Far-Right Populist Strategies of Mobilization: “Shameless Normalization”

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Outline

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  - The Politics of Fear (and Hope)

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The Populist Far-Right and Democracy

“Far-Right populism is an expression and catalyst for the transition from class politics to value politics, from party politics to symbolic politics, from ideological to identity politics, from socio-economic to cultural cleavages.”

(Irina Krasteva 2017, Re/De/Constructing the Far-Right Youth: Between the Lost Generation and the Contestatory Citizenship, 21).
The Far-Right Populist Narrative
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcV6aUw4xhU
1. "I sing this song have tears in my face
2. It is tears full of pride and I'm not ashamed of them
3. This song is for the country that is my home to me
4. To which I owe so much and that I never ever forget
5. As long as I live and can breathe this land alone will
6. be my home and my love
7. It should not matter if you are poor or rich
8. The main thing is in your heart beats our Austria
2x chorus 1:
9. Always Austria....
12. Forever and ever

13. For honesty, justice and loyalty
14. We Austrians are always known
15. So now you all reach out to each other like the best of friends
16. shake hands and swear and swear on your country
17. And I am so in love with our Vienna where my roots lie
18. where I do not have to explain myself
19. the beautiful feeling deep inside of me when I am understood by you
20. This does not exist a second time in the world
21. That's the only thing that matters
4x refrain 2:
22. Stay my home, you, my Vienna
23. I always stand by you, my Vienna
24. You will stay in my heart forever and ever“
“The FRP Narrative”

“Once upon a time”, there were free separate peoples.

“We nationalist populists are helping to bring back that earlier (and better) order”.

- Manichean division between “Us” and “Them” (people/the people and strangers)
- Strategies of provocation and ‘calculated ambivalence’ → ‘post-shame’
- Repetitive collocations (discourse prosody, ‘persistent aura of meaning’ associated with a term)

Active and context-dependent attempt to establish the far-right populist and nationalist/nativist “vision” of the world .

(P. Chilton 2017 “The people” in populist discourse: using neuro-cognitive linguistics to understand political meanings” JLP; R. Wodak 2017 The “Establishment”, the “Élites”, and the “People”: Who’s who?” JLP)
Main Contents of Far-Right Politics

• Nationalism/Nativism/Anti-Pluralism

• Anti-Elitism/Anti-Intellectualism (Anti-Expertise)

• Authoritarianism/“Law-& Order”- Politics

• Conservatism/Revisionism/ Welfare-Chauvinism
Discourse, Populist Rhetoric, and Performing Authenticity
The Politics of Fear

• All FRP parties instrumentalize (ethnic/religious/linguistic/political) minorities as *scapegoats* – as a threat to ‘us’, to ‘our’ nation; *crisis* scenarios; ‘politics of fear’.

• FRP promise to ‘solve’ this ‘problem’ – as *saviours* and as ‘voice’ of the ‘people’; this leads to *hope*.

• Appeals to common sense, emotions (pathos), and anti-intellectualism; FRP perform “authenticity” and “sincerity”.

• “Normalization” of the “unsayable”; *division of societies*.
Beispiel I: Britische Schlagzeilen – Der Beitrag der Medien!

1. 'SEND THEM ALL BACK HOME'
2. 'WE MUST STOP THE MIGRANT INVASION'
3. '4,000 FOREIGN MURDERERS AND RAPISTS WE CAN’T THROW OUT'
4. 'MIGRANTS SHUN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE'
5. 'ROMA MIGRANT INVASION WILL START VIOLENT RIOTS'
6. '500,000 MIGRANTS GET SOCIAL HOUSING'
7. 'IMMIGRATION: THE BACKLASH'
8. 'ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! CAMEROON CRIMINALS TERRORISE OUR STREETS'
9. '150,000 SAY NO TO NEW EU MIGRANTS'
10. 'MIGRANTS SET TO FLOOD IN'

Speak English or lose benefits.
DIVIDING THE WORLD

decent, honest, good, industrious, dutiful, charismatic, honourable, noble, brave, trustworthy, incorruptible

The good
The true
The upright
The victims

WE

„The true people“, represented by the populists

The “good” fight

“The others” are a threat to us!
We must fear “the others”!
We have the right to defend ourselves against “the others”!

THE OTHERS

amoral, deceitful, lazy, without conscience, evil, bad, cowardly, criminal

The bad
The fake
The liars
The perps

Those up there
The elites, politicians, upper classes, the east coast, fake media

Those out there
Asylum seekers, economic refugees, welfare tourists

Those down there
Spongers, parasites, the work-shy
FRP (Rhetorical) Strategies

• “Calculated ambivalence” and denial

• Victimhood and conspiracies

• Speaking for and on behalf of “the people” (*ad populum* argument) – repetition of simple narrative and “battle cries”

• Authenticity: “speaking like us, to us”; provides identification

• Promise of salvation and liberation – “Topos of the saviour”

• “Anti-politics” – rejection of dialogue, eristic argumentation

• “Bad manners” – flouting the cooperative principle, lying, breaking taboos, and blaming the elites for creating the taboos (>> PC)

• Continuous provocation propagated *as liberation*
EXAMPLES:

– Challenging (Media) Institutions
  – Creating “Illegal Migrants”
  – Provocation and Scandalisation
The Representation of Refugees and their Actions

Austrian newspapers (2015)
- Death and dying: 3%
- Life and living: 2%
- Flight and search: 4%
- Cost: 8%
- Arrival: 18%
- Movement and travel: 24%

Press releases of the EC (2015)
- Transgression: 17%
- Movement and travel: 21%
- Life and living: 9%
- Death and dying: 2%
- Flight and search: 19%
- Cost: 2%
- Arrival: 30%

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Fringe / Far-right discourse
Terminology, policy propositions, arguments etc.

Recontextualisation
Resemiotisation
Backstage

Genres, Posting, Interview, News, Speech, Poster, Meeting, Social Media, Media, Politics, Legislation, Jurisprudence, Education

Processes of normalisation

Mainstream discourses
Provocation:
Attacking the Media – “Fake News”

“There is a place where lies become news. That is the ORF. The best of Fake News, lies and propaganda, pseudo-culture and involuntary fees. Regional and international. In television, in radio and on the Facebook profile of Armin Wolf.”

ORF WIE WIR = “ORF LIKE CRAZY.”

Chronology of the Scandal
12. February 2018 (Ash Wednesday): Strache posts defamation on Facebook
13. February 2018: Armin Wolf files charges against Strache
24. February 2018: Judge states that this posting could be slander
25. February 2018: Director of ORF files charges against Strache
13. March 2018: Trial ended with published apology of Strache; Strache had to pay 10,000€ which Wolf donated to the DÖW (Archive for Austrian Resistance)

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17. May 2018: FPÖ Steger elected as chair of board of trustees of ORF
7/8 June 2018: ÖVP-FPÖ Government will launch “media enquiry” and promises new “media law”
Scandal is (intentionally) produced by a RWP politician (“fake news”).

Media report the new scandal in many details.

The reporting is denied.

The event is re-defined.

Quasi-apology – ‘calculated ambivalence’/ no apology.

New evidence, new accusations.

Scapegoats are created.

Dramatization: conspiracy.

Victimhood is claimed. Victim-perpetrator reversal.

Typical Patterns in Media Debates
FRP Perpetuum Mobile
Counter-Strategies against Continuous Provocations

• Jokes, irony
• Meta-level commentary – labelling destructive dynamics
• Fact-checking
• Implementing laws against discrimination, hate-speech, hate-incitement
• Frame-change
• New narrative, oriented towards accepting the present and presenting an inclusive vision of the future
CONCLUSIONS

Causes
Consequences
Counter-Discourses
“Post-Shame Era”
Lying and Normalization of the “Unsayable”

• Lying and Normalization of the “Unsayable” accompanies/furthers the undermining of checks and balances of liberal democracies

Far-right populism ➔ Illiberalism ➔ Neo-authoritarianism

• Shameless lying: Trump lied 3250 times in 500 days; Washington Post – 16 lies/day

• Conventional rules of negotiation, conversation and argumentation are flouted

• Parallel “discourse worlds” and “truths” exist – polarisation of societies

• Step-by-step transformation of liberal democracies into authoritarian states

COUNTER-STRATEGIES: “Back to the Future”

• Launching new positive (and non-simplistic) counter-narratives about “change” and the future – how to cope with real challenges (awareness of challenges; inclusive society; investing in education, innovation and new jobs (digitalisation); participation; new life and work-balance)

• Avoid falling into destructive rhetorical dynamics (based on analytical understanding of the social and historical roots of the rise of FRP and its rhetorics; better media competence, better – also emotionalizing – slogans)

• Creating participation on many local, regional (national) levels (e.g. Ireland) – better integration of migrants/refugees

• Addressing new electorates, providing unity/organisational identification for precariat and other novel professions
“BACK TO THE FUTURE!”
Inclusive Societies Coping with Future Challenges