

**SIGNIFICANT OTHERING: HOW THE FPÖ INSTRUMENTALIZES
WESTERN SEXUAL DEMOCRACY TO VILIFY MUSLIM
IMMIGRANTS IN AUSTRIA**

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Vienna, 25th May 2025

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to explore the discursive strategies employed by the Austrian far-right party, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (FPÖ), in order to perpetuate their exclusionary rhetoric towards Muslim immigrants under the guise of modern gendered issues. Specifically, it asks *How does the FPÖ employ Western sexual democratic discursive strategies, in their recent 2024 Austrian National Council election campaign, to construct Muslim immigrants as significant other?* By utilizing interconnected concepts of both nationalism and gender studies the research aims to provide a more wholehearted approach to the analysis their rhetoric during their public presences leading up to the most recent National Council election. The primary sources, consisting of media interviews and publicly available parliamentary speeches by various party actors, were analyzed through the lens of Ruth Wodak's *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA). This discourse analysis revealed that the FPÖ has shifted their rhetorical strategies towards various forms of appropriated feminist and sexual democratic discourse in order to disguise their promotion of an ethnic conception of a homogenous Austrian identity. These discursive strategies range from instrumentalizing *necropower* and *biopolitical* tactics in complementary ways, in order to promote the Muslim immigrant as an inherent threat, therefore legitimizing their exclusionary policy proposals.

Keywords: *Sexual Democracy, Significant Othering, Discursive Nationalization, Femonationalism, Biopolitics, Necropower, Civilizationist.*

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the striking rise of the far-right in Austria, as well as across Europe, it is becoming increasingly relevant to evaluate the various strategies party members employ in order to legitimize their ethnicized rhetoric of exclusion. As Europe has increasingly embraced liberal democracy as its political norm, the far-right is forced to deploy more concealed tactics, often perpetuating nationalist ideals through a disingenuous use of sexual democratic values. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore *how the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (FPÖ) employs Western sexual democratic discursive strategies, in their recent 2024 Austrian National Council election campaign, in order to construct Muslim immigrants as a significant other?*

Through the party's consistently traditionalist policies towards issues of gender, sexuality and ethnic inequalities, their modern emotional discourse around the protection of women's equality and safety is revealed to be a rhetorical pretense brought up in relation to hardlining immigration policies. Such hardlining policies require rhetorical legitimization in order to become digestible for a wide audience. Central to this analysis, therefore, is the relational rhetorical strategies between Fassin's (2010) idea of instrumentalized *sexual democracy* and its effects on the *significant othering* of Muslim immigrants in the case study of Austria. The Critical Discourse Analytical (CDA) approach allows for an extensive evaluation of the emotionalized narratives produced by the FPÖ's main political actors in its most recent election campaign. This research is conducted through an analysis of publicly available parliamentary speeches and media interviews of highly present party actors, leading up to the National Council election of the 29th September 2024. By dissecting their use of *femonationalist*, *biopolitical* and *civilizationist* argumentations, among others, this thesis aims to gain a more in-depth understanding of the party's discursive normalization of far-right political ideology. The reason these boundaries concern the Muslim immigrant community of

Austria, is due to the party's unmistakable address towards what they perceive as the threat of "Politischer Islam" (Political Islam) in all public appearances, campaign slogans and policy proposals.

This thesis begins with a contextual foundation, outlining key secondary literature and theoretical concepts drawn from gender and nationalism studies. The methodology section defines the research scope, acknowledges its limitations, and identifies the gap this work aims to address. The analytical section is introduced through a contextualizing comparison of the party's rhetorical development over time. Followed by two main focal points; the repetitive tactics the party employs in order to coherently produce a homogenous national identity along rhetorically constructed ethnic differences, and the second focus is on their particular appropriation of feminist and sexual concepts within their legitimizing strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis argues that the far-right Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (FPÖ) strategically instrumentalizes varying concepts of westernized *sexual democracy* to construct a rhetorically powerful *significant other* in the country's Muslim immigrants. For the effective communication of this analysis, this section will present the terminology lying at the heart of the research title and the corresponding scholarly literature.

Sexual democracy is a central term in the gender studies field, which was coined by French sociologist Éric Fassin in his text *National Identities and Transnational Intimacies: Sexual Democracy and the Politics of Immigration in Europe* (2010). With this term Fassin is able to summarize the political and cultural aspects of discursive national identity building which specifically focus on separations made along gender and sexual liberties in western society. He argues that the concept of *sexual democracy* inherently carries elements of western and nationalist supremacy, as it instrumentalizes feminist politics not for genuine progress, but to emotionally charge and legitimize exclusionary political agendas. An important distinction Fassin makes in his analysis is the transnational nuances of *sexual democracy* that he presents. He clearly differentiates between the use of a rhetorical “sexual clash of civilisation” by their demographics and the political agendas hidden within their rhetoric. For example, while the French case study illustrates a heterosexual-Christian conception of national identity, the Dutch case similarly reveals a sexualization of democratic values, where tolerance of sexual diversity is instrumentalized to justify intolerance towards ‘imported intolerance’ (Fassin, 2010). The FPÖ, in particular, effectively reinforced an ethnically and heteronormative Austrian identity through their distinct discursive nationalization (De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak 1999). While these nuances align with the broader pattern, they introduce important variations that influence the course of this analysis.

This effective rhetorical identification with supposed western progressiveness, is implemented as a clear indicator of *nationalist significant othering* (Triandafyllidou 1998). In the Austrian case study, this *nationalist significant othering* is put into practice along religious differences rather than traditional nation-state boundaries. *Significant othering* refers to the disguised ‘us vs. them’ rhetoric, which effectively mobilizes around ideas of national belonging through the presence of a visible ‘Other’, in this case not national but a racialized religious entity. Birgit Sauer (2022) traces this more subtle form of *significant othering*, which centers religious identity over a clear national other, to a “shift from race to faith” (451). Where religion is repurposed as an essentialized racial boundary, once again likening discursive strategies of *nationalist significant othering* (Sauer 2022).

The interconnectedness of these two central terms, *sexual democracy* and *significant othering*, showcases the relevance of implementing concepts of both gender and nationalism studies as the basis for an effective critical discourse analysis.

The theory of *sexual democracy* being employed as a rhetorical tool by the contemporary far-right, strongly links another foundational literature; Rogers Brubaker’s *Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective* (2017). Brubaker complements Fassin’s theory, that the modern far-right have reinvented their public presence in order to disguise their extreme rhetoric. However, he points out a broader shift towards *civilizationism*. These political parties, in his case from Northern and Eastern Europe, nowadays “re-characterize (the nation) in civilizational terms” (Brubaker 2017, p.41). This entails that there is now a larger rhetorical emphasis on *civilisational* differences, referring to religion, cultures and secularist ideals, rather than on the distinct national ‘Others’. Another major change in communicating ideas of national protectionism, is their weaponization of the welfare-state rather than overt neoliberal ideals. This perpetuation of core social values of the nation is highly relevant to the Austrian case study, and will be

elaborated on further in the analytical section. However, Brubaker clarifies that this is only a direct expression of the flexibility of nationalist populism, and not an expression of liberal developments within the far-right. A clear understanding of these distinctions is critical to the analytical approach adopted in this research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To provide structure for examining the research question, this section presents the more in-depth concepts applied to the analytical section of this thesis. In particular, nationalism studies concepts which are aimed at laying the foundation for the subsequent critical discourse analysis.

A foundational claim made by Natascha Strobl in her 2021 book *Radikalisierter Konservatismus*, has inspired this thesis' deep dive into the discursive constructions of nationalist ideas, that do not seem overtly political even though they are. Strobl argues that the modern far-right in Europe has mastered the effective application of Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Ironically, this theory of hegemony was developed by one of the 20th century's most influential leftist thinkers. Hereby, Strobl (2021) also actively distincts the far-right's ideological claims from their efforts at hegemony, since Gramsci's theory of hegemony refers to power that is implemented through consent, rather than overt force through political means. This form of indirect power includes banal daily rhetorical interactions within institutions such as education, media and religion that are able to shape discourse around identities (Martin 2023). Which becomes especially powerful through the political far-right's "discourse-dominance" around highly emotionalized social topics that are commonly perceived as separate from the political realm, such as themes of sexual moral panics (Strobl 2021, 23). The themes that the far-right dominates the political discourse with are often connected to ideas of national identity and belonging, which will be further elaborated on through the analytical body of this thesis. This is because scholars of nationalism studies and critical discourse analysis agree that national consciousness and identity can be "continually renegotiated, produced, reproduced and destructed" (De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak 1999). This thesis specifically seeks to build on Strobl's assertion that the far-right is actively applying Gramsci's theory of national hegemony by subtly

normalizing their ideals within their rhetorical strategies. However, due to the limited scope of this study, it will not delve into broader social far-right phenomena or the pop-cultural dimensions of the pre-political sphere. Instead, the focus will remain on analyzing the manipulative discourse employed directly by the Austrian FPÖ in its political public presence. This will include their strategies to achieve a discursive normalization of exclusionary values that subsequently shape ‘common sense’ on specific topics, rather than overt motivated ideology communication (Martin, 2023). Specifically, focusing on their mobilization around sexual morals and how these are used to affect the underlying portrayal of muslim immigrants in Austria.

This focus on efforts at hegemony through powerful rhetoric is also linked to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *national habitus*, which refers to the internalized repetitive structures that shape a collective consciousness through shared perceptions, actions and nationalizing ‘habits’ (Bourdieu, 1977). These habits are what go beyond discourse-domination, they indicate cultural shifts, often affected by geopolitical and national developments and emphasize the daily practices that subtly embody national belonging through a certain performance of stereotypes and ideals. Some of the ways in which these practices are shaped is through the constructs and rhetorical strategies that influence the idea of the national body, which the party effectively tries to promote on the political level.

One of the concepts shaping this embodiment are the varying manifestations of *biopolitics* and *necropower*, which often operate in complementary ways. In this context, I will be focusing more on the rhetorical aspects of the two concepts, and not as much on the cultural institutions and actions involved. *Biopolitics* is a term developed by Michel Foucault (1978) and refers to the state’s modern regulation of human life, a certain optimization. Hereby, the political rhetoric aims to optimize the health and reproduction of the population along nationalist structures, prioritizing their national ‘family’ (Pele 2020). Pele emphasises that the

supposed positive management of optimal living, can evolve to ideas of protectionism of the national identity and pure ideas of a homogenous ethnic nation. Meaning that ethnic and social order ideologies can easily find their way into the rhetoric of the ideal healthy population, even if it seems harmless. The direct extension and contrast to Foucault's *biopolitics* can be derived from Achille Mbembe's term *necropower/politics*, developed in his paper *Politiques de l'inimitié* (2003). At the national-political level, *necropower* refers to the mobilization of ideas of life and death that aim to reinforce national identity, where perceived threats to the nation are constructed to emotionalize belonging and legitimize exclusion (Sauer 2022). The larger frame that Mbembe's term can also take on is the banal terminology and perspectives that derive from internalized and normalized ideas of death, violence and war (Pele 2020). However, Birgit Sauer elaborates on the smaller scale version by giving the Austrian example, where visible religious 'Others', such as Muslim veiled women, are instrumentalized as a cultural threat that promotes discussions of the 'death' of the nation and its power. One of many examples of this tactic would be the 2018 ban on headscarves in schools, under a ÖVP-FPÖ coalition government, which was conducted under the guise of secular values. This was directly contradicted when they reassured the public that these regulations would not affect young Sikhs or children wearing the jewish yarmulke (P. and McDonald 2020). According to P. and McDonald, these bans were further justified by an effort to "free young girls from their alleged subjugation" (1). Through the regulation's hypocrisy these young girls become the scapegoat for political rhetoric that aims to promote exaggerated national crises.

Critics such as Fatima Mernissi (2007), state that such regulations are a form of western centric saviourism, which masks ethno-nationalist ideals. Mernissi makes the bold claim that the Muslim female headscarf is often made a convenient scapegoat for what the West views as the pinnacle of patriarchal oppression, values which countries like Austria claim to have outgrown. Mernissi contends that while the subjugation of women's bodies may be more

tangible in conservative Muslim countries, the West continues to grapple with a more invisible patriarchal power, embedded in control of the female body through beauty, time and class. Whether you agree with her conception or not, it draws a clear critique on the hypocritical saviourism that the far-right portrays through such regulations, an apparent fight for feminism that they have never cared for before the constructed national threat that the Muslim community has embodied for them.

Such ideas constitute the introduction of another core term of this thesis; *Femonationalism*. It embodies the ideas presented by scholars such as Mernissi or Fassin as well. *Femonationalism* is a term coined by Sarah R. Farris (2017) which explains the common instrumentalization of feminist discourse for the promotion of nationalist identity politics, a tool to constitute a sense of western national superiority along the terms of progressive feminist means (Farris 2017).

These core concepts will determine the foundation for the analysis of the FPÖ's public appearances during the 2024 National Council elections. By illustrating the practical application of the afore-mentioned theoretical concepts, this thesis aims to provide a structured, real-world perspective on the study of political nationalism as expressed within strategic rhetoric.

RESEARCH GAP

The current relevance of combining concepts of gender studies, such as *sexual democracy*, with the key analytical frameworks of nationalism studies, becomes evident through the prevalent gap in gendered considerations within the nationalism studies field. As early as 1998, Nira Yuval-Davis pointed out the lack of a necessary gendered perspective within the study of national identity-building, in her essay *Gender and Nation* (1998). She blames the field's exclusion of gendered influences on its common separation of the private and the "public political sphere" within the discussion on the social construction of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1998). Contrasting this to papers published more recently, we find that this gap remains largely unfilled. For example, Jennifer Thomsen (2020) quoting Suruchi Thapar-Björkert (2013) stating that "nationalism (has) primarily been discussed by men about men" (4). Showcasing, not only the unfiltered reality that the modern nation state and the study of it was built upon "masculinized memory", but moreover, that Yuval-Davis' critique remains upheld in the 21st Century (quoted in Thomson 2020, 4). However, there have been some notable contributors to this gap, especially for the specific national context of Austria. The scholars that are dominating more innovative discussions about the Austrian far-right, by bringing in issues of gender and sexuality, are Brigit Sauer, Stefanie Mayer and Edma Ajanovic. Their critical works make up much of the most recent literature that aim to broaden the scope of scholarly observation in Austria. This field of study thrives on consistency through continuous up-to-date analyses of the far right's ever-evolving strategies. Therefore, this thesis aims to further contribute to the growing literature that is directing a more gendered lens onto modern developments of political nationalism.

METHODOLOGY

1. Research Approach

This thesis aims to apply methods of *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) in order to adequately explore the rhetorical tools that the FPÖ applied in their 2024 National Council election campaign speeches and interviews. Particularly looking at the linguistic weaponization of *sexual democracy* ideals for the purpose of othering Muslim immigrants.

This method emerged from the fields of psychology, linguistics, and ethnography to develop a comprehensive approach to discourse, one that also considers surrounding elements such as cultural practices, popular culture, and political institutions (Wodak and Meyer 2008). Among other scholars, Ruth Wodak shaped the field in the early 1990s with the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Vienna (De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak 1999). Since the research question at hand focuses on the Austrian case study, it was most appropriate to base its research approach on Ruth Wodak's interpretation of *Critical Discourse Studies* (CDS). Wodak defines CDS' research focus as both written and spoken form that become an expression of social practice, whereby the "dialectical relationship between discursive practices and their corresponding social structures can be studied" (De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak 1999 and Wodak 2015, 1-61). Furthermore, Wodak defines the analysis of political rhetoric, specifically ones that look at far-right populist strategies, as a "meso-topic" level, which tend to be more sensitive depending on the national identity construction it critiques (Wodak 2015, 19). This meso-level also entails a smaller scale discursive analysis compared to the large CDA, which strongly applies to scope of this thesis (Wodak 2015, 12). An important note Wodak makes is that the field aims at self-awareness, as any scholar critically analyzing discourse must acknowledge that their work is also affected by the same socio-economic or political developments around them.

The research process required a large body of secondary literature that provided the foundation for claims made about the primary source material. Most of the groundwork within secondary literature for this study is established in the literature review and theoretical framework sections, both of which are designed to provide a structured lens through which the themes examined in the primary source analysis can be understood.

2. Primary Source Selection

The selection process for the primary source material required research on various aspects. One of these is the timeline for the National Council election campaign period. This varies in opinion, however, in a general sense it starts when the date for the election is officially set, in the case of Austria in 2024 it was officially announced on the 9th of July 2024 (*Parlament Österreich 2024*). However, this only commenced the ‘hot’ phase of campaigning. If the primary sources had only considered the source material from this late campaigning time frame it would have ignored the work that establishes presence for the campaigning parties before this time frame. The parties do not wait to show their presence until the ‘hot’ phase, they establish more underlying methods all year long (*“Neue Woche Bringt ‘Stichtag’ Für NR-Wahl” 2024*). This was further confirmed with the amount of public interviews party actors held before this time frame which already contained their main election campaign talking points and political goals. Therefore, there is a balance of primary sources within the ‘hot’ campaign phase as well as before that, the furthest they go back is March 2024.

Furthermore, while public interviews were a powerful primary source for the analysis of their rhetorical strategies, this thesis aimed to go beyond that. It is important to understand the entirety of their political presence, therefore, also including their parliamentary session speeches. These parliamentary speeches were proven to be valuable as they were also publicly

available on the official parliamentary website, and the actors often directly addressed the public within them.

When it came to the political actors chosen; the core of the analysis was shaped by Herbert Kickl, the party's "Volkskanzler". Along with Christian Hafenecker, who is another highly present male figure in the party at the moment. Since these two men would take up much space of the analysis due to their high presence, this research saw it relevant to employ an analysis of the main female political actors of the party as well. Especially since women in the far-right are often instrumentalized to soften their image and effectively convey disingenuous *femonationalist* and *sexual democratic* themes (Fassin 2010). The women chosen for analysis were all part of the FPÖ's National Council at the time; Dagmar Belakowitsch, Dr. Susanne Fürst, Petra Steger and Rosa Ecker.

3. Limitations

The main limitation of this thesis is the narrowness of its scope. In order for a wholehearted analytical clarity, the research focus had to be constrained by a strict time frame, a focused theoretical lens within the field and a limited capacity for comparative perspectives. These limitations in scope were deliberate, intended to maintain a coherent structure for an effective presentation of the final arguments, by not extending it beyond its abilities.

Furthermore, the primary source material was exclusively in German, with no officially translated documents available. Therefore, excerpts from transcripts, video or audio interview content were translated individually. This was a methodological choice as some official or generative AI translations do not match the contextual tone or meaning adequately and require more explanation. However, the reason it a limitation is due to certain limits in comprehension through language barriers and imperfect translations that might occur, especially when focusing on conversational transcripts.

CONTEXTUALIZATION THROUGH COMPARATIVE TIMELINES

In order to adequately introduce the body of this analysis, it is important to give a brief through a brief discourse-historical approach to the FPÖ's developments. The party's foundations are what define its legacy and strategies today, therefore it is relevant to address its previous ideological stances and rhetorical strategies in order to understand how they developed it over time.

To start out on a simple historical contextualization; the predecessor of the FPÖ, the *Verband der Unabhängigen* (VdU), was founded in 1949 “by former Nazis for former Nazis” (Pelinka 2001, 1). To be more specific, one of its founders was Anton Reinthaller, a formerly high ranking SS-general who became a leading figure of the *Ehemaligen* (formers) community in post-war Austria (Reiter 2018). In 1956 the VdU rebranded itself to the modern democratic political landscape by becoming the party it is known for today: the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (FPÖ). This former Nazi construct was only possible due to the overarching lack of denazification in Austria. Post World War II Austria denied any responsibility for the crimes of Nazi-Germany, on a political, international and socio-cultural level due to their status as the ‘first victim’ to Nazi Germany (Goode 2023). This claim was only challenged and later deconstructed with the Waldheim Affair of the late 1980's (Goetz 2021). Goetz (2021) elaborates that, even though this late deconstruction of the first victim thesis was profound for the socio-political landscape of Austria, the far-right has persisted in their fascist ideology, merely adapting to modernizing circumstances (Goetz 2021, 2). Pelinka already addressed this in 2001, stating that the far-right in Austria is an example “of *postmodern politics* characterized by sound bites, video-clips, and entertainment” (3). This underscores the importance of understanding Austria's political history, to fully grasp the current far-right rhetorical strategies.

The next relevant phase of the FPÖ also helps gain an understanding for the development of the far-right rhetoric in Austria, which is Jörg Haider's parliamentary success for the FPÖ under his rule in the 1990s. Jörg Haider's transformative impact on the party represents one of the most extensively studied phases of the Austrian far-right (*Pelinka 2001*). According to an interview by *Zeit Magazin* with Armin Wolf (2023), one of the most prominent national media figures in Austria, Jörg Haider introduced an "unprecedented" form of populism into the FPÖ's rhetoric. He fashioned certain trends in the FPÖ's rhetorical strategy that have remained, such as their blatant denial of evident facts in public appearances and their avid delegitimization of the 'system' which includes media outlets, established parties and certain ministerial extensions of the government (*Wolf 2023*). Haider's "anti-foreigner petitions" in rural and urban regions allowed for him to direct the polarized discourse in the pre-political realm towards an unprecedented 26.5 percent second place in the 1999 National Council elections (*Rheindorf and Wodak 2019*). Rheindorf and Wodak continue by stating that Haider's rise marked a period of efforts to normalize rhetoric on restrictive reproductive rights, queer hostility and traditionalist views on the Austrian woman's role in society. This is especially interesting, since it was "an open secret" that Haider himself was queer (*Frank, 2010*). However, Jörg Haider was only officially outed by his former FPÖ colleague Gerald Ebinger after his tragic death in 2008 (*HOSI Wien 2010*). Stefan Petzner, a close 'friend' of Haider, further confirmed this after his death when he stated that Haider was "the man of his life" and images of him distraught at his funeral made the media call him Haider's widower (*Bilefsky 2008*). Notable about this is that the FPÖ used this opportunity to pride themselves on the fact that, according to them, they were the only party ruled by a queer man for 17 years (*HOSI Wien 2010*). This is another opportunistic example of *homonationalism*, where the FPÖ aimed to appeal to the growing progressive audience at the time, in this case specifically aimed at the Austrian LGBTQI+ community (*Dhoest 2020*). At the

same time their policies reflected none of the tolerance portrayed in the statements after Haider's posthumous outing.

According to Rheindorf and Wodak the period after Haider, under Heinz-Christian Strache from 2005 onwards, required a softened public appearance during election campaign periods due to the growing international consensus against radical political ideology. His leadership moved the party towards an increased form of Michael Billig's (1995) *banal nationalism*, with the use of nationalist symbols, such as the Austrian flag, in order to push underlying ideas of national 'pride' in daily practices (Rheindorf and Wodak 2019). This new generation within the FPÖ marked their gradual decline in overtly hardline and exclusionary far-right rhetoric in campaign discourse, however such language continued to manifest in the party's stance on feminist and queer issues. Norbert Hofer, another central figure of their 2017 campaign, notably endorsed pro-life positions and opposed civil partnerships and adoption rights for same-sex couples, insinuating that these would undermine the natural Austrian family (Rheindorf and Wodak 2019). Their move away from Haider's strategies was that their restrictive gender policies were more hidden under a disguise of innocent *Heimatliebe* (love of the homeland), often accompanied by patriotic imagery, religious symbolism, and flag-centered nationalism.

Since then, especially after the Ibiza-Affair of 2019, Herbert Kickl has taken the Party-Chairman position in 2021 and once again spun around the party's narrative, as he believed radicalization would benefit the party within the socio-economic climate of the post-COVID years (Moreau 2024). However, even though Kickl was one of the former speech writer's of Jörg Haider's radical campaign, he has also since adapted his discourse more to its contemporary context (Baumann, 2025). He manages to balance the line of radicalising the FPÖ's claims and policy ideas while lowering the overall thematization of gendered or LGBTQI+ issues. His

strategy seems to focus more on the scapegoating of the ‘system’ and Muslim immigrants, than on the previous party Chairman’s narratives on queer issues.

ANALYTICAL SECTIONS

PR-TRAINED; REPETITION AS A DISCURSIVE STRATEGY

1. General Patterns Observed

This analytical section will aim to provide a detailed evaluation of the FPÖ’s rhetorical strategies within the most recent 2024 National Council election campaign, using their publicly aired parliamentary speeches by Kickl and four female party members as well as campaign interviews conducted by varying media outlets Christian Hafenecker.

The most predominant link observed between all of the analyzed primary source material, is their impressive display of party coherence, especially in discursive tactics. The reason these discursive repetitions stand out in particular is because they are brought into almost every public speech or interview of varying party actors. Even when the topic or question at hand relates to an entirely different issue, party actors effectively manage to insert their repetitive slogans and evocative catchphrases. This reflects a highly coordinated PR strategy and internal coherence within the party, both of which can be crucial in times of campaigning. The contrasting failures of the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) also further showcase the importance of strong party coherence during the 2024 election campaign. The SPÖ had multiple internal legitimacy issues which were dragged out in the public eye, severely hurting the party’s trustworthiness (*Zeglovits and Oppenauer 2024*).

Further overarching observations showed that the intensity of their terminology and claims starkly varied depending on the context the party actors found themselves in. The reason for

this was that outlets such as *OE24* or *Kronen Zeitung*, which platform the party most frequently and are both categorized as ‘tabloid-media’, offer the party minimal pushback on its controversial statements (*diemedien 2025*). In contrast, to media such as the public broadcaster *ORF*, which asks more critical questions as well as pushing back on unconstitutional statements made within interviews. This entails, according to the primary sources analyzed, that the FPÖ places significantly less emphasis on racialized narratives when in the public broadcasting contexts. Instead they used this time to center the discussions more on populist scapegoating techniques, such as the targeting of the so-called “Systemparteien” (establishment parties) and the “media-conglomerate” (*Hafenecker 2024*). For a counter example, in interviews on *OE24* and the *Kronen Zeitung*, Kickl went as far as to insinuate that his proposal for a “ban on political Islam” should be implemented through an ambiguous “repurposing” of the NS-Prohibition Act of 1947 (*Kickl 2024*). Since the interviewer asked no critical follow up questions to this, Kickl’s deliberately unclear wording during this controversial statement leaves room for interpretation whether he would replace this denazification constitutional act altogether or just use it as a blueprint for his exclusionary policy. Such controversial policy proposals are at the forefront in his interviews with tabloid media, as these mediums embrace sensationalized language.

Furthermore, there is little overtly radical sexual or gendered language within their public appearances, these perspectives are handled more indirectly through a softening of their language overall since the party’s reconfiguration in 2019 (*Goetz 2021*). This may also represent a strategic attempt to rehabilitate the party’s image following the decline in popularity caused by the 2019 Ibiza corruption scandal. This does not insinuate that the current FPÖ has adopted feminist or inclusive policies; it much rather reflects a more troubling underlying form of *femonationalist* rhetoric that is subtle enough to mislead the socio-cultural audience that has accepted more progressive norms.

Beyond the overarching patterns of the FPÖ's rhetorical strategies presented in this section, there are two main rhetorical patterns that can be found in almost all primary sources analyzed. These patterns observed were their use of derogatory catchphrases and Kickl's repeated extended metaphors that emotionalize its national identity.

2. The Repetitive Derogatory Catchphrases

The first family of consistently repeated catchphrases aim to create a distinct discursive separation between the national and the 'Other'. One of the repeated descriptions entail a purposeful use diminutive suffixes, in words such as "Flüchtlinge" (refugees) (Belakowitsch 2024) or "Eindringlinge" (intruders) (Kickl 2024, 14;15). In the German language, the diminutive suffix '*linge*' can be added at the end of any noun, for the purpose of endearment or belittling, depending on their context (Bukhori 2019, 25). This specific colloquial suffix is not inherently derogatory in its natural occurrence, but has also been significantly less studied compared to other suffixes and their linguistic effects, according to Bukhori (2019). It belongs to a family of commonly used German diminutive suffixes such as '*lein*' '*chen*' or '*i*', which are more endearing than derogatory. However, in this political context, where party actors refer to a minority group, their terminology choice reflects subtle linguistic objectification and belittlement. Going unnoticed, these terms hold power in the creation of a subtle *significant other*.

Furthermore, the party is consistent in its linguistic perpetuation of the national "us" and belonging through the possessive determiner "our". In every analyzed primary source this powerfully subtle pronoun comes up along with references to the government's responsibilities towards its "own people", such as the emotionalizing plea to "have a heart for our families" instead of foreign ones (Belakowitsch 2024). Hereby, it confirms the statement made by Wodak et al. (1999) that the discursive production of a political national identity is "always and necessarily

a creation of difference” (153). Belakowitsch not only creates an idea of the national family and a clear in-group but simultaneously produces an out-group that relationally define each other within this rhetoric. Stefanie Mayer et al. (2020) elaborate on this analysis as the focus on a rhetorical ‘family’ serve the purpose of linking the “macro-level of the constructed” in-group to the micro-level of “individual behaviour” and the private sphere, which connects ideas of intimacy and responsibility with the overarching national identity (111).

Further efforts to dehumanize any discourse on Muslim immigrants comes from linguistic choices during official parliamentary sessions aimed at the public and their opposition. One of which was held just three months before the elections by Dr. Susanne Füst (FPÖ) whereby she referred to Muslim immigrants as “diese Leute” (these people), who she states to be seemingly unwilling to be instructed to “our rules” (Füst 2024). As well as stating that restrictive immigration policies would be a form of “Symptom treatment”, indirectly creating a narrative of disease and intrusion that further contributes to the dehumanization of Muslim immigrants. These linguistic strategies assume direct western-centric superiority, which she further builds upon when she blames the Viennese Mayor for allowing “alles” (anything) into the city, citing it as the cause of rising crime. Further contributing to a conspiratory dehumanization of Muslim immigrants through objectification.

Similarly, the party’s common repetition of the racially charged “Völkerwanderer” (Steger 2024) term, which insinuates a conspiratory mass migration threatening the safety of the nation, comes up in interviews and speeches by various actors. “Völkerwanderer” was appropriated by the far-right from historical accounts of the Roman Empire, and is employed to romanticize the nation as an empire while simultaneously evoking a narrative of decline through mass criminal and especially non-white migration (Donecker 2018). Furthermore, it relates to the neo-fascist *Great Replacement Theory*, which is repeated in extremist circles such as the Identitären, a radical right movement in Europe that has been linked to the FPÖ (FIPU 2019). Through a

narrative of conspiratory invasion these two concepts produce a powerful threat in the immigrant presence. This discursive strategy, aims to instrumentalize “demographic decline as an antagonistic populist conception” of an ‘Other’ that threatens both from the outside and the inside (Mayer, Ajanović, and Sauer 2020, 110). This subtle repetition therefore gives a real-life portrayal of *necropower*, since they imply and underlying tone of existential threats that manifest themselves in their image of Muslim immigrants.

3. Kickl’s Extended Metaphors

The second recurring rhetorical strategy observed is directly linked to Herbert Kickl as a political figure in the party. Analyzing his rhetorical tactics is particularly relevant, as he was the FPÖ’s lead candidate in the 2024 national elections and controversially dubbed himself “Volkskanzler”, a term with historical associations to Nazi-era language (Sulzbacher 2023). His language is polished, stern and especially evocative through his use of simplifying *assimilative metaphors* (Comma 2024). *Assimilative metaphors* are a discursive strategy that creates an emotional tie for in-group cohesion, national solidarity and homogeneity (De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak 1999). One of the metaphors he applies most often, in multiple interviews and in parliamentary session speeches, is one that conflates the nation with the “family” (Kickl 2024). Kickl introduces this extended metaphor as a “thought experiment” every time, then he sets the scene emotively through someone leaving their apartment or house door open uncontrolled all year long, hereby referring to Austria’s open borders for Asylum-seekers. He goes on by saying that these families are giving these “intruders” access to all their food, money, resources and especially “our women”. He notably always ends on this last point about “our women”, in order to leave the audience with an intimate and impassioned thought experiment of a foreigner, in this case a muslim refugee, “vergreifen” (a dismissive term for ‘violate’) one of our female family members. Hereby, he instrumentalizes the private sphere of the family to perpetuate the

political homogenous nation. Furthermore, “our women” in this case becomes a collective image of the innocent Austrian woman. The liberated Austrian woman is hereby reduced to a symbol of prosperity for the nation as well as an idealized collective of the ethnic Austrian superiority.

In another example of this continued narrative, the party’s female member Dagmar Belakowitsch claimed in a parliamentary speech, that the Austrian government “has no heart for our own families, nothing is left for them” (*Belakowitsch, 2024*). This is a powerful discursive nationalization that further perpetuates the *Homo Austriacus* (*Liebhart and Reisigl, 1997*) which is elevated to an “imaginary collective level” through its metaphorical family ties (*quoted in De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak 1999*). This way Kickl and Belakowitsch create a seemingly innocent image of national sameness that subtly implies ethnic boundaries along a distinct national homogeneity and its clear out-group. The metaphor of “our family” powerfully insinuates ideas of ethnic citizenship for the Austrian nation. Such a discussion on ethnic versus civic nationalism is more often than not instrumentalized for political discourse rather than truly informative analyses (*Pogonyi, 2022*), something the FPÖ has perfected.

THE RHETORICAL SEXUAL CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS AND THE FPÖ'S APPROPRIATED FEMINISM

1. Instrumentalization of Sexualized National Separations

This section focuses on the party's use of terminology related to gendered nationhood, their construction of cultural conflict narratives, and their appropriation of toxic masculinity as a rhetorical device. All three of these aspects fall under the umbrella of *femonationalism* and Fassin's (2010) concept of the narrative *sexual clash of civilisations*.

The first strategy analyzed is the terminology that the FPÖ instrumentalizes in order to construct gendered ideas of nationhood along its threat by the *significant other*, Muslim immigrants. Once again, the terms employed recur across multiple public appearances and are designed to provoke shock value while conflating the feminist ideas to a racialized issue. Kickl and other political actors, often female party members, incorporate the buzzwords "Massenvergewaltigung" (mass rapes), "Gruppenvergewaltigung" (gang rapes) or "Vergreifen" (violate) into conversations on immigration policy. By example, Kickl (2024) and Hafenecker (2024) insinuate that widespread rape cases are a form of "importierte Kriminalität" (imported crime), once again subtly objectifying Muslim immigrants as a cargo that can intrude or be imported into Austria. Or a female party spokesperson who directly claimed that the phenomenon of gang-rapes was not in the country before 2015, clearly referencing the large migration wave from the Middle East of that year (Fürst 2024). The use of narratives around violent acts, especially sexual violence, is an effective discourse-domination as any rejection of the topic would insinuate negligence towards Austrian feminist dilemmas. Furthermore, it effectively constructs a discursive 'common sense' around issues that, in reality, reflect exclusionary migration ideologies rather than a genuine concern for the protection of Austrian

women, showcasing the catalyzing power of gendered issues within political rhetoric (*Sauer and Siim 2019*).

This narrative of the ‘protection’ of Austrian women and “young girls” is expanded on by their policy proposal that aims at “lowering the age of criminal responsibility (from 14) to 12 years old” (*Ecker 2024*). Showcasing their use of Bauer’s (2022) explanation of the two concept of *Necropower*, which often works in subtle ways. The *Necropower* perspective, is only introduced when the party explains that the need for the lowering of the age for criminal responsibility only came with the 2015 imported threat for Austria’s “young girls” (*Ecker 2024*). In this March 2024 parliamentary speech on youth safety, Rosa Ecker constructs an extended imagery of young Muslim boys as primitive and criminal, primarily through a detailed listing of incidents involving youths from various Middle Eastern countries allegedly harming girls or boys of an “Austrian nationality”. Notably here is the underlying gendered aspects brought in; young Austrian girls have to fear sexual violence from young boys under 14, while innocent young Austrian boys fear unprovoked violence from the same aggressor. Perpetuating a simplified understanding of a “natural” clash of cultural values. By her pointedly constructed imagery of violent young immigrant boys as an existential threat, Ecker perpetuates a narrative of national crisis and generational decline. This rhetoric subtly invokes *necropower*, framing the issue as a struggle over both the life and death of national prosperity.

2. The FPÖ’s Sexual Clash of Civilizations

The next rhetorical narrative the party perpetuates is one of a ‘natural’ clash of civilizations. Susanne Fürst of the FPÖ stated that the “Clash der Kulturen” could not be ignored (*Fürst 2024*). Kickl continued this narrative by stating that muslim immigrant’s “culture” was too different to the Austrian one, meaning that it would be too much work to teach them our values as well as to make “these people literate” (*Kickl 2024*). He ends his statement by concluding that these

cultural clashes are “the last thing the market needs”, relating directly to a neoliberal interpretation of hardlining exclusionary immigration policies (Kickl 2024). Another effective example of this far-right narrative is Kickl claiming that this is “a culture where women have no value”, in a OE24 interview (Kickl, 2024). These types of claims showcase a Western-centric sense of superiority projected onto an essentialized image of Muslim immigrants, the country and culture becoming obsolete as they are homogenized under orientalist imagery (Sauer 2022, 450). They also promote a common sensical separation between the progressive western societies and the violence of ‘the third world’, which in this case is represented by their generalised idea of this religious identity.

The FPÖ’s rhetoric aims to legitimize certain ‘natural’ inequalities, differences while at the same time promoting national homogeneity. These strategies are implemented throughout their public presence in order to justify and emotionalize their hardlined exclusionary policy proposals.

One of their main exclusionary policies which they want to push is to make social welfare, especially “basic benefits, only available for Austrian citizens” (Kickl 2024, 31:20). Hafenecker goes beyond that in his OE24 Live interview in June 2024, that Schools and Doctors should reprioritise Austrian citizens again in order to put an end to what they refer to as the government’s “reversed solidarity” towards immigrants (Hafenecker 2024, 21:30 and 17:45). Both of these policies showcase a real-life example of Brubaker’s theory that the contemporary far-right are moving more towards instrumentalizing *civilizationist* agendas, such as creating national privilege around the welfare state, in order to perpetuate ethnicized priorities within the nation. Beyond that, such an attack on the access to equal healthy living, education and basic economic needs displays a powerful use of *Biopolitics*. Creating underlying boundaries through who is worthy of belonging to this national body through restrictive health benefits also furthers the definition of national identity along the physical body of its members. *Biopolitics*

hereby has the power to perpetuate the ideal healthy national body along ethnicized boundaries, these boundaries are also clearly drawn by the FPÖ through their aim to only allow ‘Asylum’ for the country’s “immediate (European) neighbours”, insinuating a white western homogenous body that is worthy of the benefits Austria’s identity offers (*Kickl 2024*).

Once again, it is noteable that the party refrains from direct mentioning of reproductive rights in these scenarios, a controversial stance they have almost fully set aside in their rhetoric. However, not only is reproductive health care insinuated within regulating access to health care, it is further promoted by Belakowitsch’s (2024) call for more “Family-policy instead of Migration-policy”. Not only does this further touch upon a heterosexual ideal of national reproduction it also clearly separates reproductive benefits between “our families” and the foreign bodies (*Belakowitsch 2024*).

3. Instrumentalized Feminism; Toxic Masculinity

Lastly, this section examines Susanne Fürst’s paradoxical appropriation of the contemporary gendered term “toxic masculinity” to advance her apologetic stance toward cultural promotions of right-wing agendas. To quote Fürst (2024) entirely, “the toxic masculinity, the real threatening sexism, can’t be found on Sylt or at the Oktoberfest, not with the rural youth in Zillertal, not with the soccer hooligans in the stadiums and also not with the people that talk about Remigration and current problem of our current population exchange”. Let us unpack this; Sylt references the recent video scandal of privileged partying youths changing the lyrics to a popular German pop song to call out the expulsion of all immigrants, which quickly spread across to the Austrian youth in Zillertal (*Holub 2024*). Oktoberfest is known to be a promotion of conservative values, nationalist symbols and most importantly, toxic masculinity with a number of sexual assault cases every year (*Wucherer 2022*). Football hooliganism has linked by many scholars, to increased national sentiment and masculine

violence. Fürst thus aligns the FPÖ's stance on their interpretation of "progressive" goals. Directly instrumentalizing the left's popular cultural discussions of masculinity and internalised gender performance, to promote national traditional values.

Another similarly nonsensical yet rhetorically powerful statement, which serves as a radical attention-grabber by aligning with traditional national ideals, is Kickl's accusation that the Austrian government considers the life of a Ukrainian refugee to be worth more than that of "someone from Iraq or Iran" (*Kickl 2024, 16:60*). His paradoxical invocation of typically egalitarian values in the context of asylum policy mirrors Fürst's instrumentalization of 'toxic masculinity', as both momentarily temper their radical positions by adapting to contemporary discourses on these ethnic issues.

This strategy can be compared to Fassin's (2010) report of French former president Nicolas Sarkozy, who created positive secularism, with which he aimed to realign the progressive developments of French secularism with their Catholic origins in order to create a clear religious boundary for national belonging. Similarly, the Austrian case study rejects contemporary concepts of gendered progressiveness by framing them as a disillusioned expression of national identity. Such paradoxical rhetoric is a powerful appropriation of progressive discourse for the purpose of perpetuating the opposite.

CONCLUSION

This thesis showcased that the FPÖ rhetorically employs Fassin's (2010) concept of western-centric *sexual democracy* in order to construct a homogenous Austrian identity through the Muslim immigrant as its collective *significant other*. The disingenuous use of discourse on sexual liberation and gender equity, works as the party's effective linguistic conformity to its liberal democratic context. This selective appropriation of feminist ideas about the modern national body only acts as a disguise for their exclusion of the Muslim minority from any meaningful participation within the national community.

This exclusion is produced for the effect of creating a visible and rhetorical difference, which simultaneously promotes the homogeneity of their ethnic nation. This is only further promoted through their strategic move away from overt nationalist language, and more towards Brubaker's (2017) *civilisationalist* strategy of restricting the welfare state to a form of national solidarity, one that is defined ethnically. Which is easily done with an 'Other' that can be visibly identified and then further personified as inherently sexually violent through various emotionally charged terminology such as "mass-rape", "imported crime" or their sexual "clash of cultures". These catchphrases gain their threatening power through the FPÖ's frequent reference to the nation as a collective metaphorical "family", heterosexually shaped and ethnically Austrian. Especially as it is often directly contrasted with the fear of the derogatory "Eindringlinge" (intruders) against "our women" and "our youth", whereby the private sphere becomes politically mobilized through a discursively created existential threat. This threat allows for the pre-political ideas around the death of the nation, a form of *necropower*, to set foot in the national discourse and its voters. Therefore, the FPÖ effectively constructs a discourse-dominance through polarization and ideas of "natural" hegemonies, that normalizes

hardlining and even unconstitutional policies. All of this can be found in a majority of their public appearances, in this case in their campaigning interviews in media outlets such as *OE24*, *Kronen Zeitung* and *ORF*, but also in their official parliamentary speeches.

This thesis concludes that while the FPÖ has reduced overt references to restrictive reproductive rights, queer hostility, and traditionalist gender roles, these themes have not been abandoned, only reframed. As demonstrated in the comparative contextualization, their success lies in a populist adaptability that continually reformulates exclusionary ideologies into rhetorically acceptable formats, enabling the party to sustain its influence over time. In this case these acceptable formats are; themes of appropriated feminist rhetoric found in highly emotionalizing linguistic techniques that are strengthened through their cohesive repetition. The second format being their discursive push towards a common sensical, even “natural”, separation of cultures that persists in the modern nation. All of these strategies are becoming harder to directly detect as illiberal far-right ideologies, consequently they require constant monitoring and open deconstruction.

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Note; For the purpose of checking grammar mistakes and adequate sentence structure the use of generative AI through *Grammarly.com*'s tool for 'grammar checking' was employed in a limited form (only in the final editing process for a select few sentences). This thesis aims at academic honesty by noting that only for its language perfection did it employ generative AI from this site.

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