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Konstanze N'Guessan

Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

Only playing? Ethnographic perspectives on ludic fascism in Germany



Meme:
<https://www.reacti.orgifs.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/internet.gif>

When we think and talk about contemporary fascism, the affects that come to our mind are usually anger, hatred or perhaps fear. In my talk I will focus on something that rarely features in the analysis of the far right: it is the pleasure of being part of a community of “haters,” the fun of posting racist memes and the ludic dimensions of digital fascist practice. Building on Sahana Udupa’s work I will argue that fun and play may be considered some kind of “meta-practices” of digital hatred that keep people going and engaged, binding anonymous and fluid communities together. Play and fun also are crucial in the far right’s attempts to metapolitically mainstream far right discourse and imagery under the “innocent” label of “mere play” or “just joking”. That we tend to overlook these facets of the successes of the (post-)digital far right may have more to do with our prevailing stereotypes about the far right – that is dead-serious, that it’s central driving affect is hatred and anger – and that in any case it is not funny.

In my research on far-right meme practice many of my interlocutors claimed to be “larping” fascism. My talk addresses the question of how to make sense of such emic explanations anthropologically. Are fun and playfulness inextricably linked to the contemporary far right? What do we do with emic theorizations of racism as “larping,” queerphobia as fun, and antisemitism as “just a joke”? What is the analytical gain of analyzing contemporary, digital forms of metapolitical activism as “play”? What can be learned about the successes of the contemporary far right if we take the “only playing” claim literally and seriously? I am making use of classic anthropological play theory (Bateson, Geertz, Schechner) as well as critical humor studies to make sense of these more ambiguous forms of play and transgressive humor as a particular form of ludic fascism in the (post-)digital age.

Konstanze N'Guessan is researcher at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies in Mainz. She is currently heading the anthropological subproject of the BMBF-funded joint research project MISRIK on far-right meme practice. Her research interests cover a wide array of topics from nationalism, bureaucracy and state ritual, historiography and remembering, to parenting, performativity, play, humor, racism and the far right online. She has done field research in West Africa (Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire) and Germany.

Institutskolloquium Wintersemester 2024/25 Leitung: Matthias Krings

JG | ■