with that censorship. This is largely the case in the BTL

comments when commenters reject and delegitimize protesters for being over the top, hypocritical or even outdated.

9 FEMEN: Individuals and Collectivity

In this final results chapter, I turn to the third set of research questions and explore the tension around individuals and collectivity in FEMEN's discourse and its subsequent negotiation in the newspapers and BTL comments; some of these tensions have already been discussed or touched upon in previous chapters, such as the universal construction of woman and oppression and the individual voices of FEMEN in the papers. This chapter is split into four sections: in the first, I cover FEMEN in their feminist context; in the second, I cover the particular issue that FEMEN have as elite representatives of women; in the third, I address the relationship between anti-feminism and criticism of FEMEN in the newspapers; and, finally, the fourth section covers the naming strategies used for FEMEN in BTL comments.

9.1 The Spearhead Militant Unit of Feminism

In their manifesto, as discussed in Chapter 8, FEMEN describe themselves as the 'spearhead militant unit' of feminism and the 'special force' of feminism and FEMEN members are the trained soldiers of this special force. FEMEN not only take on the identity of feminists, but they take on the identity of the militant and aggressive feminist, which has historically been vilified. They situate themselves as one 'unit', one part of feminism, but at no point in their texts do they reference what the other units might be. That being said, situating of FEMEN members as specifically elite means that by implication the other forms of feminist protest are potentially "lesser". Elsewhere, FEMEN have openly eschewed established academic approaches to feminism and feminist theory (FEMEN & Ackerman, 2014), preferring to re-invent feminist protest, so this isolation is not surprising. This perhaps also explains their emphasis on contemporaneity and modernity in their construction of the struggle against patriarchal oppression.

Important for the coverage of FEMEN in the newspapers is the contextualisation of the group. This is crucial for understanding FEMEN, particularly when their aims and objectives can be so broad and their protest targets so varied but they operate within one reasonably simple world view. FEMEN present a considerable challenge to dominant postfeminist and

domesticated feminist discourses (Dean, 2010; Mendes, 2012) in the mainstream news media by articulating a radical view of a patriarchy which carries out the universal oppression of women. Their world view necessitates collective action and rejects that oppression of women can be pushed into distinct, non-Western locations (Baer, 2016). That being said, knowledge of FEMEN's world view comes through accumulative knowledge of multiple texts (their protest texts, their manifesto and other output such as social media) and a willingness to engage with their problematising of the sexualised female body through topless protest.

I have already covered how the protest aim and the protest action are not always closely linked together, sometimes at opposite ends of a news article or entirely absent, for example, in coverage of the Cologne Cathedral protest. This particular protest is also sometimes named as something "other than" a protest, such as 'der Zwischenfall', although the other two protests in this study are openly named protests. FEMEN's particular articulation of feminist protest, 'sextremism', also does not travel well outside of their texts. In place of 'sextremist', protesting FEMEN members are named instead as 'activists'/'Aktivistinnen' or 'feminists'/'Feministinnen' and 'FrauenrechterInnen', with the former 'Aktivistin' much more common than the latter. FEMEN, as an organisation, are also situated as a feminist or women's right group. Infrequently, they are located in the Ukraine, or internationally; in one article (F DM 2.1), both locations are used, indicating that provenance of the group itself is not a particularly strong marker of identity in the papers, similar to FEMEN themselves.

[eine] ursprünglich ukrainisch[e], inzwischen jedoch längst international agierenden, feministisch[e] Protestgruppe	<i>Welt</i>
Die ukrainische Frauengruppe Femen	<i>Welt</i>
feministische Organisation	<i>Spiegel</i>
Frauengruppe FEMEN	<i>taz, Welt</i>
Frauenrechtsorganisation	<i>all German</i>

Table 1: Feminist Nominations of FEMEN in the German Newspapers

international feminist group FEMEN	<i>Daily Mail</i>
the feminist group Femen	<i>Telegraph, Guardian</i>
the women's rights group Femen	<i>Daily Mail, Independent</i>
Ukraine's FEMEN group	<i>Telegraph</i>
Ukrainian feminist group FEMEN	<i>Daily Mail, Guardian</i>

Table 2: Feminist Nominations of FEMEN in the UK Newspapers

In the newspapers, FEMEN are almost never connected to other feminist groups or contemporary feminist activity or discussions, the exception being the vehement criticism from Tunisian feminist Maya Jribi published in *Spiegel*, which I return to below. What is noticeable is that FEMEN are more often named as feminists than in the news coverage of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project. FEMEN do more explicitly take on a feminist identity, but FEMEN also more obviously fit the established discourse of radical feminism, such as the kind highlighted by Dean (2009), with their public street protests and the established stereotype of the angry, militant feminist.

FEMEN's protests are often linked to other protests that have taken place. In my corpus, however, the kind of context is never one that contextualises their protest method with other manifestations of topless protests, or other contemporary feminist protest. In the Hanover Fair coverage, FEMEN's protest is linked to other anti-Putin protests, either at the Fair itself (1) or in other countries that Putin visited within the same time period (2); similarly, criticisms of treatment of NGOs in Russia from German Chancellor Angela Merkel and 'strained' German-Russian relations (3, but also in the *Telegraph* 7.1 and *Daily Mail* 1.1) serve to situate FEMEN within a broader negative evaluation of Putin. Here, the higher profiles of the world leaders Putin and Merkel and news values that prioritise well known and powerful social actors come into play. This prioritisation is also evident in the ways that Putin's reaction or Cardinal Meisner's birthday become newsworthy in the UK and German papers, respectively, as discussed in Chapter 8.

- (1) The Russian leader's arrival at the trade fair on Sunday also **drew protesters**, some of whom were dressed in striped prison uniforms. 'Stop political terror,' read one banner. (F DM 1.1)
- (2) After visiting Germany, he travelled to the Netherlands, where he faced **protests from gay rights activists**, who blew whistles and played loud dance music outside his meeting with the Dutch prime minister. (F Tel 7.3)
- (3) Putin and Merkel, who also held talks in Hanover on Sunday, want to further boost booming economic ties but the **German leader also repeated her concerns about human rights in Russia** after raids by Russian authorities on German and other non-governmental organisations based in the country. (F Ind 5.1)

Most often, FEMEN are contextualised within their own chronological history. This is done through the use of dates or time periods:

- (4) Femen wurde **vor fünf Jahren** in der Ukraine gegründet und ist **seit 2012** auch in Deutschland aktiv. (F B 1.14)
- (5) Gegründet **2008**, wurde Femen mit Oben-ohne-Attacken gegen Sextourismus bei der **Fußball-EM 2012** europaweit bekannt. (F W 7.1)
- (6) Femen was founded in Kiev **in 2008** to protest against Ukraine's booming sex industry. (F DM 1.1)
- (7) The group has been protesting topless **since 2010** (F Tel 7.3)

In the Daily Mail coverage of the Hanover Fair protest, just under half of the article is a list of FEMEN's past protests which demonstrates the geographical range of FEMEN, who the author of the article claims has '150,000 members' worldwide. The purpose of the individual protests is included inconsistently (such as, in example (9) but not (8)), as opposed to the time and location which form the main structure of each protest:

- (8) In September last year Military Police in Rio de Janeiro arrested two women protesting topless on the Esplanade of Ministries during the country's Independence Day parades. (F DM 1.1)
- (9) In February last year the protest group clashed with Italian police during Milan Fashion Week after a demonstration against the use of anorexic models.
[...]
A similar protest⁶⁸ was held in January in the Swiss resort of Davos in January, where the World Economic Forum held its annual meeting. (F DM 1.1)

Josephine Witt, native German and the most high profile FEMEN member in my newspaper corpus, took part in all of the protests. In the German papers, when she is singled out, she is put into the context of her own historical protests:

- (10) Seit Anfang des Jahres ist sie bei Femen aktiv, hat oben ohne in Berlin bereits gegen die NPD protestiert und stürmte in Hannover mit "Fuck Putin"-Spruch auf den Brüsten auf Russlands Präsidenten los. (F S 3.4)

⁶⁸ In (9), the purpose of the two protests were different (the protest in Davos was against the elitism of global finance and against poverty), so 'similar' here could refer to the topless protest method, the specific women involved, or the 'clashes' with police.

- (11) Ende Oktober störte sie eine Rede des Hamburger Bürgermeisters Olaf Scholz über Flüchtlingspolitik. (F W 8.2)
- (12) Mit der auf den Bauch gepinselten Parole „Blut & Spiele“ und im Fußballmuster bemalten Brüsten war sie zuletzt Mitte Dezember aus Protest gegen die Herren-Fußballweltmeisterschaft 2022 in Katar uneingeladen in der ZDF-Talkshow „Markus Lanz“ aufgetreten. (F taz 6.2)

Through one-on-one interviews with Witt, as well as self-penned pieces from other FEMEN members, readers can learn about FEMEN's feminist stance: that they use their bodies in defiance of established feminine norms and that they are politicising their female sexuality through protest, but this requires a reasonable level of effort and investment on behalf of the reader and is not clear from one article alone. Josephine Witt in particular provides a "hook" for personalisation of FEMEN in the German papers. Through interviews with and quotes from Witt, FEMEN's self-representation as the physical embodiment of female oppression comes to light (62, 63), the 'weaponised' nature of their bodily politics (64), and their universal view of female bodily oppression (62):

- (62) „Den Oberkörper frei zu machen, ist ein unmittelbarer Akt der Befreiung: „Hier ist mein bares Ich, unverfälscht und gewaltfrei.“ Wir reduzieren uns nur auf unser Frausein. [...] Wir stellen Zusammenhänge her, die weltweite Ungerechtigkeiten zeigen. [...] Die Brüste gelten dabei als Symbol der Befreiung, das alle Frauen verbindet.“ (F taz 6.4)
- (63) „Ich halte mich nicht für Gott, das war natürlich eine Provokation. Sie soll zeigen, dass wir alle selbst verantwortlich für unser Handeln auf Erden sind. Dass man keiner Frau verbieten kann, über ihren eigenen Körper Entscheidungen zu treffen.“ (F S 4.3)
- (64) „Etwas muss man der Öffentlichkeit geben, wenn man eine Botschaft verbreiten will. Bei uns ist es der Körper. Wir benutzen ihn als Waffe für unseren Protest.“ (F B 1.6)

In ways that are not present in FEMEN's own texts or in the newspaper coverage, BTL commenters articulate FEMEN in a historical feminist context, explicitly linking them to the two previous traditional waves, with 'suffragettes' and 'bra burning' standing in for the first and second wave, respectively. Whether a positive or negative comparison, FEMEN's protest form plays a large role in this historical feminist articulation.

Starting chronologically, FEMEN are linked to the British suffragettes through their defiant public protests, particularly relevant when the three FEMEN protesters are imprisoned in Tunisia. They can be explicitly supported as a form of 'modern day' suffragette:

- (13) Femen sind **das beste seit den Suffragetten!** [...] Das **auch** die Femen Aktivistinnen bereit sind in arabische! Gefängnisse zu gehen, ihre Heimat (evtl. für immer) zu verlassen, ihr Leben in die Wagschale zu werfen, nötigt Respekt ab. (F taz BTL 5.2)
- (14) All are equal these ladies are very brave [...] history will prove them to be **suffragettes of their time and culture.** (F DM BTL 1.1)

Other BTL commenters draw comparisons between reactions to the British suffragettes and reactions to FEMEN. Although these are not always explicitly supportive of FEMEN, they are nevertheless using an analogy to a group of historical feminists whose objective – suffrage for women – was achieved and is now entirely common sense, but who were also ridiculed and imprisoned at the time:

- (15) Und **sie werden wie jene unterschätzt.** Zumindest am Anfang. **Die Suffragetten gingen in Massen!** in englische Gefängnisse, führten Hungerstreiks durch, nahmen Zwangsernährung in Kauf. Sie waren bereit, stolz durchs kalte Gelächter des Patriarchats zu laufen. Verhöhnt in den Medien, beschimpft, bespuckt, verprügelt auf den Straßen. (F taz BTL 5.4)
- (16) [I think the whole thing is shrill, vulgar, unintelligent counter-productive, exhibitionist and ridiculous. but that's just me. (F G BTL 3.1)]
- just what they said about the suffragettes.** (F G BTL 3.1)

Others invoke the suffragettes positively to then negatively construct FEMEN, with the comparison resting on the perceived seriousness or reasonableness of the suffragettes' campaign and the perceived frivolity, hypocrisy or pointlessness of FEMEN's campaign (also (23), as well as (97) in Chapter 8); in this way, the suffragettes may have benefited from the passing of time, as highlighted by the previous commenters.

- (17) The Suffragettes must be turning in their graves. (G806-HF)

Second wave feminism is revived through the discourse of bra-burning, a complex image on its own (Hinds & Stacey, 2001), which suggests that it is the enduring sensational aspect of bra burning that is being revived in comparison to FEMEN's sensational topless protest form. The relationship of FEMEN to bra burning has both positive and negative sides, but the political use, in some form, of breasts is the element that connects the two:

- (18) Oh Mann (wahrscheinlich im wahrsten Sinne)! Lauter alte Säcke, die sich hier zu Kommentaren hinreißen lassen zu müssen glauben?

Mit 19 ist es durchaus angebracht, das globale Dorf verändern zu wollen. Schadet dem Feminismus? Ah, ich nehme an, **die BH-Verbrennungen Ende der sechziger** haben dem Feminismus auch geschadet, oder? Irgendwie werde ich den dumpfen Verdacht nicht los, es sind zu achtzig Prozent Männer, die glauben, die Femenproteste schaden dem Feminismus... (F S BTL 2.5)

- (19) **Burning bras in the seventies** didn't do that much.

Ultimately men and women have to come together to do anything about sexism in society.

This easily turns into a jokey story for the media. (F G BTL 3.1)

Second wave feminism might also be revived through a few references to 'radical feminism', situated as stemming from the 70s rather than referencing contemporary radical feminists. Although 'radical feminism' itself is not interrogated, the term alone is part of a sedimented historical image of feminism (Dean, 2009). These are similarly divided, although FEMEN are consistently considered to be radical feminists:

- (20) Femen sind leider die Steigerung der **Radikalfeministinnen**. Als Kind der wilden Siebziger bin ich Freikörperlichen Aktionen in keinsten Weise abgeneigt, der Kampf der tunesischen Frauen um gleiche Rechte wird dadurch in keiner Weise unterstützt. (F S BTL 2.4)
- (21) They are evolved version of **radical feminism** that surfaced in the 70's and have used the nudity as a juxtaposition against patriarchal attitudes, essentially it is an admonishment that the patriarchy will only see the nudity and not the message. (F G BTL 3.1)

FEMEN are also put into a historical context when they are made examples of the death of contemporary feminism:

- (22) Mit den meisten Spielarten des deutschen Feminismus kann ich tatsächlich nichts Positives anfangen. Auch Femen-Aktionen wie die bei der Klum halte ich für **anachronistisch**. (F S BTL 2.4)
- (23) The only good thing is: Femen shows how **modern feminism is by now a dead end**. The goals of feminism that were within reason (suffrage, etc.) were reached decades ago. (F G 3.1)

BTL commenters also use FEMEN to criticise other feminist groups, separating FEMEN out as not ordinary feminists, reminiscent of the way that FEMEN separate themselves out as an elite unit:

(24) Und da der traditionelle, längst ergraute und erschlaffte Feminismus in Deutschland längst stumpfe Zähne bekommen hat (ähnlich wie der in Tunesien), würde ich jede Femen-Aktion hier bei uns nur begrüßen. (F S BTL 2.4)

(25) [Besides that I find it rather odd that I've seen a woman who wouldn't fit into the mainstream picture of beauty at a FEMEN protest. (F G BTL 3.1)]

It's mainly because Femen have cottoned onto the fact that the image of the typical feminist harriidan is neither appealing to men or to women. (F G BTL 3.1)

Location also comes into play here, as FEMEN's protests abroad in Tunisia are celebrated along with the lack of need for feminism in the West. Oppression of women is something seen as happening elsewhere (26, 27), including Russia, but not in Germany, the UK or Western Europe. In some cases, the West is even presented, rather than gender equal, as a victim of feminist control (26, 28):

(26) Am Ende sind die Östlichen Länder dann doch Gerechter als **diese Feministenverseuchten westlichen Länder**. (F S BTL 2.2)

(27) why don't these new feminists focus their efforts on **countries where woman are truly treated as second class citizens**? i can never really take feminists in developed countries seriously. nor can truly oppressed women no doubt. (F G BTL 3.1)

(28) Good lad, **in the uk feminists control our puppets at the top** , whatever a feminist says , our government agree with in fear , well done Putin (F DM BTL 1.1)

Although I have already covered reactions to FEMEN's protests abroad and the argument of cultural imperialism, the same arguments appear again. In one case, FEMEN are congratulated for speaking up against Islam (example (90) in Section 9.4), and in others, they are considered to be an established and historical line of imperial, white, privileged feminists whose protests abroad are illegitimate (29, 30):

(29) Erinnerst mich an den typischen **Kulturimperialismus** der Sorte "am deutschen Wesen soll die Welt genesen". Denn schließlich bestimmen immer noch **hiesige deutsche weiße Feministinnen und Feministen**, welche Strafe für Erregung öffentlichen Ärgernisses in Tunesien angemessen ist, nicht wahr? (F S BTL 2.5)

- (30) As a 53 yr old feminist [...] who worked against the arrogance of western feminism that assumed I somehow knew & understood & could speak for my sisters in the global south, who actually tried to listen to their diverse voices on what issues mattered to them the most - I find your activism **utterly ludicrous, tone deaf, totally irrelevant to the majority of the world's women (living in the global south) and totally complicit with white European/western supremacist colonialist ideas** (F G BTL 3.1)

Finally, on an opposite line of argument, FEMEN are negatively evaluated while feminism is positively evaluated. Here, FEMEN are an unnecessary force that is damaging feminism in general (32, 34), or their claims to a feminist identity are entirely rejected (31, 32, 33):

- (31) **Nein Feministische Initiativen sind intelligenter** und dringen weiter ins Mark als diese blöden Shows und ihre Zuschauer. (F taz BTL 5.4)
- (32) Entschuldigung, aber Mitleid kann ich beim besten Willen nicht aufbringen. Femen geht es auch gar nicht um Feminismus, es geht um Aufmerksamkeit. Solche Leute **schaden dem Feminismus**. (F S BTL 2.5)
- (33) **This is not feminism** and should be ignored!!! Feminism is about protecting women not objectifying their bodies these are stupid foolish women (F DM BTL 1.1)
- (34) Because women showing their tits has achieved so much for women's rights!

Feminism needs Femen like a fish needs a bicycle. (F G BTL 3.1)

9.2 'Bitte lasst uns in Ruhe': Speaking for All Women

FEMEN consider themselves to be elite representatives of all women, as I have discussed. Their discourse creates a number of potential antagonisms for those who do not recognise the same oppositions between religion and feminism or the bodily image of FEMEN as representative of all women. The discursive construction of location, too, is antagonistic as they blur the lines between nationality and religion and rely on East/West oppositions when constructing the aim of the Tunisian protest. In this section, I first demonstrate how FEMEN's material reality challenges their theoretical universality, evident both in the manifesto and in their texts covering the Tunisian protest and the subsequent detention of the protesters. Secondly, I show how FEMEN's claim to speak for all women is also challenged at points in the newspaper coverage and in the BTL comments.

As I demonstrated in previous chapters, FEMEN first articulate a highly generalised ‘woman’ as the victim of patriarchal oppression in their manifesto. Further into the manifesto, they detail more clearly some of the practical aspects of the organisation, such as the sources of money (donations, their website) and their press policy (see Chapter 7). In the ‘Structure and Activities’ section of the manifesto, the material locations of FEMEN become clearer (35, 36). This means that attendance for FEMEN training, which is a key part of their identity as elite warriors, is limited to those who can reach and gain access to the centres in those two specific European locations. While FEMEN claim to be representatives of all women, the women who can take part in FEMEN’s activities are restricted by their location and mobility:

(35) the movement FEMEN is represented by national branches **all over Europe** (F manifesto)

(36) Female extremists are trained in the training centers created by the movement in **Ukraine** and **France**. (F manifesto)

The restricted physical location of FEMEN, as well as their bodily restrictions, could arguably not be overly problematic; after all, a group must be located somewhere. They are functioning as representatives, therefore more illuminating is how they handle representing all women during a protest, rather than in their abstract manifesto.

In the first report of the Tunisian protest, the provenance of the three protesters (France for Marguerite Stern and Pauline Hillier and Germany for Josephine Witt) is suppressed. In the following texts reporting their arrest and later pushing for their release, location is brought to the fore through their identities as European citizens or their respective nationalities:

(37) The process for 2 **french** and 1 **german** activists of FEMEN will take place in Palais de justice, avenue Bab Bnet at 10.30 (F 3.5)

(38) **European** FEMEN activists held a peaceful topless rally in Tunisia. [...] Tunisian police arrested three FEMEN activists: two citizens of **France** - Marguerite Stern (23), Pauline Hillier (27) - and one **German** citizen, Josephine Markmann (19). For more than a day activists were denied the right to communicate with their legal counsel, **the consuls of France and Germany** (F 3.11)

(39) We want to remind you that the 29 May 2013 the **European** FEMEN activists have made the first in the history of the Arab world topless protest (F 3.13)

(40) this illegal sentencing of peaceful **European** activists (F 3.16)

- (41) three Tunisian prisoners of FEMEN from **European Union** (F 3.19, 3.20)

FEMEN publish an 'SOS' letter to Angela Merkel (F 3.10), asking her to become their 'guardian angel' and use the 'authority given to [her] by the people of Germany' to intervene in the proceedings and 'free' her 'tribeswoman Markmann Josephine'. Additionally, after the sentencing, they publish a short quote from the spokesman for the EU representative for foreign policy that states she is 'surprised by the severity of the judgement' (F 3.17) as a form of expert authority designed to delegitimize the sentence. The material jeopardy of the FEMEN members can be seen, too, in their repeated re-articulation as 'prisoners' of Tunisia (41), alongside 'activists' and 'sextremists', such as 'Freedom for the Tunisian female prisoners!' (F 3.3) and 'FEMEN COLLECTS DONATIONS FOR TUNISIAN FEMEN PRISONERS' (F 3.4).

FEMEN more explicitly negatively construct Tunisia by describing the conditions of the prison where the protesters are held. They rely on moral evaluation delegitimation such as describing guard behaviour as 'intimidation' and the experience as 'horrors'. The details serve to bolster the reputations of FEMEN activists as brave warriors fighting unjust oppression:

- (42) There is not much time, we hope very much that on 5th of June **our heroes** will be released, and we urgently will need to take them out of this **barbaric place**. (F 3.4)
- (43) FEMEN activist Margueritte, Pauline and Josephine are in **terrible unhygienic conditions**, they are unable to take a shower, police took away girls' clothes, the girls are dressed in borrowed rags. Activists are isolated from the world, **they have a psychological pressure and intimidation**. For example, they are subjected to prolonged gratuitous move around the city in a closed police special transport, police doesn't speak French, and the information about their future destiny they got only through the consulates of Germany and France about an hour ago. (F 3.3)
- (44) till this day they are in a **smelly African prison**, deprived of all human rights, subjected to continuous psychological pressure (F 3.13)
- (45) EX-PRISONERS OF FEMEN IN TUNISIA TOLD ABOUT **HORRORS OF THEIR CAPTIVITY**
[...]
Daily forced nudity in the presence of male prison guards, forced public seizure of personal hygiene of the genital organs, beatings, spending the night on the floor bloody, violent visits to the courts in a burqa, this is **an incomplete list of the conditions** of the FEMEN activists in prison Tunisia (F 3.22)

The recourse to the European provenance of the activists constructs a difference between Europe and Tunisia, with Europe as a bastion of democracy and Tunisia as a 'barbaric place' (F 3.6). The reaction of the Tunisian authorities, therefore, is entirely disproportionate and unacceptable by 'European' standards, both on individual national levels and at a bureaucratic EU level, which further reinforces the image of Tunisia as oppressive. It is notable that this positive and democratic image of Europe, specifically Germany, disappears in the Cologne Cathedral protest, as the target is in Europe itself and representations of place are repressed, giving the impression that this is a strategy designed almost exclusively to secure European attention and in turn the activists' release. This is perhaps a contributing factor to FEMEN's appearance as 'sloppy and reactionary' (Channell, 2014: 613): they appear to pick and choose their evaluation of Europe, depending on what suits the protest at the time.

The Tunisian protest, and the subsequent imprisonment of the protesters, is variously equivocated with freedom for Amina, for the women of Tunisia, the women of the Maghreb, the 'East' and all women of the world. The question remains, then, how are these women textually represented? Throughout the coverage, FEMEN do continue to reference Amina and her imprisonment, but this is backgrounded compared to the plight of the European activists and their 'illegal' detention in a 'horror' prison. The other women being held in the prison in Tunisia are not mentioned until the final text (F 3.22):

- (46) The story of the prisoners of FEMEN reveals to the world ugly picture of the rapid Islamization of Tunisia's Islamist regime and the movement toward shariatisation of law. Even today, with the FEMEN activists in a prison **women are spending cell serving multi-year period by wild Sharia charges**: wearing too short skirts, cheating husband (F 3.22)

In this quote it is clear that FEMEN consider the imprisonment of these other women to be illegitimate as examples of the 'shariatisation of law'. I would argue, however, that the other women are being used here simply as a rhetorical example and their identities as individuals suffering patriarchal oppression is not a matter of concern. They are only present for this single sentence, and entirely suppressed in the rest of the texts, that is, as social actors they were present in the practice of incarceration, but non-existent in the recontextualisation through FEMEN's coverage (van Leeuwen, 2008: 18). When FEMEN draw attention to the 'terrible' conditions of the prison, the aim is to de-legitimate their own activists'

imprisonment through an oppositional discourse with anti-Islamic overtones and not to delegitimize the imprisonment of all the women in the prison. In this context, FEMEN's exhortations to liberate all women of the Maghreb appear to be superficial rhetorical claims rather than representations of a concrete practice of the group.

FEMEN's universal aims, unanchored from any real space and geographical markers, fall apart when the activists' material reality is jeopardised. FEMEN claim to be protesting for the women of Tunisia as part of a grand global struggle against oppression, but return to their European identities when they want legal intervention. The other women imprisoned in the same conditions, for what FEMEN consider to be unjust sentences, are then abandoned, with little to no mention of them. Crucially, these other women are unable to appeal to the same European identity as the activists for their own freedom. While there are, of course, power issues in speaking for other women (Baer, 2016; Ramazanoğlu, 1989; Scharff, 2010), what FEMEN do in their Tunisian texts is actually less than speak for other women, they almost entirely erase them. In the process, the power relations involved in claims to universal representation are erased too.

This is evident, too, in the German news media coverage of the protest: the other women in the prison are referenced only to demonstrate the overcrowding of the prison, therefore the terrible conditions of the prison (47). This serves to emphasise the sensational aspects of the protesters' imprisonment.

- (47) Jetzt werden erstmals Details zu ihren Haftbedingungen bekannt: Nach Bild.de-Informationen sitzt Josephine W. im Frauengefängnis Manouba westlich der Hauptstadt Tunis. Dort muss sie sich eine Zelle mit **29 weiteren Inhaftierten** teilen! (F B 1.7)

FEMEN present their own texts as authored by FEMEN the organisation as a singular entity, rather than by individual members. Individual members taking parts in protests are named within the texts, but they are not presented as the authors of the texts at any point. Other voices do appear intermittently in their texts, either to be immediately refuted within the text, such as Putin's comments, or used to support their particular view. For example, in their Tunisian texts, they provide some quotes from the trial that are designed to show the illegitimacy of the trial:

- (48) Here is the most ridiculous and absurd quotations of the trial day: "The procesutor: 55% of Ukrainians are prostitutes. And our mission is to fight against their networks." (F 3.15)

Newspaper articles, by contrast, are multivocal, ranging from controversial opinion columns from named journalists, to hard news articles with by-lined authors, to articles that are credited solely to the paper itself, or to one or more of the press agencies such as Deutsche Press Agentur (dpa). Within an individual article, one can find multiple voices through the use of quotations and reported speech; an important part of the conventions of newspaper 'objectivity' is to provide 'balanced' accounts through giving a voice to both sides of a particular argument or event (Richardson, 2007). This allows space for voices that are critical or ambivalent about FEMEN; FEMEN themselves provide no evidence of or reflection on any external criticism.

In Spiegel there is another standalone article entirely based around external criticism of FEMEN after their Tunisian protest, from Tunisian politician and feminist Maya Jbiri:

- (49) Tunesische Frauenrechtlerin: "Femen, bitte lasst uns in Ruhe" (F S 3.6, headline)

Jbiri's personal authority is determined through her construction as a long-standing feminist politician in Tunisia who has worked under different political structures. She criticises FEMEN for not being aware of the local contexts of Tunisia, and says that they risk doing more harm than good. This latter point relates to other constructions of harm that I have already covered in previous chapters.

- (50) "Ihr riskiert, alles kaputt zu machen, wofür wir gekämpft haben." (F S 3.6)

Elsewhere, criticism of FEMEN from Tunisian women can be found in the UK coverage of the protest: two local women, an 'angry bystander' and a lawyer who worked in the Ministry of Justice where FEMEN protested, are quoted as criticising the protest in both the Guardian and the Daily Mail:

- (51) 'This is against our religion,' said Fatima Zahaouadi, a young woman wearing the black robes of a lawyer but without a conservative headscarf. 'For these women to take off their

clothes as part of freedom of expression is against our religion and the traditions of Arab-Muslim Tunisian society.' (F DM 2.1; F G 4.1)

In the BTL comments, women actively reject FEMEN's claims to speak for them:

- (52) **Sorry, ich (Frau) fühle mich so gar nicht von hysterischen Frauen um die 20 mit Model-Maßen repräsentiert**, die scheinbar gegen Sexismus und Patriachat protestieren und dabei von einem Patriarchen – und scheinbar Drahtzieher von Femen- selbst gecastet wurden. (F taz BTL 5.1)
- (53) **As a muslim woman I can say I am not oppressed**. Please do not use your body to fight for MY RIGHTS as I have my rights thank you very much. If I did feel I was in any way oppressed then I will protest, with my clothes on. (F DM BTL 2.1)

Similar to the rejection of FEMEN on the grounds of cultural imperialism, others emphasise the autonomy of the women from the specific nations that FEMEN are protesting on behalf of when they protest against Putin or in Tunisia:

- (54) **Fragt doch mal die tunesischen Frauen wie die zu dieser Aktion stehen**, ich könnte schwören, nicht unbedingt positiv. Wir Europäer sind keine Missionare, auch wenn wir uns in der Rolle gut gefallen. (F S BTL 2.3)
- (55) **Let Russian women decide** what the issues facing Russian feminists are, but also let them decide who they wish to be represented by. (F G BTL 3.1)

9.3 Anti-feminism and Criticism of FEMEN in the News Media

A thorough review of the existing work on representations of feminism in the news media can be found in Chapter 2, but I re-cap here some of the more relevant findings to the results of this study. The news media has been a key historical player in the negative representation of feminism, particularly when it comes to more radical feminist ideas and people (Holland-Cunz, 2003; Huhnke, 1996; Mendes, 2011a; Rhode, 1995; van Zoonen, 1992). Positive representations of feminism can still be found in historical and present-day coverage of feminism (Mendes, 2011a) and newspapers have embraced feminist journalists and feminist sections, such as taz in Germany (Huhnke, 1996). Positive contemporary representations of feminisms tend to present feminism as an individual choice, rather than a collective one, and more radical strands continue to be repudiated in favour of less “threatening” strands (Dean,

2010; Mendes, 2011a). In coverage of feminist street protest SlutWalk, UK papers do provide positive representations of feminism, but the depth, network and context of feminist ideas is often found wanting (Mendes, 2015b). In their analysis of German newspaper coverage of FEMEN, Thomas & Stehling (2016) developed the thesis that FEMEN were more negatively represented the closer that their protests became to Germany, having started out with a positive representation when their protests were limited to the Ukraine.

In this section, I re-visit some of these themes by looking at the tension between proximity and support for FEMEN and the ways that FEMEN are individualised in the newspapers. Coverage of FEMEN differs across the four German papers in this study according to the interaction of the news values of relevance, sensationalism and proximity (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). The sensational protest form gains FEMEN a great deal of attention in tabloid BILD, but this attention shifts dramatically from positive to negative according to the location of the protest. By contrast, left-wing newspaper taz consistently trivialises FEMEN and provides far less coverage overall, and their interview with protester Josephine Witt raises issues of appropriate feminist conduct. Through exploring the themes I discussed above, I explore whether criticism of FEMEN is always anti-feminist.

Proximity is an important news value: the closer geographically an event is to the reader base, the more likely it is to receive coverage (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). The results of my study support this, with far more articles written about FEMEN in the German newspapers than in the UK newspapers. Two protests take place in German locations (Hanover, Cologne) and all three protests involve at least one German protester, Josephine Witt. FEMEN founders Alexandra and Inna Shevchenko provide the direct contact for the UK papers, while Witt provides the direct contact for the German papers, appearing in quotes and interviews in all four papers. Meta-commentary on her role as the face and voice of FEMEN in Germany can be found in both Welt and BILD:

(56) Die Nackte ist uns **wohlbekannt**: Femen-Aktivistin Josephine Witt (20). (F B 2.1)

(57) Josephine Witt, das **bekannteste** Gesicht der Femen-Gruppe (F W 8.1)

FEMEN's own coverage is designed to remove individual identities in favour of the "essence of woman". In an interview with *Welt* after the Cologne Cathedral protest, however, Witt is highly individualised according to her identity as a young, female philosophy student from Hamburg. Pornography is situated as Witt's campaign, rather than FEMEN's, and the article ends with personal comments about her love life and her New Year's plans:

- (58) Josephine Witts Nacktkampf gegen Pornografie (F W 8.2)
- (59) Jetzt wolle sie erst einmal Silvester feiern. [...] Aber ich führe auch ein ganz normales Leben, treffe mich mit Freunden – und habe auch ganz normale Dates!" (F W 8.2)

In *BILD*, during coverage of the Tunisian protest and the subsequent incarceration and trial, Witt receives a great deal of personal attention from the paper, which can be seen through the headlines that they run:

- (60) **Josephine** (19) und die Angst der Islamisten vor ihrem Busen (F B 1.2)
- (61) **Witt**: «Wir wollen die patriarchale Gesellschaft stürzen» (F B 1.6)
- (62) „Im Höllen-Knast brach **ich** zusammen“ (F B 1.14)
- (63) **Deutsche Studentin**: «Der Protest ist alle Mühe wert gewesen» (F B 1.15)

BILD provide detailed coverage of the protest and trial, concluding with the protesters' journey back from Tunisia to France, evident again simply from headlines tracking their progress through Europe:

- (64) Hier kommen die Femen-Mädchen frei (F B 1.9)
- (65) Nackt-Protest in Tunis: Deutsche nach Haft zurück in Europa (F B 1.12)
- (66) Femen-Mädchen in Paris gelandet (F B 1.13)

The protesters are constructed as women brave in the face of adversity; this particular quote is a photo caption and it is an addition (van Leeuwen, 2008: 18) from the author of the article:

- (67) *Sie recken die Faust in die Höhe, schauen selbstbewusst in die Kamera. Eine Geste, die sagt: Hier sind wir wieder! **Wir haben uns nicht unterkriegen lassen.*** (F B 1.13, italics in original)

The sensational aspects of their imprisonment are foregrounded: Witt is constructed, through scare quotes, as describing the prison as ‘hell’ (62), and the punishment is negatively appraised by the newspaper as ‘knallhart’ (F B 1.3) and the experience as an ‘Albtraum’ (F B 1.13, 1.14). The protest is also given implicit support when they portray the reaction of the Tunisian authorities as over the top:

(68) Und das alles, weil sie für Frauenrechte kämpfte, nackt ... (F B 1.14)

This stands starkly against BILD’s coverage of the Cologne Cathedral protest. The same protester, the same protest method and the same protest group, but taking place in Germany rather than Tunisia, is vehemently rejected. Two opinion pieces follow up a news story, constructing Witt as ‘annoying’ and delegitimizing her feminist anger as ‘laughable’:

(69) Du **nervst**;
Deine Empörung ist **lächerlich** (F B 2.2)

(70) Mein Gott, du Nackt-Mädchen **nervst!** (F B 2.3, headline);
ES **NERVT** LANGSAM, JOSEPHINE! (F B 2.3)

In the opinion piece written by Franz Josef Wagner (F B 2.2), he challenges her personal authority as a feminist protester with the impersonal authority of the building’s size and age: he details the long history of the Cologne Cathedral (‘765 Jahre her’), the feeling of ‘eternity’ from being inside – ‘Wenn man in diesem Dom ist, fühlt man Ewigkeit’ – as well as the physical height and presence of the building – ‘157 Meter hoch’ – constructing her as one individual person on one day on an insignificant campaign. He recognises the enemies of FEMEN as ‘Willkür, Prostitution, Diktatur’, but that these are not found in the Cathedral at Christmas; he makes no reference to their anti-religious or pro-abortion stance. He states that, ‘Nackte Brüste im Kölner Dom empfinde ich als das Allerletzte’, without divulging why; in this way, he assumes the readers do not need to have this explained to them. FEMEN’s radical politics comes in understanding *why* naked breasts are ‘das Allerletzte’ and then ultimately destroying that notion.

Key for understanding the repudiation of FEMEN's protest in the Cologne Cathedral is in the final lines:

(71) Proteste sind wichtig. An einem richtigen Ort. Dort wo die Bösen sind. Aber dort ist es auch gefährlich. (F B 2.3)

The author invokes a positive view of protest, but then locates this in a place of 'danger' and 'evil' without clear geographical markers. This constructs a discourse of protests being worthwhile only in places of physical peril, which is particularly ironic considering that Witt was punched in the face by a church-goer during the Cologne Cathedral protest. As a point of contrast, as I demonstrated above, BILD constructed the protesters in Tunisia as brave and the prison conditions and experience as highly negative. In interviews with German women, Scharff (2011) found that sometimes, Muslim women are constructed as 'Other' in that they are the ones that are truly in need of feminism, while British and German women are able to negotiate their own gender inequalities on an individual level and are not subject to patriarchal oppression. This theme has appeared a number of times throughout this study, as the need for feminism in 'the West' is rejected in favour of protest abroad. It would be too much to extrapolate from these two protests that feminism in Germany is therefore illegitimate according to BILD, but the signs of a repudiation of feminism according to geography are there.

This uneven construction of FEMEN is not replicated across all the papers, as I have already indicated. Taz provides much less sensational coverage of FEMEN than BILD, which is not in itself surprising considering that BILD is a tabloid; there are far fewer articles on the same protests and there is no presentation of the protesters in Tunisia as brave or implicit judgement of their imprisonment. Rather, the sensational aspects of FEMEN manifest in constructions of FEMEN protesters as attention seekers (see Chapter 7). They also trivialise the topless protest method in other ways, such as the '600 Euro pro Brust' headline for the article covering Witt's €1200 fine after the protest in Cologne (F taz 6.5).

Along with the Welt interview with Josephine Witt after the Cologne Cathedral protest that I have already mentioned, taz and Spiegel also feature interviews after the same protest. Taz's interview is longer than the one in Spiegel – 25 questions compared to 9 – and the interviewer takes the opportunity to ask a broad range of questions about other protests and statements

made by FEMEN, as well as a broader range of criticism. In these questions, the interviewer articulates FEMEN as problematic for a number of reasons: the earlier male leader of the group, Viktor Swjatski; the sexualisation of their bodies during their protests and their 'sexist' imagery; the increasingly diminishing potential of provocative shock protests; the description of FEMEN as soldiers; their anti-prostitution stance and the conflicts over this with other feminists; and their relationship with Muslim women:

- (72) Eine andere Gruppe fühlt sich von Ihnen angegriffen: die Musliminnen. Sie werfen Ihnen Rassismus vor, weil Sie so pauschal gegen den Islam wettern.; Muslimische Feministinnen fühlen sich bevormundet. (F taz 6.4)

Four times she is pushed for 'concrete' and 'exact' information, perhaps to draw attention to the more abstract nature of FEMEN's claims:

- (73) Und was haben Sie konkret im Dom erreicht?;
Und was fordern Sie konkret in Deutschland? (F taz 6.4)
- (74) „Unser Ziel ist der Sturz des Patriarchats“, haben Sie kürzlich gesagt. Was genau wollen Sie stürzen?;
Und wie genau stellen Sie sich den „Sturz“ vor? (F taz 6.4)

Along the same lines, the interviewer criticises the lack of communication about their protest purpose and feminist world view:

- (75) Von Ihrem feministischen Glaubensbekenntnis **habe ich nichts gelesen.**;
Dann kommen von Ihren Botschaften nur die Brüste an, **das Anliegen dahinter aber nicht.**
(F taz 6.4)

Although the headline “Das sind nicht meine Brüste” indicates the function of topless protest as standing in for the representation of women in general, the questions foreground the sexualisation of the protest without complicating this sexualisation and engaging with FEMEN's radical body politics:

- (76) Frau Witt, würden Sie uns Ihre Brüste zeigen? (F taz 6.4)
- (77) Bekommen Sie unangenehme Post, die Sie doch sexualisiert? (F taz 6.4)

Example (76) is the opening question, which is rejected by a number of BTL commenters for sexualising Witt:

- (78) Bereits die Eingangsfrage der taz-Autorin veranlasste mich zum Mega-Hashtag:
#aufschreikreischrappeldiepappel!!!
Sexismus pur von taz-Redakteurin! (F taz BTL 5.4)
- (79) Ich muss gestehen das ich schon nach der ersten Frage nicht weitergelesen habe. TAZ, das war BILD-Niveau. (F taz BTL 5.4)

Others reject the interview outright:

- (80) Ich frage mich, was so ein Pranger-Interview in der taz soll. (F taz BTL 5.4)
- (81) Sicherlich - die Fragen sind Käse und zielen in eine bestimmte Richtung. (F taz BTL 5.4)

Unlike in BILD, the criticism levelled at FEMEN in the taz interview is closer to the kind of criticism of FEMEN found in academic literature: speaking for other women, self-sexualisation and poor communication of an abstract world view. Repudiation of FEMEN in BILD appears to be based in the argument that feminism is irrelevant in Germany, but repudiation of FEMEN in taz appears to be based in the argument that FEMEN are engaging in bad or unsatisfactory feminist practice.

In the interview in Spiegel, the focus remains on the protest itself, as Witt is asked about the criticism found in the media directly afterwards and Meisner's description of her as an 'arme, kranke Frau'. When general criticism is presented, it is with much less challenging language than in taz, as FEMEN are constructed in Spiegel as misunderstood by their critics or the subject of bewilderment, rather than as actively damaging the feelings of other women or obscuring their message:

- (82) Warum verstehen so viele Menschen Femen nicht? (F S 6.4)
- (83) Auch junge Leute schütteln den Kopf über Femen. (F S 6.4)

Spiegel, however, publishes indirect criticism of FEMEN on a number of occasions. As discussed, the only criticism of FEMEN's Tunisian protest, from Tunisian feminist Maya Jbiri is

found in Spiegel. A number of public figures within the Church and politics, such as Volker Beck from the Green Party, also criticised the Cologne Cathedral protest; Spiegel alone publishes the criticism in a dedicated article (F S 4.2), which at the very least demonstrates that Spiegel considers these criticisms to be newsworthy enough for standalone articles. The Cologne protest also becomes a topic for readers' letters, three of which are negative and one of which is positive. The latter is sent in by an academic, criticising the patriarchal structures of the Catholic Church and praising Witt for carrying out the 'most important protest of 2013'. In the negative letters, Witt is constructed as 'immature' and 'narcissistic', with the protest 'unnecessary', 'stupid' and 'laughable', which are constructions of Witt that appear again in the BTL comments across the corpus (see Section 9.4). The author of the final letter establishes her own personal authority for her criticism of Witt through describing herself as not religious and as having had an abortion, two things which might perhaps put her on FEMEN's side.

9.4 Brave, Naïve, Stupid? FEMEN Below the Line

In Chapter 6, I demonstrated the range of ways that #aufschrei, the Everyday Sexism Project and the respective founders were named in the BTL comments. While there is less variety in the naming of FEMEN and the FEMEN protesters in the BTL comments, the naming strategies still highlight some of the ways that they are legitimated or delegitimated, many of which I have covered above.

FEMEN is most commonly nominated with their group name, with various orthographic differences⁶⁹, and the protesters classified through their affiliation with FEMEN and a compound with a gendered classification. These gendered classifications contain far fewer negatively appraised terms than for the hashtag feminist groups, but the preference for infantilising terms such as 'Mädels' and patronising terms such as 'Damen' remains. FEMEN, similar to the Everyday Sexism Project and unlike #aufschrei, provides few linguistic resources for wordplay, which is perhaps why the group's name is used consistently. FEMEN, again, similar to the Everyday Sexism Project and unlike #aufschrei, was also more established and

⁶⁹ Such as: FEMEN, Femen, femen and FeMen

well-known in 2013 and therefore the usage of the name might also reflect a better knowledge of the group.

FEMEN [and orthographic variations]	<i>all German</i>
die Femen Frauen	<i>all German</i>
die Mädels von Femen	<i>BILD</i>
die Femen Mädchen	<i>Spiegel</i>
die Femen Damen	<i>all German</i>

Table 3: Nominations and Nominations with Gendered Classification for FEMEN in the German BTL comments

FEMEN [and orthographic variations]	<i>all UK</i>
FEMEN women	<i>Guardian</i>
FEMEN girls	<i>Guardian</i>
the ladies of FeMen	<i>Daily Mail</i>

Table 4: Nominations and Nominations with Gendered Classification for FEMEN in the UK BTL comments

On the occasions when the name FEMEN is changed, it is done humorously to denote a singular and question what the correction denotation of the individuals might be:

die Femens	<i>Spiegel</i>
eine Feme	<i>Spiegel, Welt</i>
Femin	<i>taz</i>
a 'femen'	<i>Guardian</i>
all the Femens	<i>Guardian</i>
feman	<i>Guardian</i>

Table 5: Changed Nominations of FEMEN in the German and UK BTL Comments

They are also commonly identified through functionalisations that identify their act of protest, either with or without the 'Femen' affiliation:

Aktivistinnen	<i>Spiegel, taz, Welt</i>
Aktivisten	<i>Spiegel, taz</i>
Activists	<i>Guardian</i>
Demonstranten	<i>BILD</i>
die FEMEN-Demonstrantin	<i>taz, for Josephine Witt</i>
Protestierende	<i>Spiegel, for JW</i>
Protesters	<i>Daily Mail, Guardian</i>

Table 6: Functionalisations for FEMEN in BTL Comments

At the same time, speech marks are used to question their status as activists and thereby negating their protest: “Aktivistinnen”, “Aktivisten” (Welt, Spiegel), “Aktivistin” (Spiegel, taz) and “protesters” (Guardian).

Individual protesters or FEMEN members are sometimes nominated, demonstrating knowledge of the individuals involved. In line with existing news values and news coverage, Josephine Witt is identified in the German BTL comments and the author of the Guardian article, Inna Shevchenko, is directly addressed in the Guardian BTL comments:

Josephine	<i>Spiegel, taz, Welt</i>
Frau Witt	<i>Spiegel, taz, Welt</i>
die Witt	<i>Spiegel, taz, Welt</i>
die Josephine	<i>BILD, Spiegel</i>
Josephine Witt	<i>Spiegel, Welt</i>
Frau W.	<i>Spiegel, Welt</i>
Madamemoiselle Witt	<i>Spiegel</i>
Josi	<i>Welt</i>
das Fräulein Witt	<i>taz</i>
Frau Witt oder Markmann ⁷⁰	<i>Welt</i>
Josephine M.	<i>taz</i>
J.M.	<i>taz</i>
Frau Markmann-Witt	<i>taz</i>
Inna Shevchenko	<i>Guardian</i>
Inna	<i>Guardian</i>
Shevchenko	<i>Guardian</i>
Ms Shevchenko	<i>Guardian</i>

Table 7: Informal, Semi-formal and Formal Nominations for FEMEN Protesters in BTL Comments

The gendered classifications used for FEMEN, as mentioned above, are reasonably limited, with a handful of negative appraisals:

Frauen	<i>all German</i>	women	<i>all UK</i>
Mädchen, Mädels	<i>all German</i>	girls	<i>all UK</i>
peinliche Weiber, ukrainische Weiber	<i>BILD</i>	lasses	<i>Guardian</i>
FEMEN-Weiber	<i>Spiegel</i>	dames	<i>Guardian</i>
diese Tussi, diese Tussen	<i>BILD</i>		
neurotische SpätpuberTanten	<i>Spiegel</i>		

⁷⁰ She is nominated with both surnames in the papers, with s opting to nominate her as Josephine Markmann and the other three as Josephine Witt.

diese verdammten Flintenweiber	<i>Spiegel</i>
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Table 8: Gendered Classifications for FEMEN in the German and UK BTL Comments

Negative appraisals and negative evaluation with gendered classifications delegitimize the FEMEN protesters as mentally deficient, particularly amongst German BTL comments, which ties in with a wider theme of delegitimizing FEMEN's protests as 'dumm' (84, 85):

die Dummen	<i>Spiegel</i>	idiots	<i>Guardian, Daily Mail</i>
die dummen Gören	<i>BILD</i>	silly women	<i>Daily Mail</i>
diese dumme Göre	<i>Spiegel</i>	stupid foolish women	<i>Daily Mail</i>
dieses dumme Kind	<i>Spiegel</i>		
drei Idioten	<i>taz</i>		
dummes Mädchen	<i>Welt</i>		
ein paar idiotische Dusselinnen	<i>Spiegel</i>		

Table 9: Descriptions of FEMEN as Stupid in the German and UK BTL Comments

(84) Bloß **Dummheit**

Die rechthaberischen Femen haben doch bloß vergessen erwachsen zu werden. Oben ohne, wen wollen sie denn heutzutage in Europa damit erschrecken? In muslimischen Ländern ist das ohne Zweifel öffentliches Ärgernis und wird zu Recht bestraft. (F S BTL 2.4)

(85) Wie **dumm** ist diese Jopsephine? (F W BTL 7.4)

As can be seen from these examples, stupidity is closely related to constructions of FEMEN as immature. This youth/stupidity construction also manifests in negatively evaluating the protesters as naïve:

<i>BILD</i>	<i>Spiegel</i>
solche kleinen naiven deutschen Mädchen so eine naive Frau kleine junge naive Damen	naiv Josephinchen
<i>taz</i>	<i>Welt</i>
diese jungen, naiven selbstdarstellerinnen	das naïve Kind

Table 10: Descriptions of FEMEN as Naive in the German BTL Comments

As well as the examples already given, the protesters are also re-named as children or teenagers. This is particularly relevant for Josephine Witt, who at 19, is close to the line

between legal adult and child; when the examples below refer to singular actors, these are all Witt, and they are spread across both Tunisian and Cologne protests:

<i>Spiegel</i>	<i>Welt</i>
Kinder 19-jährige (?) Halbkinder ein pubertierendes und geltungssüchtiges Kind der spätpubertierende Teenager dieses pubertierende Mädels naiv Josephinchen	das Kind das naive Kind das verwirrte, halbnackte Kind diese bedauernswerte Kindchen diese verwirrten Kinder dieses 19-jährige Kindchen halbnackte Spätpubertierend Kindchen
<i>BILD</i>	<i>taz</i>
diese Femen-Kinder kleine junge naive Damen solche kleinen naiven deutschen Mädchen	das Kind diese jungen, naiven selbstdarstellerinnen

Table 11: Constructions of FEMEN and FEMEN Protesters as Young the German BTL Comments

The construction of children or teenagers ties in with immaturity and stupidity and equivocates their loud protests and concerns with the noises that these young age groups make, be it crying or tantrums over trivial things, which should be ignored or quietened rather than listened to and taken seriously. The addition of 'verwirrt' also further negates the claims of FEMEN.

Another strong evaluation of the FEMEN protesters, particularly in Tunisia, is as 'brave':

<i>Spiegel</i>	<i>Daily Mail</i>
diese drei sehr mutigen Frauen diese mutigen Frauen diese mutigen Mädchen eine mutige junge Frau	extremely brave women poor brave girls these brave women these very brave women very brave girls

Table 12: Descriptions of FEMEN as Brave in the German and UK BTL Comments

Often this is a positive evaluation, providing support for FEMEN's protest aims (86, 87). In a related way, 'brave' is denied through emphasis on 'stupid', creating an opposition between the two (88), and (89) below:

- (86) **mutige** Frau, die für ihre Überzeugung eintritt. Ich wünsche mir mehr solche Aktionen gegen den Wahnsinn "kath.Kirche". (F S BTL 3.1)
- (87) you go girls, **very brave** to support her. (F DM BTL 2.1)
- (88) **Mutig** fand ich's nicht, nur unsagbar **doof** und **naiv**. (F S BTL 2.5)

Bravery in the Tunisian protest, however, is sometimes part of positively evaluating FEMEN in order to delegitimize Tunisia (89) or Islam (90). This might be an example of the opposite phenomenon mentioned earlier, whereby differences between groups are mitigated out of the need to delegitimize feminists. In this case, feminists are supported to delegitimize Islam or Tunisia as a representative of an Islamic country. Here, however, the 'feminist' aspect of FEMEN is backgrounded or suppressed in favour of gendered classifications – 'women' – and their bravery highlights the negative evaluation of these countries. This is further emphasised in the Daily Mail, where the protesters are only positively evaluated as 'brave' for the Tunisian protest and not for the Hanover Fair protest; (89) manifests this by drawing on the post-feminist discourse that denies a need for feminism in the West:

- (89) An die richtige Adresse
Immerhin demonstrieren sie jetzt mal dort, **wo Frauen wirklich unterdrückt werden**, das ist schon verdammt mutig (ob es **klug** ist, ist die andere Frage). (F S BTL 2.1)
- (90) These are **extremely brave** women. Most of us would be bricking it in their shoes. Religion really is sexist (to varying degrees admittedly) and fair play to them for standing up to those islamofascists I say. (F DM BTL 2.1)

I have already discussed in this chapter how FEMEN are related to a feminist context. When it comes to their naming, they are sometimes identified as feminists, with both wider evaluations of feminism as negative or positive, but the range of ways that feminists are negatively evaluated is much more limited than for #aufschrei. 'Emanzen' occurs only three times, once in a compound with 'Berufsemanzen' (BILD). Unlike the hashtag feminist groups, FEMEN are not constructed within a discourse of militancy, aggression and war, even though they take on the conceptual metaphor of war in their own texts. FEMEN are also not considered to be part of a wider 'generation', not connected to technology and only twice are they identified as 'careerist'.

9.5 Individuals and Collectivity: Discussion

In this final chapter, I have shown how the articulation of “woman” is unstable in FEMEN’s own discursive representations, insofar as they claim to speak for all women but they then suppress the suffering of the women they claim to speak for in their own texts unless it serves a rhetorical purpose for them, while emphasising the suffering of their own activists. We can see the problematic exclusions that take place in FEMEN’s discourse when the group comes into conflict over geography and religion, with women positioned as the helpless victims of Islam, while Islam and Tunisia, or ‘the East’ are equivocated together. By contrast, in FEMEN’s rejection of Christianity, this kind of equivocation between a country or a whole region and a religion does not take place. What is interesting about this discursive construction is that FEMEN do not instrumentalise the ‘Muslim woman’ to demonstrate that oppression only exists elsewhere, as is sometimes done in contemporary postfeminist discourse (Scharff, 2011), because they locate oppression worldwide, including Europe. There are still elements of this othering, however, as Muslim women are held up as particularly extreme examples of the victims of oppression – only seen when FEMEN protesters were unexpectedly forced to sit alongside them in prison – perhaps to further increase their media appeal and the shock value of their protests.

Geography and religion is the most conflicted aspect of FEMEN’s discourse of universal womanhood and oppression, with BTL commenters struggling over the role of activists protesting abroad. A few sceptical voices below the line raised the concern of a ‘Hierarchie der Feindbilder’ when it comes to the entanglement of feminism and Islam. On the one hand, there might be an anti-feminist inclination to defend the autonomy of people in other countries or religions in the service of rejecting feminism, without a genuine care over their autonomy in other situations that do not involve feminist protest. On the other hand, feminism may be celebrated in the service of rejecting certain countries or religions, which draws on postfeminist discourse that recognises the need for feminism abroad while simultaneously denying the need for it locally. Although this point of scepticism is numerically represented by few BTL commenters, I think it is important to bear in mind this particular complication considering the news media coverage that I detailed in this chapter.

Thomas & Stehling (2016) put forward the hypothesis that German news coverage of FEMEN becomes less positive the closer that FEMEN protesters come to Germany. This is borne out in my results most clearly in the BILD coverage, which celebrates FEMEN protesters in Tunisia, following their incarceration and voyage home in detail and constructing them as brave and strong in the face of foreign horrors. The Cologne Cathedral protest, however, is strongly repudiated and the discourse of bravery is replaced with one of childishness and irritation. In the BTL comments across the papers, the protesters in Tunisia are sometimes constructed as brave, but they are constructed as brave *women* rather than brave *feminists*; this is particularly prevalent in the Daily Mail, a UK tabloid similar to BILD. The protesters at the Hanover Fair or in the Cologne Cathedral are not constructed as brave in the BTL comments. While this is a small data set, I think this is a not insignificant difference and might point towards, as I mentioned above, an anti-Islam discourse that utilises feminists without engagement in feminist concerns.

Bravery also sits in a relation to stupidity and naivety, either the protest in Tunisia was ‘brave but stupid’, or ‘not brave but stupid’. Here, the FEMEN protesters are stupid for not having researched Tunisia beforehand or for thinking that their protest form was appropriate. This ties back into the claims of ‘andere Länder, andere Sitten’ that I highlighted in previous chapters, where the moral and legal standards of Tunisia, through a more abstract legitimisation of cultural relativism, are defended in order to delegitimize FEMEN’s protest.

Spiegel, similar to #aufschrei, contains the most criticism of FEMEN, with editors considering articles based in external criticism of FEMEN newsworthy for both protests. One of these comes from a Tunisian feminist, whose passionate quote forms the heading to the second section in this chapter. In a different interview with FEMEN member Josephine Witt, FEMEN’s critics are presented as misunderstanding them or mildly disapproving. By contrast, the taz interview with Witt criticises FEMEN for speaking for and ‘infantilising’ Muslim women, as well as for poor communication of their message. Adding to the work done by Thomas & Stehling (2016), I would say that rejection of FEMEN also differs across the German papers according to whether they are considered bad feminists (taz) or whether feminism in Germany is not seen as necessary (BILD).

FEMEN are also recognised as a more obvious part of a wider feminist history, with BTL commenters connecting them back to established first and second wave feminists; this is evidenced even in the attempts to deny them a claim to contemporary feminism, because the assumption that they form part of feminist history must exist for it to be subsequently denied. The group is named as a feminist or women's rights group in the newspapers, even if they are not contextualised within a feminist chronology. As I discussed in previous chapters, I think that this is largely a result of the fact that FEMEN's protests resonate more obviously with sedimented discourse about feminist protest, even though FEMEN are trying to re-articulate some of those elements. Being considered part of a feminist history does not appear to help FEMEN to convey their messages or protest aims, with protest aims being backgrounded in news coverage. In the same way that Knappe & Lang (2014) describe women's voices in public spaces today as 'whispers' rather than 'shouts' thanks to the advances of past feminists, perhaps connecting with sedimented images of feminism mean that FEMEN present less of a dislocation than they might hope: explicitly feminist groups performing public street protests may not be widely expected to provide detailed explanation of their aims and objectives, as these are familiar and passé, even if the imagery of the protest remains newsworthy and provocative.

The ways that BTL commenters delegitimize FEMEN compared to #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project show some interesting differences: although FEMEN claim a militant and angry feminism that is at war with patriarchy, it is the hashtag feminist groups that are constructed as militant and angry with its founders and contributors as soldiers of a feminist army, or constructed as even more extreme, straying into the territory of terrorism or chaos. Although FEMEN are more technologically integrated – admittedly the parts of the protest that get publicised are public and offline – running a number of social media platforms and a regularly updated website, with an online shop, it is the hashtag feminist groups who are delegitimized for their technological engagement. Although the nature of FEMEN's protests means that FEMEN members must dedicate a great deal of time and energy to the cause and forcibly background their non-FEMEN lives when, for example, arrested and imprisoned, it is the hashtag feminist groups who are delegitimized for being careerist.

Of course, these techniques for delegitimation are not designed to be simple descriptions of the groups; if BTL commenters stated the obvious, then the delegitimation would fail. On the one hand it shows a cycle of argumentation, whereby the groups that are not angry and militant are constructed as such, and groups that take a positive discourse of militancy are constructed as unreasonable children or immature teenagers, which is the case for FEMEN. In this case, it would be interesting to see if the same arguments stood if the protesters were obviously older than Witt's 19 years. On the other hand, I think it also might reflect a perceived threat level of the groups, which ties into the same hypothesis of Thomas & Stehling (2016) and which I return to in the concluding reflections in Chapter 10.

10 Concluding Discussion

This final chapter comprises three concluding sections: firstly, reflections on my results in light of the research questions I set at the start of this thesis. This section accompanies the discussions that conclude the individual results chapters, each structured according to the research questions, but this final section is designed to have a holistic approach and draw together threads that are important for all three groups under study, rather than summarise everything that I have already presented. Secondly, I reflect on the methodology that I applied in the research for this thesis and how well the CDA methods that I used suited my theoretical grounding of Discourse Theory. Finally, I highlight some of the limitations of the study and how these might point to the immediate next steps for research into contemporary feminist protest groups.

10.1 Reflections on the Representations of Contemporary Feminist Protest Groups

My first set of research questions (1a and 1b) focused on the discursive dislocations of the groups and how these dislocations are negotiated in the news media and BTL comments. The process of dislocation is key for politics in discourse theoretical terms, as it is through dislocations that the arbitrary nature of social relations is revealed and people can identify anew (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Torfing, 1999). Feminist discourse, by constructing current gendered relations as problematic, is dislocatory and opens up opportunities for people to change their opinions on the world around them, for example, by questioning the strict distinction between pink and blue colours for children's clothing and toys, or the representation of women in politics or in the media. Dislocations can also be resolved through articulation into existing discourses without creating new identifications (Torfing, 1999). As I discussed at length in the literature review, some contemporary resolutions for feminist dislocations identified by researchers are discourses claiming that feminist goals have been achieved, that feminist concerns lie elsewhere in the world or that problems can be negotiated on an individual basis. Understanding how contemporary feminist protest groups construct their dislocations in their specific socio-economic moment represents a contribution to knowledge of the development of feminist discourse. Understanding the ways

in which these dislocations are resolved in other, non-feminist media such as newspapers and BTL comments can provide information for these groups, and others, on the discursive barriers that they face and ways to potentially develop their own discourse to confront these resolutions and create further new dislocations.

The dislocations of FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project all ultimately rely on moral evaluation legitimization, working through an opposition of freedom and oppression – ‘[c]omplete control over the woman’s body is the key instrument of her suppression; the woman’s sexual demarche is the key to her liberation’ (FEMEN) – which in the hashtag feminist groups’ texts manifests more specifically in speaking out and silencing: ‘nobody will be able to say we can’t talk about it anymore’ (The Everyday Sexism Project); ‘die Freiheit, offen über Erlebnisse sprechen zu können’ (#aufschrei). The moral evaluation is activated through the equivocation of ‘oppression’ with other negative concepts, such as FEMEN’s links between patriarchy and rot and decay, or the negative emotions associated with enforced silence experienced by contributors to the hashtag feminism campaigns. The discourse of the three groups also exposes, in their own ways, the slippery nature of the mechanics of this oppression. FEMEN work at a reasonably high level of abstraction in their texts, using the classic feminist term of ‘patriarchy’ largely represented through nominalisations such as ‘exploitation’ and ‘suppression’ that obscure the social actors involved. When social actors are targeted in protests, they are high profile, elite and often singular. While working with a basic discursive structure of “female bodies” that are “oppressed” by “patriarchy”, FEMEN focus on negative evaluating patriarchy through vulgar language and war metaphor, rather than detailing the processes of this oppression, detailing patriarchy as an invading force that must be attacked and defeated. Objectivated action is similarly present in the description texts for Everyday Sexism and #aufschrei, where women are situated as the victims of oppression but the perpetrators are removed through passive constructions such as ‘women are told’ (The Everyday Sexism Project) or swallowed up into vague concepts such as ‘Gesellschaft’ (#aufschrei). The stories are rich with perpetrators of sexism, women and men, strangers and family members, and individual examples of sexist action, but a clear articulation of perpetrators and processes is lost once the stories travel outside of their immediate environment.

The mainstream news media is a key player in spreading wider knowledge of feminist protest, and also a key historical player in the negative presentation of feminism. How the news media construct groups' political dislocations could therefore have an impact on their acceptance and success (Dahlberg, 2011). The clearest finding from this thesis is the importance of feminist groups' engagement with the media in order to convey their aims and objectives. Of course, this is something that groups themselves can have limited influence over, as well as over the final presentation of their quotes and interviews, but it is these direct quotations that most accurately represent the discursive dislocations in their own texts. Barriers to feminist groups in the news media remain the established news values that tend towards conflict, sensational imagery and high-profile actors. For FEMEN, their protest form was foregrounded, which I return to below, and the focus shifted onto their high-profile targets rather than the aims of their protest, such as descriptions of Putin's 'amused' reaction to their 'eye opening' protest in Hanover. For the Everyday Sexism Project and #aufschrei, a "battle of the sexes" conflict was inserted into their discourse of sexism: men were articulated as sole perpetrators or gendered relations were articulated as matters of gendered miscommunication and flirting, which in turn trivialised the projects and brought in subtle victim blaming. The high-profile actor criticised by #aufschrei, German president Gauck, also drew attention away from the group through giving him more prominence in the article content as well as through headlines and quotations that foregrounded him.

Previous work on BTL comments and online public spaces has highlighted how toxic these environments can be, especially for feminists (Benton-Greig, et al., 2017; García-Favaro & Gill, 2016; Shaw, 2014) and BTL comments on other feminist campaigns are documented as overwhelmingly negative and unsupportive: >90% in Benton-Greig, et al. (2017). While I did not carry out a statistical analysis, feminist voices were present in BTL comment sections in all papers, including tabloids BILD and the Daily Mail, with some BTL commenters articulating views and arguments very similar to or even more radical than those in the feminist groups' own texts, supporting, or calling for, for example, the take down of patriarchy or recognising the connectedness of sexual harassment and cat calling. Alongside this positive discourse, the comment sections also provide insight into the myriad ways that the groups' dislocations are delegitimated and therefore resolved by being rejected. Perhaps exacerbated by the newspaper coverage, BTL commenters reject the hashtag feminist groups for being sexist

towards men and wrongly articulating the true victims and perpetrators of sexism. The extended chain of equivalence around the nodal point of “sexism” is challenged from a number of angles, such as the difference in physicality between jokes about sex and acts of rape, or the incompatibility of sexism and crime, which highlights a potential issue in the understanding and denotation of sexism and the relation of gendered actions and gendered oppression; in turn, this links back to the point made above about the slippery nature of these processes. FEMEN’s protest form becomes the focus of most BTL commenters, as well as a tension over geography and religion. BTL commenters reject FEMEN’s universal construction of the oppressed woman by highlighting the autonomy of people in different countries and the need to respect social norms that vary nation to nation, encapsulated, for example, by the German saying ‘andere Länder, andere Sitten’. FEMEN’s protest also becomes used as a tool to delegitimize Islam, with question marks remaining over the engagement with their specifically feminist concerns.

In questions 2a and 2b, I turned to the protest forms of the groups and how these were constructed and negotiated in the three different textual locations. The respective protest forms of the groups are the centre of their radical politics and their contribution to contemporary feminist discourse. FEMEN’s topless protest is their articulation of a female body which has been liberated from patriarchal oppression. They attempt to dislocate the sedimented discourse of a slim, white, attractive body as passive, sexualised and subject to reproductive processes by putting it into public spaces with aggressive and vulgar agency, thereby turning the sexualised body into a political one; this is most clearly understood through their slogan of ‘my body is my weapon’, or their similar claim of using their breasts as weapons. They also reclaim the positive identity of the militant, angry feminist, using constructions with ‘fuck’ against their opponents or openly naming themselves as ‘militant’. The hashtag feminist groups utilise the technology of social media to bring together thousands of testimonies of sexist actions, crossing boundaries of time and space. While FEMEN’s protest method is designed to raise feminist consciousness through elite example, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project represent continuity with offline consciousness-raising circles that encourage active participation after realisation that sexism is a collective, shared problem. This is further evidenced by the way that the BTL comments and sometimes the newspapers themselves become second sites for the same protest method, as BTL

commenters and journalists share their own stories of sexism. Meta-commentary within the stories in all three locations documents instances where contributors have responded to the discursive dislocations of the groups by viewing their own experiences in a new light and identifying with the political aims of the groups, with contributors claiming that they ‘never classed [the incident] as assault’ and that sharing stories ‘makes [them] feel like [they’re] not alone’ (The Everyday Sexist Project).

The online location and the self-contained format of the stories mean that they travel easily into the newspapers, but this method also means that there is little control over which self-contained stories or tweets travel, and they do not need to be articulated into a wider discourse of structural gendered oppression to make sense to readers. The sensational aspect of FEMEN’s protest method appears to help them gain media coverage, but this also works against the group as they are sexualised without engagement in their body politics, with their protest action described in the UK papers as ‘stripping’ or the description of their toplessness taking precedence over description of the protest aims, which are not always even included. Instrumentalisation of feminist protest in anti-Islam discourse also becomes problematic in tabloid BILD. This paper provides the most detailed coverage of their protest and trial in Tunisia; however, it does so through constructing the protesters as brave young women – ‘[w]ir haben uns nicht unterkriegen lassen’ – fighting for women’s rights in horrific conditions – ‘Höllen-Knast’; this is a discourse which is rapidly dropped when FEMEN protest in Germany and FEMEN are forcefully repudiated as irritating and unnecessary, repeating constructions such as ‘es nervt!’.

On a related note, Spiegel provides numerically the most articles on both German protest groups, FEMEN and #aufschrei. It also provides the most criticism of the protest groups, whether an opinion column, letters to the editor or articles built from external criticism of the groups. The editors of Spiegel clearly consider these latter articles, whether from politicians, public figures or online commenters, to be newsworthy when editors of the other papers do not. Is this something to celebrate, as in, does this mean that the paper is more diligent and more debate takes place in their pages? Also, should it be expected considering that they provide the most articles overall? As a counter point, Huhnke (1996) highlights how Spiegel has been criticised for mixing hard news and opinion in ways that contravenes industry

standards on objectivity. She claims that one examples of this in their coverage of feminism in the 80s and early 90s, where they consistently and largely implicitly presented feminism negatively, for example, by pitting feminists against more positively viewed groups (for example, scientists) in headlines (Huhnke, 1996). The findings here might also be a further example of this subtle delegitimation because criticism of feminist protest is more often present and newsworthy in Spiegel than elsewhere.

The ways that the groups' protest methods are legitimated or delegitimated in the BTL comments also illuminates what remains expected, that is, sedimented, in the discourse of feminist protest and feminist protesters. While also tying into a racist and anti-Islam discourse, FEMEN are lauded for their bravery while protesting in Tunisia, in light of the bodily risk to them, and their protest form is positively constructed as "at least doing something", regardless of agreement with their aims. By contrast, the hashtag feminism groups are delegitimated for their online presence, constructed as keyboard warriors who live in a parallel world; here, the risk of online trolling is not considered to be personal peril, although the emotional toll has been well documented by the founders (Bates, 2014; Wizorek, 2014)⁷¹. From this, the importance of physical, bodily peril to what is considered legitimate protest is clear, as well as the importance of protest in traditional offline public spaces. Along the same lines, the founders of the hashtag feminist groups are delegitimated for their personal expertise in social media, highlighting how feminist protesters are expected to be amateurs in their environments and how feminist protest should be, or at least seen to be, spontaneous. While fitting these criteria for (seemingly) spontaneous, potentially perilous public protest, FEMEN's protest method is also rejected by BTL commenters as inappropriate; the dislocation of their protest method relies on recognition of patriarchal censorship of the female body, so when BTL commenters agree with this censorship, constructing it as 'too much', 'outdated' or 'boring', FEMEN's dislocation fails.

⁷¹ As well as the physical impact of stress on the human body, the emotional toll also leads to physical implications, such as periodically having to give up curating the site, in the case of Laura Bates (Bates, 2014). On a related note, American feminist game reviewer Anita Sarkeesian has in the past cancelled public talks due to online threats of gun attacks at these talks, which further demonstrates the physical peril of online trolling as well as the potential offline effects: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/oct/15/anita-sarkeesian-feminist-games-critic-cancels-talk>.

In the final two questions, 3a and 3b, I explored the tension between individuals and collectivity in the groups' discourse and their representation in the news media and BTL comments. As discussed in the literature review, the three groups studied in this thesis are 're-doing' feminist politics in light of pervasive and almost 'common sense' (Gill, 2017) postfeminist discourse that constructs collective feminist organising as unnecessary, either emphasising the personal negotiation of problems or outright denying the existence of structural inequalities. Positively taking on a collective feminist identity in this context is one of the ways that the groups construct dislocations (Baer, 2016). In the words of Knappe & Lang (2014), reclaiming feminism as politically relevant for structural problems is one way that the groups turn their voices from whispers into shouts. For these groups, however, creating this collective politics is a difficult balancing act, constantly at risk of being undone by attention on individual actors, the founders or others, instead of the wider social context.

In their texts, FEMEN use nominalisations to build up the chain of equivalence around "patriarchy" and "oppression", itself a nominalisation. This connotes a universal and pervasive force, but also obscures the mechanics of oppression by removing grammatical need to name the actors involved, as I discussed above. Alongside a universal patriarchy, FEMEN construct a universal woman as its victim, delineating this woman along biological lines and situating themselves as the exemplary liberated women. This is the part of FEMEN's discourse that provides the most conflict, both internally and externally, when it is articulated with geography. The voices of the women that FEMEN claim to be speaking for in Tunisia are suppressed, only to be briefly referenced in a singular line in what appears to be more of a rhetorical move than an authentic campaign for their freedom. While FEMEN go against contemporary postfeminist discourse that instrumentalises Muslim women in particular as victims of oppression in contrast to liberated "Western" women (Scharff, 2011) because they see *all* women as oppressed, FEMEN do this by erasing the multiplicity of women in the world and still rely on racist oppositions between the 'progressive' West and 'barbaric' Tunisia. It is this universal womanhood combined with FEMEN's representative stance that is criticised most heavily in the media, in articles in *taz* and *Spiegel*, and by BTL commenters. The latter of these draw on various notions of autonomy and cultural relativism to reject FEMEN's claims to protest abroad, while the papers use the voices of Muslim women themselves that state

that FEMEN cause damage to their feminist campaigns with their topless bodies and infantilise them by speaking for them.

FEMEN also articulate their feminism positively with militancy, aggression and anger as well as with an attractive and feminine body, challenging sedimented negative images of radical feminist protest. Although their anger and militancy are largely erased by the time that discourse about the group reaches the BTL comments, as I discuss below, the familiarity of their protest as a political protest is perhaps the reason that they are more often named as feminists or a feminist group in the papers. In the BTL comments, too, they are articulated within a chronology of feminist history that links them in some way to recognised first and second waves, with the suffragettes in the UK and ‘bra burning’ of the sixties and seventies, whether this is done so positively or negatively. At the same time, their universal approach to female bodily oppression also means that they are denied contemporary access to a feminist identity by some BTL commenters who outright claim that this is ‘not feminism’, or if it is, it belongs to a past, outdated feminism and it is not acceptable now.

The aim of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project is to gather together thousands of stories in one place that share intersecting experiences of sexism but that differ in actor, action, time and location. This sits alongside a wider argumentation of silencing, backed up by contributors in some stories telling their own personal experiences of silencing about sexism. In this way, they show that these experiences are both oppressive and part of the everyday lives of vast numbers of people, women and men, both as victims and perpetrators. The contributors appear to have an implicit understanding that the range of actions, from being ignored as a woman in favour of a man, to rape and sexual violence, are somehow connected because they share them without meta-commentary; however, it is this range that is challenged most in the BTL comments alongside the gender identification of the victims and perpetrators. Nearly all actions in this range can be removed from the meaning of sexism, according to BTL commenters, whether trivialised as flirting or jokes or separated out as criminal actions or “more serious” actions, which in total leaves very little behind for a political project. As a result, these hashtag feminist groups may benefit from most strongly anchoring their discourse in one of explicit gendered oppression, which damages all members of society

as well as which is upheld by all members of society, as this is what is demonstrated in the stories.

While FEMEN, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project embrace collectivity as relevant for contemporary feminist protest, they do so in different ways. Through the collated stories on their websites, #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project use thousands of individual concrete experiences to demonstrate collectivity. FEMEN, on the other hand, are a small number of individuals representing, in abstract terms, women as a collective whole. This representation then takes the form of concrete but still heavily symbolic action in the form of their protests. Along with their very different protest aims, methods and their construction of the problem, these differences in approaching collectivity demonstrate, firstly, the current diversity in contemporary feminist protest, and, secondly, the continued possibility of feminist protest to be diverse and changing.

In the newspapers, the collectivity of the hashtag feminist groups is undone in subtle ways, some of which I have already mentioned, such as constructing the campaign as pitching women against men and trivialising the groups through victim blaming women. All of the groups, including FEMEN, are not contextualised with other contemporary feminist groups, or increased feminist visibility. When #aufschrei is once connected to a feminist past, it is with a gaping gap in time between #aufschrei and the sixties. FEMEN are contextualised within the chronology of their own protests, according to location and time rather than aim, and not within a chronology of topless or feminist protest. While this is not a surprising result, it demonstrates a continued barrier to developing a more highly networked public discourse of feminist collectivity.

Collectivity is also undone in the papers through a shift in focus on the singular high-profile actors that are the target of campaigns, such as President Gauck or Vladimir Putin. While the aim of the groups is to use these as examples of wider structural problems, such as the trivialisation of sexism and the oppression of democracy, respectively, this collective message is obscured by, for example, foregrounding of Putin's reaction to FEMEN's protest. This skewing is evident, too, in the BTL comments when commenters evaluate the high-profile targets without any comment on the feminist protest. Attention is also focused on the

individual actors involved in the groups, be it the founders of the hashtag feminist groups or the individual FEMEN protesters. On the one hand, this is, as discussed, a crucial way for the aims of the groups to be accurately conveyed and detailed. On the other hand, these individual actors are also subject to the same processes as the high-profile actors in the BTL comments, as they become the target of discussion, positive or negative, rather than their wider politics.

How the individual feminist protest actors are named in the BTL comments can provide important information on the argumentation used to delegitimize the groups and therefore their feminist aims. In Chapters 6 and 9, I showed how #aufschrei and FEMEN are negatively constructed in different ways in the German papers through the naming strategies of the social actors involved, with #aufschrei constructed as extreme and militant – for example, ‘Terroristen’ or ‘Feminismusgeschwader’ – and FEMEN constructed as childish and naïve – for example, ‘dumm’ or spätpubertierend’ – even though FEMEN are the openly militant group. #Aufschrei members are named with more negative terms for feminists and for women – ‘Stadtemanzen’ or ‘Schreckschrauben’ – and negatively constructed as narcissistic millennials invested in their own social media careers rather than genuine political actors, or ‘Profilneurotiker’. Overall, #aufschrei is more negatively constructed, more clearly repudiated, than FEMEN. Previous work has shown that the closer FEMEN come to Germany, the more they are negatively constructed in the papers; this is because, geographically, the closer they are to Germany, the more they threaten the status quo (Thomas & Stehling, 2016). I would argue that #aufschrei, by articulating a feminist dislocation through myriad everyday experiences – and which is subsequently constructed as a generic battle of the sexes in the papers – is “closer to home” than FEMEN, who work with an abstract notion of patriarchy and protest against elite social actors. #Aufschrei is perceived to be more extreme because it is perceived to be more threatening to the gendered status quo and the rules by which all people interact every day. This is why they are named ‘Gesinnungsgestapo’ who must be stopped while FEMEN are ‘Kinder’ who can be ignored.

To conclude this section of the conclusion, I would like to raise a few points about potential improvements to feminist campaigning, considering that this project is a critical eye from within contemporary feminism, although I am aware that I myself have not been part of these

campaigns and the value of the existing protest action should not be downplayed. As I have already mentioned in this section, it is clear from the results of this project that the presence of feminist voices from the campaign founders or group members leads most directly to the sharing accurate information about the groups' aims and objectives in these papers, as long as this information is consistent. Again, this is not something that groups have control over, but is important to bear in mind that the mainstream media still attract a significant readership despite the increase in social media use.

The arguments in the BTL comments give, I believe, the most useful information for problems faced by feminist campaigns, even if the comments are not designed to be feedback *per se*. Critical voices in these forums are not the same as outright trolling, although this is of course still present, and engaging with the specific ways that the aims of the groups, or the members themselves, are challenged and rejected could potentially strengthen the argumentation of the groups. For example, concerns over the meaning of "sexism" suggests that the Everyday Sexism Project and #aufschrei would themselves benefit from a clear and upfront definition of sexism. When FEMEN, a feminist group claiming to represent women, are criticised by women for erasing them, then they should consider listening to these women. Furthermore, more upfront recognition of fears represented in the BTL comments may perhaps be fruitful, in particular the fears of men that they, too, are being erased or neglected by hashtag feminist campaigns.

From the results of this study, and by the standards of intersectional feminism discussed in the literature review, it appears that the hashtag feminist campaigns seem to be the "better" campaigns, even though – or perhaps because – they receive the most vehement criticism in the BTL comments. Although the problems with FEMEN are well documented by others and in this thesis, I would like to add a final point for reflection about their particular form of protest. As I highlighted in Chapter 9, FEMEN are more clearly linked to a feminist historical chronology, either to the second wave in general or specifically the first wave suffragettes in Britain. FEMEN's public, confronting, attention-grabbing protests and their feminist concerns are often derided as stupid or ridiculous or unnecessarily extreme, and I think that this is particularly interesting considering the finalisation of this thesis in 2018, a hundred years after women were given the vote in Britain, a result due in part to the actions of the suffragettes.

On this centenary year, the suffragettes have been celebrated in the media in the UK, with multiple documentaries, news articles, podcasts episodes, exhibitions, public dances and marches as well as other events commemorating them and remembering their struggle⁷². Once delegitimated as terrorists, arrested and ridiculed, the suffragettes are now heralded as heroines fighting for a right that is now seen as inviolable and common sense. How might FEMEN be seen in a hundred years' time? Or, for that matter, how will the hashtag feminist campaigns, who are in fact the ones called terrorists in my data, be seen over the same time span? Indeed, the struggle for suffrage in Germany looked substantially different, gained from small advancements and slow developments over time as feminists from different class and ideological backgrounds engaged with the society around them. What should feminist protest look like? Is there a single correct way? Or should diversity take precedence over perfection?

10.2 Reflections on the Operationalisation of Discourse Theory

In the introduction and the literature review, I explained how an additional contribution of this thesis, along with the exploration into discourse around contemporary feminist protest, was the combination of Critical Discourse Analysis tools for linguistic analysis along with the theoretical framework of Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory. Having completed the analysis, I would recap by stating that I found the two approaches largely complementary, with CDA tools fleshing out the abstract theory of Discourse Theory, and Discourse Theory providing me with a broader framework of conflict and conflict resolution, through the notion of the political. This is evidenced by not only my results chapters, but by the review of the literature in Chapter 2 that I carried out through the lens of Discourse Theory.

The struggle between the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence in building a discourse was useful for understanding how the groups constructed their protests and their aims. The role of tendentially empty nodal points such as "sexism" and "patriarchy" in chains

⁷² A few brief examples: BBC documentary *Suffragettes with Lucy Worsley*, the National Trust's *Women and Power* podcast series, as well as numerous exhibitions at National Trust houses across the country, exhibitions at the National Archives, the Museum of London and in Westminster Hall, and a whole range of local events; see <https://vote100rdg.net/> for events local to the University of Reading, where this thesis was written, including public dances, public walks, library book recommendations, voting campaigns and tea afternoons.

of equivalence helped indicate the details of the groups' self-representation and the many signs that were condensed into their political projects. At the same time, it also helped to indicate the inconsistencies in their discourse, such as the dual role of "sexism" as a nodal point and a normal moment in the chain of equivalence, pointing to a lack of clarity in its denotation: for example, is sexual harassment a type of sexism or are they separate, but equal, signs in a discourse related through a different nodal point? The logic of difference was key to BTL commenters challenging the discourse of the feminist groups, whether it was emphasising the differences in physicality between signs of "cat calling" and "rape" that had been mitigated, or the differences in geographical location and religion in FEMEN's discourse of patriarchal oppression of women's bodies. Lesley Jeffries' (2010) *Opposition in Discourse* provided a toolkit of the semantic and lexical triggers of difference and opposition, which mapped neatly onto these logics of difference and equivalence.

Theo van Leeuwen's (2008) *Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis* provided the main analytical driver of the thesis, with a clear, detailed and structured process for textual analysis via sociosemantic categories. This allowed me to break down the texts under study and look at them in new ways. For example, the expansive range of stories shared on the websites of #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project could be detailed through the four different categories of actor, action, time and place. The process of suppression highlighted how FEMEN excluded fellow Tunisian women, who they claim to represent, from the discursive construction of the 'horrors' of imprisonment, that is, they were present in the physical imprisonment but absent from the textual representation of this imprisonment.

One of van Leeuwen's most useful categories was that of legitimization, along with the closely related category of evaluation. I found this particularly useful for demonstrating how the protest groups constructed and justified their feminist dislocations in their manifestos and description texts, because these groups are a threat to the current status quo and therefore their arguments need explanation. Legitimation and delegitimation of these dislocations in the newspapers and BTL comments show if and how the groups' discourse is supported or rejected and, in the case of the latter, in what ways their dislocations are resolved. Sometimes this was explicit argumentation, and other times subtler processes of evaluation through naming practices came into play, such as that of 'Profilneurotiker' and 'Spätpubertierende'.

I would recommend further exploration of a combination of CDA and Discourse Theory, such as applying it to new feminist groups, non-feminist groups and to many more texts, to really test its usefulness in other contexts. When it comes to general research aims, Critical Discourse Analysis and Discourse Theory are largely compatible in that they are both approaches concerned with social inequalities and power abuses, looking to provide a view on emancipation of oppressed groups. Both, too, fall under the much broader umbrella of social constructionism, meaning that researchers generally share the same perspective on the contingency of discourse. When exploring methodology at the start of this project, I found issues with both approaches, however, that were strengthened through a combination methodology. Discourse Theory works at an abstract level, exploring social antagonism and power struggles, the potential for social change as well as the limitations to social change. CDA projects are concerned with power struggles, but at a more concrete level with an emphasis on empirical analysis and detailed investigation of linguistic, and other semantic, features. CDA has allowed me to demonstrate how language in particular plays a role in social antagonism – how feminist groups challenge the status quo through the linguistic articulation of new discourses – while Discourse Theory has provided a conceptual toolkit for understanding, firstly, the construction of discourses more generally and, secondly, the interaction between conflicting discourses through the concept of social antagonism.

This thesis was a small-scale study and the conceptual depth of Discourse Theory meant that I left a number of concepts uncovered, or only lightly touched upon, such as radical politics, ideology, populism and democratic politics, which would perhaps benefit from more application to contemporary empirical data. The analytical depth of CDA, manifested in many qualitative and quantitative methods, can also provide complementary tools for grappling with larger corpora and other forms of meaning making, such as images, as well as other forms of written texts beyond these used in this project. In this case, I would suggest a further exploration of the complementarity of both approaches while taking advantage of their respective strengths and depth in theory (Discourse Theory) and practice (CDA).

Finally, I found the multiperspective research design to provide illuminating insights into conflict between discourses, which is indeed what it was designed to do. There are multiple

other perspectives that could be taken, some requiring different methods – the wider feminist blogosphere, interviews with founders or unconnected members of the public, other media such as TV, and so on – but I believe these would also be fruitful. While understanding the construction of feminist discourse alone is worthwhile, understanding the specific and detailed ways that it is picked apart by unsupportive voices, found in BTL comments and also the newspapers, provides potential information on future steps feminists can take to tackle these criticisms. Similarly, the ways that feminist protest is supported in non-feminist locations demonstrates where the strengths in their discursive constructions lie. The contrast between protest forms of the groups, as part of the multiperspectival design, was also fruitful in showing how diverse contemporary feminist discourse is, as well as showing the adaptability of anti-feminist discourse in identifying and challenging the particularities of different protest methods.

10.3 Limitations of the Study and Next Steps

As I re-iterated throughout the initial chapters of this thesis, the results of this thesis provide a contribution to the knowledge of the discursive terrain of contemporary feminist protest, and by extension contemporary feminism. My results hold for the texts about the groups under study, but that does not mean that that results here hold for texts about the groups that I did not study, which may either challenge or deepen the conclusions drawn here. Likewise, these results cannot be applied to the groups that I did not study. For example, there have been more recent anti-sexism campaigns since #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project, most recently the internationally-reaching #MeToo. At a cursory glance, these share a number of similarities, but it would require detailed academic study to adequately compare them. Here, the multiperspectival research design could be re-applied in many ways: new perspectives on the same groups in this thesis, or on new groups.

This latter point leads to the larger question of what is to be done with these results? This study was designed to be largely synchronic, with events taking place within one year. The sample size was too small for a diachronic study within a year's coverage. Has the discourse of subsequent anti-sexism campaigns changed? How have their dislocations been resolved?

With every new campaign, the novelty of their dislocation is lessened. Does the discursive terrain change, as challenges to the gendered status quo are absorbed, or do they continue to be repudiated along the same lines? Here, we could return to Laclau and Mouffe's work on hegemony and how the hegemonic order absorbs challenges to its control, but in doing so changes itself. This is also what Vivienne (2016) conceptualises as 'erosive social change', whereby the status quo is changed piecemeal over time. Despite the historical demonisation of feminism in the news media, feminist voices have been articulated into the newspapers, such as Laura Bates writing in the *Guardian*. A further question to ask of these results for future study is, now that we know how they construct themselves and how they are constructed in the media, how can we begin to evaluate the success or reach of these groups? Of course, this would begin with questioning how we could begin to understand success. The groups already have made many achievements: by creating discursive dislocations, by attracting many contributors or operating an international organisation, and for attracting media attention and public discussion. How could we, then, evaluate their longevity and their impact of their discursive dislocations beyond their members? A synchronic approach to FEMEN would also yield more depth to mapping their sensational approach. In the media, they appear to benefit from coverage on the basis of their topless protest method and its shock value. This shock value will diminish over time, as highlighted by BTL commenters, so a worthwhile future study would be to track their protests and the protest coverage over a longer period of time, particularly as they are still active at time of writing.

As a qualitative study carried out by one researcher, the total number of texts studied was relatively small. Discourse theoretical studies are suggested to be 'macro' studies that encompass many approaches to gather a range of perspectives on the object under study (Howarth, 2005). This ties in with the grounding notion of discourse as a theoretical horizon of meaning making that contains material objects as well as linguistic signs. As I discussed in the previous section, future studies could be expanded in theoretical and analytical scope, drawing on both Discourse Theory and CDA. Here, we could look into approaches used within Critical Discourse Analysis designed to deal with larger bodies of text, such as corpus linguistic approaches – for example, those used in Gabrielatos & Baker (2008), Jaworska & Krishnamurthy (2012) or Mautner (2009) – or images, such as multimodal analysis – for example, Moran & Lee (2013), Sunderland & Mcglashan (2013) or van Leeuwen (2005) – or

draw on historical and ethnographic approaches, such as those used in the Discourse-Historical approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

The results of this thesis have, overall, demonstrated the depth and breadth of knowledge that can be gained from investigating the discourse around contemporary feminist protest. New angles of attack are introduced as feminists introduce new forms of technology for protest, while the same tropes of delegitimation are still present. At the same time, supportive voices can be found beyond the sites of the feminists' own discourse, particularly in the BTL comments. Future work done as a consequence of the results that I present here should be carried out in the same spirit of 'staying with the trouble' touted by Smith-Prei & Stehle (2014) and the spirit of Sara Ahmed's 'feminist killjoy' (Ahmed, 2010): turning a critical eye on contemporary feminist discourse in order to strengthen our understanding of its manifestations and its challenges, both from within and from without.

11 References

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12 Structured Appendix: #aufschrei and the Everyday Sexism Project

12.1 Examples from Chapter 4

- (12A) My 14 yo gets cat called and whistled at so often walking to school she thinks it's just part of life. (ESP stories)
- (13A) In meiner Stadt wurde [...] eine junge Austauschstudentin auf brutalste Art und Weise vergewaltigt und ermordet. Die erste Frage, die dazu von der Bildzeitung gestellt wird, lautet: "Doch was wollte Gabriele an genau dieser Stelle, wo sich regelmäßig Drogenabhängige herumtreiben?" (#a stories)
- (14A) When I say that I enjoy baking cakes, never much of a response. When I say that my boyfriend and I bake together, "REALLY?" Your boyfriend bakes as well?!" (ESP stories)
- (15A) der typ der mir androhte mich zu vergewaltigen (#a stories)
- (16A) At my graduation for my Masters degree, [...] I attend with my husband and dad. My (male) tutor ignores my comments and speaks only to them. (ESP stories)
- (17A) Auf dem Flohmarkt wurde ich zweimal von jemandem im Gedränge an den Armen begrapscht. Nein, kein flüchtiges Vorbeistreifen, sondern ein mehrere Sekunden währendes Halten meines Oberarmes. (#a stories)
- (18A) a guy came up to us and started grabbing our breasts and bottoms and touched us in our genital area. (ESP stories)
- (19A) dann einmal während dem sex, lag ich auf dem bauch und er "rutschte ab", in die falsche richtung. ich sagte laut "halthalthalthalt!" und er schien einen moment inne zu halten. ich rief, er sei an der falsche stelle, geh da weg. und dann gang langsam, machte er einfach weiter. unendlich langsam, während ich mich unter diesen knapp 100kg nicht bewegen konnte. (#a stories)
- (20A) When I was 7 I was sexually assaulted in a public toilet by a stranger. (ESP stories)
- (21A) Heute nachmittag habe ich folgende Szene beobachtet: [...] Er packte sie am Arm, an der Schulter, woraufhin sie auszuweichen versuchte, schließlich packte er sie am Hals und drückte sie ans Auto. (#a stories)
- (22A) Where I work, they hire in cleaners from an agency, who mostly seem to be men. I hate walking past them in the corridor as they stare at you the whole time (ESP stories)
- (23A) wurde eine weile lang von einem kerl gestalkt. der rief immer um 3 uhr nachts an. (#a stories)
- (24A) I was walking with a friend on a popular and well used track - a man walked out from behind a tree onto the path, blocking our way and wanking. (ESP stories)

- (54A) I still work there, and i don't know what to do i am friends with his wife and his two kids are so lovely. I don't want to say anything because i don't want to cause any trouble, and in this situation everyone will probably blame me. (ESP stories)
- (55A) Ich hatte große Angst und fühlte mich sehr hilflos und ausgeliefert, denn er war viel stärker als ich. Seitdem habe ich auf keinen Kontaktversuch mehr von ihm mehr reagiert , weil ich Angst habe. (#a stories)
- (56A) Ein älterer Mann setzt sich in meine Nähe. Er quatscht mich an. [...] Im Gespräch rutscht er immer näher. Als er fast auf meinem Schoss sitzt, springe ich auf und verabschiede mich schnell mit den Worten:"Ich muss jetzt zum Abendessen". (#a stories)
- (57A) A man walking past me grabbed my butt on his way to the aisle. I should have said something, but I didn't. (ESP stories)

12.2 Examples from Chapter 5

- (4A) at school it's just little things like my science teacher getting boys to carry things because there stronger, or my English teacher always letting boys work go on the walls because they're smarter. boys make sexist jokes every day especially in cooking. I was making a cake in cooking and my teacher called it very good, so the boy next to me laughed and said that 'of course it's good she's a girl they're meant to cook' (ESP stories)
- (5A) Der Dozent an der Uni, der schon in Vorlesungen öffentlich gesagt hat, es mögen sich Studentinnen, die ihre Tage haben, bitte nicht in die vorderen Reihen setzen, weil er den Geruch nicht ertrüge. (#a stories)
- (8A) In Nottingham clubs at the end of the night men go & 'pick up the litter. (ESP stories)
- (11A) The other day on the train, that was packed with people a man took advantage of the situation to feel my ass (ESP stories)
- (12A) Ich hechte als letzte in den Übervollen. Bus und stehe direkt an die Tür gequetscht. Ein älterer Mann will an der nächsten Haltestelle aussteigen und drängelt, noch bevor die Tür auf ist. Ich sage, er soll das drängeln bitte aufhören, ich würde platz machen sobald die Tür aufgeht und ich dementsprechend Platz dazu habe. [...] Er, mit schleimigem Grinsen, mustert mich und sagt "Über Dich mal schnell rüberspringen, gute Idee!" Und bewegt seine Hüfte. (#a stories)
- (18A) Another time recently on the Gold Coast, Australia, i was walking home from afternoon tea with a friend when two men in a car pulled up next to me on the pavement and shouted at me a sexist slur (ESP stories)
- (18B) My mum says men should not clean the house,care for the babies or cook, because that's a women's job. I'm from Somalia and I'm fighting this sexist ideology and is not that easy in my kind of community. (ESP stories)

- (19A) I was at a very large, crowded mall by myself one day, headphones in, looking for a birthday gift for a friend. As I'm walking, it sounds like someone's talking to me and then I hear a loud "hello". It's this random guy who I've never seen before and as I turn around, I see him look down at my legs. "Hey, you seem really nice. What's your name?" (ESP stories)
- (27A) Can I accuse myself of sexism? I've just plumbed in our new washing machine. [...] Only thing is I went to paste it on Facebook, I wanted to share my pride at doing something so resolutely male (I know you do get female plumbers!) but why did I feel I had to do this? (ESP stories)
- (44A) When I insisted on paying for the meal [...] he made certain to point out to the cashier that he'd paid three times that on concert tickets. As if he was concerned they'd revoke his gender over a 12 quid dinner. (ESP stories)
- (45A) Bei jeden Familientreffen wieder
Mein Opa meint ich solle mich doch mehr schminken [...] oder hohe Schuhe tragen. Ebenso andere Verwandte jedes mal die Frage ob ich endlich einen Freund hab, und das ich mich eben anders kleiden sollte um einen zu kriegen
bin 15 (#a stories)
- (46A) Cycling home yesterday after work, to be leered at and shouted to by a guy in a white van. (ESP stories)
- (47A) Als ich mit 15 Jahren abends allein in einer Großstadt unterwegs war, lief mir ein Mann hinterher. [...] Als ich die Kneipe erreichte, wurde er langsamer und schrie mir zuletzt hinterher: "Du es machst mit mir für 20 Euro!" Vielleicht wollte er mich nicht vergewaltigen, vielleicht ja nicht, aber wenn mir so einer mehrere Straßen lang hinterherrennt? An diesem Abend jedenfalls bin ich trotz meines geringen Taschengeldes mit dem Taxi heimgefahren.

Ich war eher froh, diesem ekelerregenden Kerl entkommen zu sein, als mich über das "Angebot" aufzuregen und selbst jetzt noch, 10 Jahre später, ist die Angst da, wenn ich nachts allein bin. (#a stories)

12.3 Examples from Chapter 6

- (1A) I was out shopping with my husband, and we stopped into a hardware store so he could pick up some supplies. I held back as the aisles are narrow. A man walking past me grabbed my butt on his way to the aisle. (ESP stories)
- (2A) heute: meine Töchter spielen mit Pfeil und Bogen. Das sieht der Nachbar und sagt: "Dass die mit so etwas spielen – als Mädchen!" (#a stories)
- (3A) My sister's boss spiked her drink at a work party last week. She won't tell anybody. (ESP stories)

- (4A) ... Äußerst "charmant" wenn man Sätze wie "Bäh die gamprige Lesb'n schon wieder" zu hören bekommt. Bei machen frag ich mich wirklich ob die "noch retten" sind ;-((#a stories)
- (7A) Pizza Express staff automatically tried to give me the salad and my uncle the massive pizza. Nope. (ESP stories)
- (24A) while getting off the train this morning a man patted me on the bum and said 'off you go' had no idea how to react to that! (ESP stories)
- (25A) Female friend once told me to never say that I may not want children around boys, as it would make them dislike me as all girls should be seen as good potential mothers/wives. (ESP stories)
- (26A) Meine Mutter, die meint, dass die knittrigen T-Shirts meines Bruders peinlich seien und er diese seiner Freundin ruhig zum bügeln geben solle. Meinen Einwand, dass er sich, sollte er gebügelte Kleidung wollen, das doch auch selbst erledigen könne, brachte sie zum lachen: "Er ist doch ein Mann, bügeln ist Frauensache." (#a stories)
- (27A) The only person to ever make me feel uncomfortable about pubic hair was a female friend on a girls' school field trip. No man or boyfriend has ever made anywhere near such an issue of it as she did. It feels like young women are not only suffering the relentless comparisons with porn stars but also helping to reinforce it. (ESP stories)
- (28A) Mein Vater, der immer, wenn ich mich gegen seine körperliche Übergriffigkeit zur Wehr gesetzt habe, gesagt hat: "Dein zukünftiger Mann tut mir jetzt schon leid." (#a stories)
- (29A) My senior English class in high school was made up of 19 people, 17 girls and 2 boys. Despite the majority of girls, the male teacher gave all of his attention to the two guys in class, constantly talking to them and teasing them, and never paying any attention to the girls. (ESP stories)
- (30A) Der Chatfreund (der beim Treffen normal war), der es lustig fand, mir zu drohen, er würde mich umbringen, aber davor noch vergewaltigen. (#a stories)
- (31A) Colleague joked about swapping cola 4 sex on hol in Thailand with 'grateful whores' (ESP stories)
- (32A) Als kleines Mädchen wurde ich (leider) in aller Ausführlichkeit von meinem "lieben" Großvater geherzt, geküsst, gestreichelt (#a stories)
- (33A) A builder wolf whistled to me & my friend when we were both 16. He was 32!! My friend wanted to meet him as she thought [...] that it was normal way to get attention :((ESP stories)
- (34A) Ebay mit der Einblendwerbung. Je nach Suche kommt entsprechend sexistische Werbung, wenn ein Mann dahinter vermutet wird. (#a stories)

13 Full Appendix

See attached disc