

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

Em. Professor Ruth Wodak, FAcSS
Distinguished Professor and Chair of Discourse Studies
Lancaster University/University Vienna
r.wodak@lancaster.ac.uk
<http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/profiles/265>



Outline

- Introduction: The Far-Right Populist (FRP) Narrative
 - The Politics of Fear (and Hope)
- Framework
 - Discourse, FRP Rhetoric, and Performing Authenticity
- Examples: “Shameless Normalization”
 - Illegal Migrants
 - Attacking “Vienna”
 - The Far-Right Populist Perpetuum Mobile
- Conclusions
 - Consequences and Counter-Discourses

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=IcV6aUw4xhU>



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*.





The Daily Mail
'SEND THEM ALL BACK HOME'

DAILY EXPRESS
WE MUST STOP THE MIGRANT INVASION

DAILY MAIL
4,000 FOREIGN MURDERERS AND RAPISTS WE CAN'T THROW OUT

DAILY EXPRESS
MIGRANTS SHUN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

DAILY EXPRESS
ROMA MIGRANT INVASION WILL START UK RIOTS

BRITAIN IS FULL UP AND FED UP

DAILY EXPRESS

500,000 MIGRANTS GET SOCIAL HOUSING

IMMIGRATION: THE BACKLASH

YOU PAY TO TEACH MIGRANTS MANNERS

DAILY TELEGRAPH
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH MIGRANTS FROM CAMERO

HOW ROMANIAN CRIMINALS TERRORISE OUR STREETS

150,000 SAY NO TO NEW EU MIGRANTS

MIGRANTS SET TO FLOOD IN

The Daily Telegraph
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”!*

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

THE
OTHERS

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

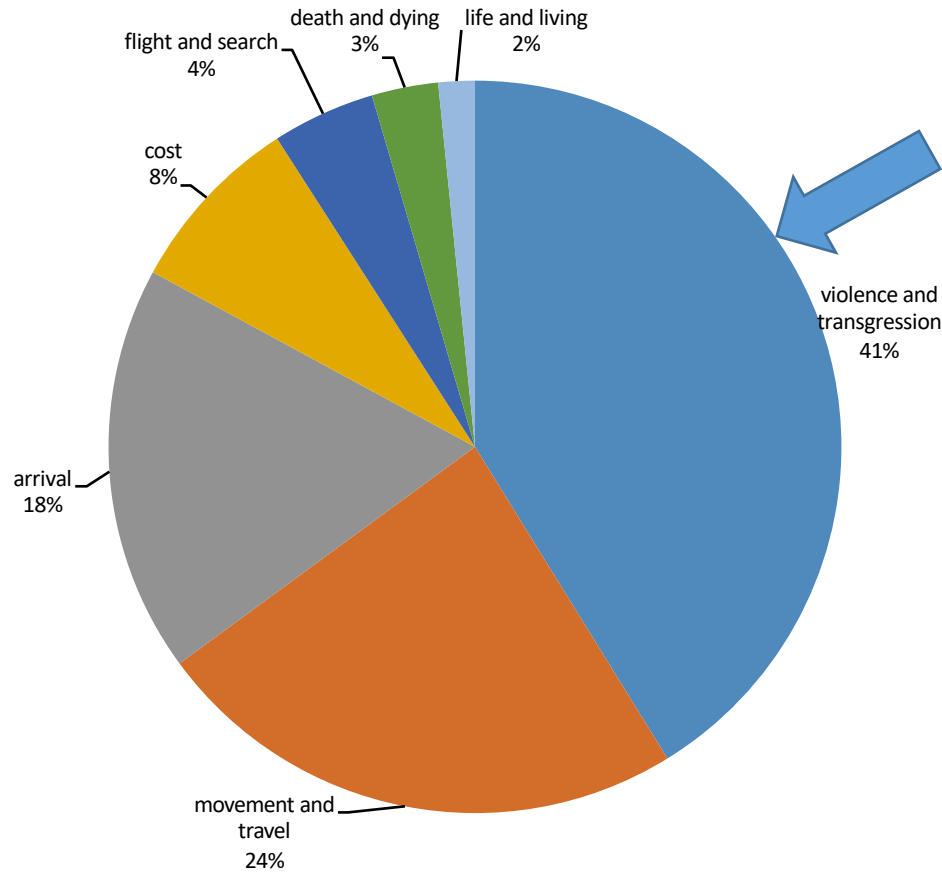
FRP (Rhetorical) Strategies

- “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

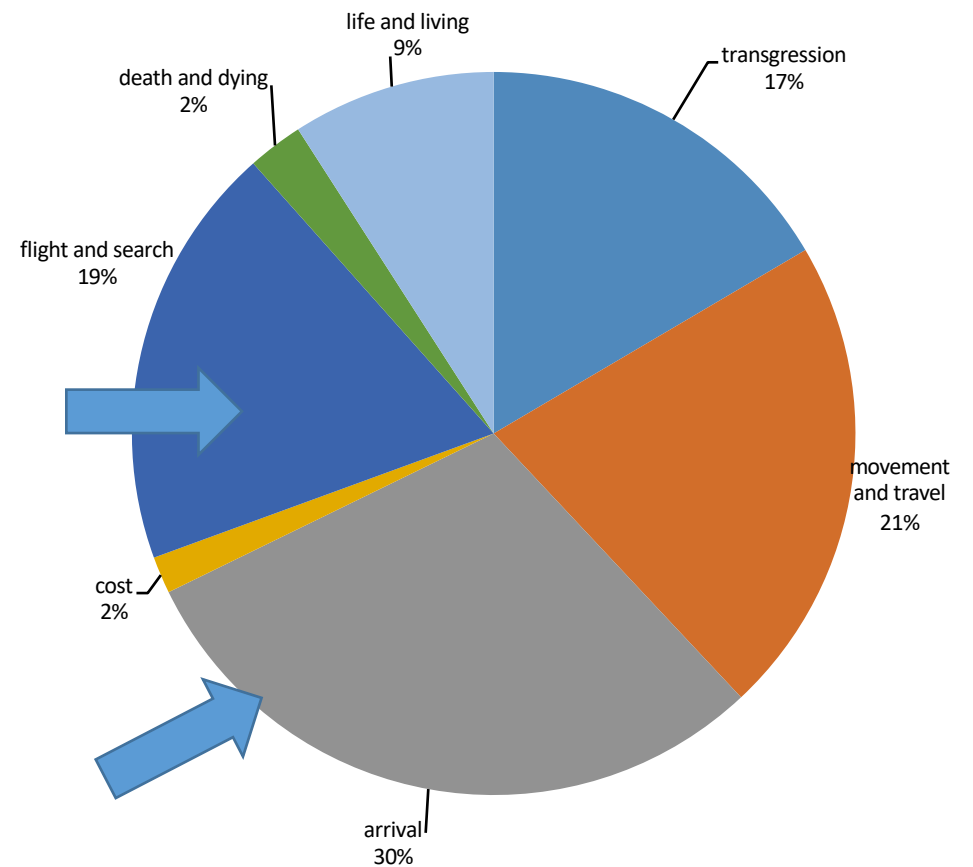
EXAMPLES:

- Challenging (Media) Institutions
 - Creating “Illegal Migrants”
- Provocation and Scandalisation

The Representation of Refugees and their Actions



Austrian newspapers (2015)



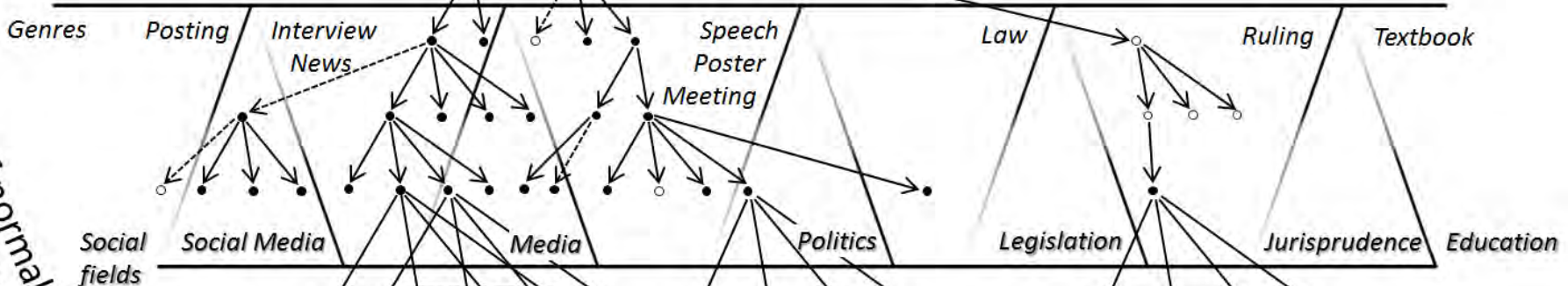
Press releases of the EC (2015)

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

Recontextualisation
Backstage

Resemiotisation
Frontstage

Processes of normalisation



Mainstream discourses



Provocation: Attacking the Media – “Fake News”

“There is a place where lies become news.

That is the ORF.

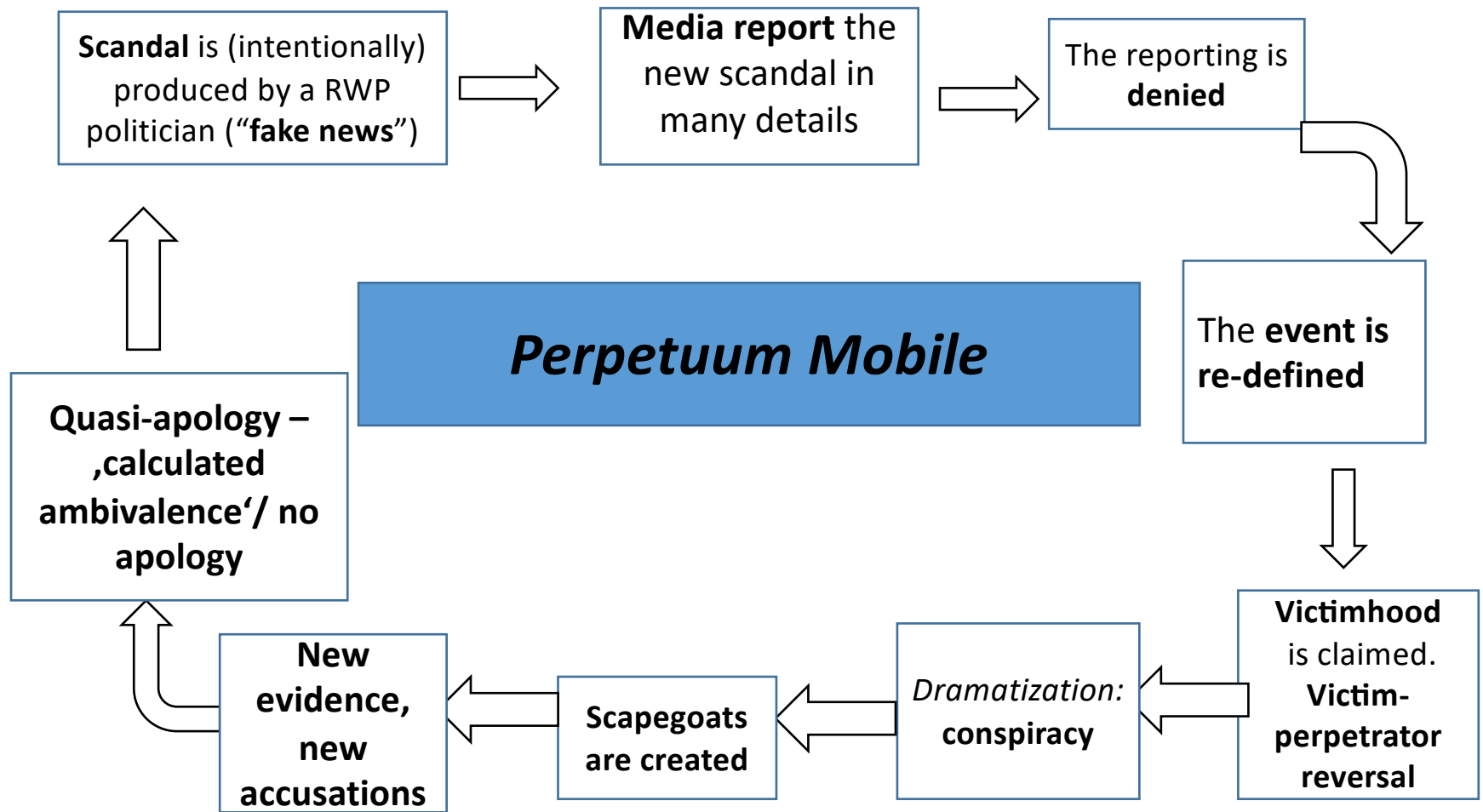
The best of Fake News, lies and propaganda, pseudo-culture and involuntary fees. Regional and international. In television, in radio and on the Facebook profile of Armin Wolf.”

ORF = ORF LIKE US
WIE WIR.

ORF WIE WIRR = “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)
-
- 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”



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/furtheres 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

(Wodak, R. (2017) 'The “Establishment”, the “Élites”, and the “People”: Who’s who?' *Journal of Language and Politics* 16/4: 651-666; (2018) Entering the ‘Post-Shame Era’ – the Rise of Illiberal Democracy, Populism and Neo-Authoritarianism in EUrope: The case of the turquoise-blue government in Austria 2017/2018’ in ‘The Limits of EUrope’, Special Issue; *Global Discourse* (in press).)

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

