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The Other Side of the Medal:

A Case Study of Right-Wing Populist Party Identity in German
Newspaper Discourse

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Abstract

Nowadays, liberal democratic societies comprise the breeding ground for thriving right-wing populist parties. They share the “fundamental core of ethno-nationalist xenophobia, (...) and anti-political establishment populism” (Rydgren, 2004 p.475). Coeval research has acknowledged the threat that is entailed in the bespoken phenomenon; yet, its account is incomplete.

This study follows Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, in objecting to the individualist and rationalist tenets that inform previous research, to accentuate a neglected lens on the thrive of right-wing populism in Western liberal democracies. Their discourse theoretical frame was herein used as both theory and method, in a discourse analysis of the *Alternative für Deutschland's* (AfD) identity in German online newspaper discourse. The empirical material comprised 97 articles from Germany's most popular national daily newspapers, which reported on the AfD in parliament, an AfD demonstration in Berlin, and the AfD's youth organisation's congress throughout April, May and June 2018. Ultimately, the study arrived at the conclusion that the sampled newspaper discourse identified 'us', the 'benevolent democrats' via the exclusion, and rejection of 'them', the 'wicked right-wing populists'. Since such relation was markedly antagonistic proper, newspaper discourse may be considered to have contributed to the recent thrive of right-wing populism in Germany.

Keywords

Discourse, identity, us/them distinction, discursive struggle, antagonism, agonism, right-wing populism, Alternative für Deutschland

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

”The enemy is our question as a figure. (...) We stand on equal grounds. That is why I must confront him fighting, to ascertain my measure, my limits, to substantiate my own figure” (Carl Schmitt in Richter, 2005 p.29).

Within the symbolic frame of democratic rule, the enemy that is constitutive of the demos is indeed envisioned as an adversary; adversaries being paradoxically defined as “friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies” (Mouffe, 2000 p.13), since each strives to organize such space differently. These “relations of inclusion-exclusion implied by the political constitution of ‘the people’” (ibid., p.10) are upheld by the tension between conflicting interpretations of democratic and liberal values. Such contention ought, nevertheless, not to be reduced to the rather simplistic dualism between ‘perfect equality’ and ‘perfect liberty of the individual’; instead, it must be envisaged as a relation of contamination.

“The prevailing liberal hegemony” (Mouffe, 2005b p.53) violates both of these democratic principles. Firstly, it has been understood as “the end of an old antagonism and the reconciliation between liberal and democratic principles” (ibid., p.53). Secondly, the subsequent consensus without exclusion “signifies (...) foreclosing the possibility of envisaging an alternative to the existing order” (ibid., p.53) and hence dislocates the democratic principle of the sovereignty of the people.

The bespoken “democratic deficit has contributed to the development of right-wing populist [RWP] parties claiming to represent the people and to defend its right, which have been confiscated by political elites” (ibid., p.53).

Research on the thrive of right wing populism agrees: RWP parties jeopardize democracy. The problem is contained in the construction of ‘the people’; “ethno-pluralist xenophobia (based on the so-called ethnopluralist doctrine) and anti-political establishment populism” (Rydgren, 2004 p.475), entail the risk of prompting violence and hatred against ethnic minorities.

1.2 Problematisation

Truth is a deceptive notion; in the modern right-wing populist narrative of the ‘national ethnos’, an essential identity, as well as in the social sciences. The Western understanding of the individual as autonomous, and its belief in social relations that are determined by objective conditions have constrained the spectrum of lenses on the phenomenon of right-wing populism; the macro-societal struggle over the creation of meaning is usually omitted.

In reflection of globalisation, researchers have repeatedly enquired into the link between objectively measurable sociostructural change, and voting for RWP parties. Jusup et al. (2017), for instance, examine the relationship between RWP voting in EU member states, and immigration. The EU is argued to be approaching a tipping point where the increase in RWP voters in a given country increases more rapidly than the inflow of immigrants into the EU; it is attributed, to the majority sensing “that their national, ethnic or religious identity is being threatened” (ibid., p.1). The identified relationships, however, are not robust, which suggests that RWP party voting is not merely motivated by immigration.

Thrilled by the substantial, yet limited explanatory power of structural factors, attitudinal accounts, like that offered by Oesch (2008), argue that social and cultural changes predispose workers to support RWP parties, as they threaten above all the working class’ identity. Rationality, however, is bounded; the extent to which cognition and affect inform behaviour that accurately reflects objective changes, is hence limited. In consequence, attitudinal research is permeated by inconsistencies and gaps, like the heterogeneity of RWP parties’ supporter group; they point toward the importance of abductive research.

Political psychological enquiry confirms: “PRWP leaders both *read* and *shape* public sentiment” (Jetten & Mols, 2016 p.290). Social movement studies have subsequently investigated right-wing populism as discourse; Rydgren (2004) and Rydgren (2005), have explained the recent emergence of similar RWP parties across Europe with the diffusion and adaption of a novel master frame, which has coincided with a drastic drop in party identification and increased salience of the socio-cultural cleavage dimension. Due to the

assumption that voter attitudes and party ideology develop separately frame analyses, nevertheless, fail to illuminate how the RWP myth of society comes into being.

In an echo of the advancements, as well as flaws of previous research, this study explores the phenomenon of right-wing populism through Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical lens; that is, the Western notion of identity is abandoned, while the centrality of the discursive struggle over meaning is acknowledged. Chiefly, an alternative construction of the phenomenon is enquired into, to complement the cluster of studies that have focused on identity in right-wing populist discourse. To utter both, a theoretical and practical contribution to previous research, specifically the *Alternative für Deutschland's* (AfD) identity is deconstructed in German online newspaper discourse; newspaper discourse has been chosen over, for instance parliamentary debates, for this paper aimed to yield a description of how the electorate is made to understand the AfD – ordinary citizens often do not witness political debates, but read about parties' activities in newspapers. Henceforth, this study ought to “bring us important insights into the way political antagonisms manifest themselves today” (Mouffe, 2005b p.56), by investigating how the AfD's identity is constructed and how such construction relates to the RWP discourse at large.

1.3 Research Question

How does newspaper discourse construct the identity of right-wing populist parties in contemporary liberal democracies?

1.4 Key Concepts

Right-Wing Populist Parties (RWP parties) are in alignment with research on contemporary right-wing populist discourse by Rydgren (2004) and Rydgren (2005) defined as parties “that share the fundamental core of ethno-nationalist xenophobia (based on the so-called ethno-pluralist doctrine) and anti-political establishment populism” (Rydgren, 2004 p.475).

Antagonism is regarded a mode of identification, in which signs acquire their meaning via the designation of a constitutive outside; ‘us’ and ‘them’, are not dialectic antheses. “‘Them’ is not the constitutive opposite of a concrete ‘us’, but the symbol of what makes *any* ‘us’ impossible (Mouffe, 2000 p.13).

Antagonism proper “takes place between enemies, that is, persons who have no common symbolic space” (ibid., p.13), wherefore the respective ‘others’ are seen as enemies to be destroyed.

Agonism, an alternate configuration of antagonism, which “involves a relation not between enemies but between ‘adversaries’”, who “are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organise this common symbolic space in a different way” (ibid., p.13).

1.5 Purpose

The AfD’s identity in German online newspaper discourse is herein to be deconstructed. Specifically, how ‘us’, in newspaper discourse, relates to the right-wing populist party is being investigated. This study’s contribution is anchored in its theoretical frame. Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theoretical approach is distinct in that the individual is viewed as interpellated with meaning by discourses. Such position renders the *conflict* over the creation of meaning decisive to the organisation of the social. Apart from right-wing populist discourse, in which ‘us’, ‘the people’ are in part constituted by the exclusion of ‘them’, ‘the establishment’, the relation of competing discourses to RWP parties is thus equally central to the thrive of right-wing populism in contemporary liberal democracies.

Deconstructing the AfD’s identity in German online newspaper discourse, is thus additionally to elucidate the conditions of the collision between the two discourses, which “will bring us important insights into the ways political antagonisms manifest themselves today” (Mouffe, 2005b p.56).; that is, illustrating the relation between ‘us’ and the AfD, in a discourse that chimes with the established parties’ convictions, permits an assessment of whether these identities are antagonistic proper or agonistic. In case of the former, the electorates’ identification with- and support of right-wing populism is fostered via the reinforcement of the antagonism between ‘us’, ‘the people’ and ‘them’, ‘the establishment’.

This study’s endeavour was realised in a case study of online newspaper articles that reported on demonstrations involving AfD supporters, AfD members of parliament, the AfD’s youth organisation’s (Junge Alternative/JA) as well as on the party’s role in the most recent scandal surrounding the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), from April, May and

June 2018. Newspapers from which in total 87 articles were sampled, were the highest circulated daily newspapers in Germany; these are concurrent online and offline. Further, the BILD, Süddeutsche and ZEIT reflect conservative ideologies represented by those parties that have most commonly been in government since 1949.

Markedly, this paper aims to complement previous research, by having selected a deviant analytical lens and focus, and to contribute towards a more comprehensive account of the current thrive of right-wing populism; it does not intend, to merely confirm Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical view, but to point out its value by applying its highly abstract concepts comprehensibly in a relevant context.

1.6 Disposition

The following section reviews prevalent perspectives on contemporary right-wing populism; such review evaluates the relevance, and implications of the two notions, that Laclau and Mouffean discourse theory contends, to and on the exemplified studies. Namely, the understanding of the individual as autonomous and of objectively defined social reality. The literature review is to assess the value of Mouffe's analytical lens. Subsequently, the conceptual tools, and methods are presented, before proceeding to the analysis, discussion, conclusion and limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Objective Determinants of- and Motives for RWP Support

2.1.1 Objective Determinants

Jusup et al. 's (2017) enquiry into the relationship between immigration and the proportion of right-wing (RWP) populist voters in a given country, for instance, reflects on the socio-structural ramifications of the recent refugee crisis across the EU. It is argued that “tolerance towards immigrants is conditional”, and that “EU societies are approaching a tipping point” (ibid., p.2) as fear is “exacerbated by an inflow rate of immigrants that exceeds the rate of integration” (ibid., p.9).

Initially, Jusup et al. (2017) conducted a bivariate linear regression analysis of the effect of the percentage of immigrants in the population on the percentage of RWP voters in various EU countries. They identified the tipping point, where RWP parties will obtain the absolute majority, at 30% immigrants in the population. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the latter accounts for 40.77% of the variation in RWP voting (ibid.). Hereafter Jusup et al. (2017) attempted to gain an insight into how the rate of immigration is echoed in RWP votes by annualising both immigration inflow and the change in RWP voters. The results reveal that “for a group of countries in which the annualised increase in the percentage of RWP voters exceeded 2%”, such “increase is virtually independent of the inflow of immigrants” (ibid., p.5). Jusup et al. (2017) attribute the lack of an association of immigration and RWP voting in these cases to the political organisation of the EU “whereby if one country decides to accept immigrants, the decision may have repercussions for all the other member states” (ibid., p.5).

Subsequently, they assembled a time-series cross-sectional data regression model that investigates the change in the fraction of RW voters in a given country to the fraction of immigrants in the population, and to the overall inflow of immigrants into the EU relative to the EU population. The model additionally took into account the number of violent crimes involving immigrants, as well as unemployment rates, and the rate of integration. Their

analysis showed that both the “fraction of immigrants in the general population and the immigration inflow into the entire EU are significant explanatory variables” (ibid., p.5). Neither unemployment nor violent crime, by contrast, had a significant effect on the response variable (ibid.).

In addition to the apparently limited explanatory power of immigration, Jusup et al.’s (2017) research exhibits two inconsistencies, which further undermine the identified relation between immigration and RW voting, and suggest that it is additionally voters’ socially constructed interpretation of objective conditions that motivate support for RWP parties. Firstly, in an attempt to isolate the effect of the recent refugee crisis on RW voting, the cases were selected on the dependent variable; only member states that had been severely affected by the crisis were included in the sample. In turn, EU member states that were subjected to a relatively low immigrant inflow yet experienced a surge in right-wing populism were excluded from the analysis. The extent to which immigration to individual member states, as well as to the EU as a whole determine RW voting, may consequently be substantially lower than, for instance, 40.77%; the association, is thus less robust than initially suggested. Secondly, Jusup et al. (2017) included a non-EU state in the sample, namely the Kingdom of Norway, which further undermines the explanatory relationship between immigration and RW voting, and instead points to the centrality of socially constructed threats. Norway is part of the Nordic Passport Union, and thus merely associated with the Schengen area (Council of the European Union, 1999). Despite the lack of borders to other Scandinavian countries, Norway is thus less affected by the decision of EU states per se to accept immigrants. The perceived threat, which is argued to have generated an annual increase of more than 2% in RWP party support in Norway, hence does not constitute a perfectly rational reflection upon real, objective circumstances. Ultimately, the attitudes that motivate RW voting may not be exclusively bound to immigration, and, considering the limited explanatory power of immigration, these interpretations of the changes brought about by globalisation, may additionally be relevant to cases other than Norway.

2.1.2 Motives for Workers’ Support of RWP Parties in Western Europe

Attitudinal research has correspondingly striven to answer the question: What motivates voters to support RWP parties? It is due to their vulnerability to labour market risks, and the

lack of socioeconomic resources that production-, service workers and small business owners ought to favour state intervention. “Workers’ disproportionate support” (Oesch, 2008 p.350) for the most vigorous anti-systemic alternative, RWP parties, thus runs counter to the traditional notion of class voting.

Oesch (2008), hence investigated the extent to which the class difference in RWP party voting in Europe is economically, culturally and socially motivated, using binomial logistic regression analysis. Individually, economic variables related to “insecure employment prospects and the fear of wage pressure” (ibid., p.369); cultural motives denoted the “perception of immigration as a threat to national identity and refusal to grant foreign residents equal rights” (ibid., p.369); finally, social alienation was measured in terms of “dissatisfaction with the way democracy works” (ibid., p.369). The results showed that controlling for economic and cultural grievances sufficed only in the case of Austria and Switzerland to eliminate class voting differences. For Belgium and France social alienation needed to be additionally controlled for (ibid.). Notably, the class difference persisted in the case of Norway even after controlling for all three attitudes. Oesch’s (2008) findings further suggest that economic determinants “play a smaller role than often assumed” (ibid., p.370) in fostering the working class’ electoral support for RWP parties; instead, they point towards the centrality of identity protectionism and discontent with the functioning of contemporary liberal democracy. Put differently, it is due to the economic motives being least salient, that the current thrive of right-wing populism in Europe breaks with traditional class voting.

Nevertheless, Oesch’s (2008) study provides frail explanations for cases in which workers do not form the electoral base of RWP parties and neglects that these groups are indeed heterogeneous. The problem lies in the very notion of an ‘attitude’, which is defined as “ a relatively enduring organisation of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols” (Hogg & Vaughan, 2005 p.150). Cognition, affect and behaviour are further assumed to be consistent; that is, ‘I believe immigrants are a threat to my identity’, ‘I am scared of immigrants’ form a logical sequence, wherefore the behaviour ‘I resent immigrants and vote for an RWP party’, is considered rational. Rationality, however, is bounded. Since attitudes are acquired through experience, “cognitive limitations of the decision maker – limitations of both knowledge and computational capacity” (Simon, 1997 p.291), as well as time, restrict the extent to which

attitudes inform truly rational behaviour. By investigating the link between attitudes and voting for RWP parties, attitudinal research thus fails to account for how voters' attitudes are formed, that is, for the experiences through which voters' develop for instance a "dissatisfaction with the way democracy works" (Oesch, 2008 p.369).

For illustration, one may consider the case of Switzerland and the 'social alienation' variable in Oesch (2008). Firstly, workers did not account for the majority of votes received by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) (ibid.). Instead "the salaried middle class, jointly with the small traditional bourgeoisie" (ibid., p.358) constituted its largest voter group. Oesch (2008) circumvented the identified puzzle, by arguing that the anomaly provided evidence for the SVP "com[ing] closer to the profile of the catch-all party" (ibid., p.358). It is nevertheless "problematic to treat PRWP support as evidence of "resonance" with public sentiments" (Jetten & Mols, 2016 p.275), which will be discussed in the subsequent section because RWP leaders can turn relative gratification into a sense of victimhood. Considering that 'insecure employment prospects and fear of wage pressure' motivated workers' support for the SVP (Oesch, 2008), it is thus reasonable to assume that the same cultural and social attitudes predisposed the middle class and traditional bourgeoisie to voting for the SVP, which in other cases incited workers to RWP party support.

On the one hand, Oesch (2008) confirms this paper's critique of Jusup et al. (2017) in the proposition that the motives for voters' support for RWP parties are not limited to immigration. On the other, the assumption that attitudes like an "unease with multiculturalism" (Oesch, 2008 p.350) are determined by economically, objectively defined conditions such as that workers, which encompass "individuals in less privileged class locations", are "less educated", and thus more likely "to perceive immigration and foreign cultures as greater threats" (ibid., p.352), is undermined. Briefly, if the possibility exists that the salaried middle class and bourgeoisie acquire the same attitude towards immigrants as workers, and subsequently vote for RWP parties, it cannot be objectively measurable attributes associated with social class, which wholly define attitudes. The case of Switzerland thus puts the notion of the individual as an autonomous subject with attitudes that reflect on objective conditions, and consequently of the social as determined by objective reality, into question; after all, RWP parties' supporters constitute a heterogeneous social group. Abductive enquiry into how experiences give rise to the interpretation of immigration as a

threat, and dissatisfaction with the status quo, is hence necessary to grasp the roots of right-wing populism.

The negligence of the roots of attitudes that motivate RWP voting is, secondly, most trivial in Oesch's (2008) definition of 'social alienation'. Although 'dissatisfaction with the way democracy works' renders workers significantly more likely to support an RWP party and points to the centrality of their anti-establishment position, it is not specified how such social alienation may arise. Since 'dissatisfaction' is highly subjective, it may not have been recognized as such by all research participants, whereby its effect for instance in case of Norway, where the class difference persisted, may be underestimated in Oesch (2008).

2.1.3 The Appeal of Right-Wing Populism in Times of Economic Prosperity

Psychological enquiry suggests that individuals are at least in part imbued with meaning;. Enquiry into the phenomenon of right-wing populism by Jetten and Mols (2016), further challenges the inference that the increasing support for RWP parties is "evidence of 'resonance' with public sentiments" (ibid., p.275).

Through a laboratory experiment, Jetten and Mols (2016) specifically investigate the "way economic prosperity affects the persuasiveness of an [RWP party] leader with an anti-immigrant agenda" (ibid., p.279). Subsequent to being confronted with different appraisals of the future Australian national economy, participants evaluated an anti-immigration speech that built either on realistic or symbolic threats; the former denoted "increased competition for jobs, housing, and other scarce resources", while the latter devised the "fear for loss of one's norms, identity and culture" (ibid., p.282). Anti-immigration attitudes were, in an echo of previous structural research, expected to be more vigorous when the economy slowed down, as the real threat presented by the RWP leader was reaffirmed in anticipated economic hardship.

Their findings, nevertheless, disclose "stronger anti-immigrant sentiments when the national economy was presented as prospering rather than contracting" (ibid., p.275); the "nature of anti-immigrant arguments (...) did not moderate this effect" (ibid., p.281). Chiefly, the fear of

competition for jobs, housing and other scarce resources motivated support for RWP parties even when the economy was prosperous, which confirms the conjecture that attitudes do not accurately reflect on objective reality. As it remained unclear, “how the electorate becomes receptive to the message of PRWP leaders” (ibid., p.282) when objective conditions ran counter to the RWP frame, Jetten and Mols (2016) conducted a second, qualitative study of parliamentary “speeches by PRWP leaders who managed to secure significant electoral successes in times of relative prosperity” (ibid., p.282) in Australia and the Netherlands. Their analysis focused on the main political arguments, the portrayal of the national economy, and the social categories that were therein deployed.

Jetten and Mols’ (2016) content analysis, argued that “PRWP leaders reinterpret socioeconomic conditions (...) in such a way as to arouse fear of unrecognised problems” (ibid., p.288). They “divert attention away from the healthy state of the national economy (...) and instead portray society (...) as the battleground of a power struggle between” (ibid., p.288) three social groups: the elite at the top, immigrants and asylum seekers at the bottom, and the ‘ordinary people’ in the middle. More specifically, minorities are depicted as “enjoying protection and preferential treatment by the elite at the expense of ordinary, hard-working taxpayer” (ibid., p.285). Therein, ‘the people’ became the victim of an alliance between the elite, seeking to build wealth and clout from immigration, and the needy immigrants (ibid.). Ultimately, ‘us’, ‘the people’ are argued to require “strong leadership to reclaim their position and entitlements” (ibid., p.285) in the face of the alliance among ‘them’.

Notably, Jetten and Mols (2016) provide evidence that individuals are at least in part interpellated with meaning. This is evident, firstly, in the misalignment of ‘objective’ conditions and people’s perception thereof. Secondly, it was shown that “PRWP leaders both *read* and *shape* public sentiment” to instil a “sense of togetherness and common fate among groups of individuals whose interests are not necessarily aligned”, “by influencing a group’s collective self-understanding” (ibid., p.290).

2.2 Right-Wing Populism as Discourse

Social movement studies conceptualise right-wing populism as an interpretive frame that provides “cognitive instruments that allow making sense of the external reality” (Caiani & della Porta, 2011 p.182), by “selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of action within one’s present or past environment” (Rydgren, 2005 p.426).

Building on Jetten and Mols’ (2016) proposition that “PRWP leaders both read and shape public sentiment” (ibid., p.290), social movement studies emphasise time and agency. Rydgren (2004) and Rydgren (2005), accordingly understand political parties as agents who seek “to maximize its influence on policy outcomes (...) in accordance with the core ideas and value embedded in its party ideology” (Rydgren, 2005 p.416), and therein depend on time or expanding and contracting political opportunity structures. the latter being defined as “consistent – but not necessary formal, permanent or national’ – resources that are external to the party or movement in question” (Rydgren, 2004 p.476).

2.2.1 Opportunity Structures & Innovation of the New Master Frame

Rydgren (2004) and Rydgren (2005) assert that the coeval thrive of right-wing populism across Western societies has “less to do with structural factors influencing different political systems in similar ways” (ibid., p.413), than with the cross-national diffusion of its new master frame. “The fundamental core of ethno-nationalist xenophobia (...) and anti-political establishment populism” (Rydgren, 2004 p.475), has freed the extreme right from stigma and disseminated from successful RWP parties to embryonic organisations in other countries. Thus, the adoption of the frame further entails its adaption to particular cultural and political contexts, wherefore opportunity structures are reckoned equally decisive of an RWP party’s success/failure.

To exemplify, Rydgren (2004) applied the above-summarised model in a case study of Denmark to explain the emergence and successes of the Danish People’s Party. Markedly, dealignment and realignment processes – as well as the politicisation of the immigration issue – gave rise to niches in the electoral arena, and ultimately expanding opportunity structures.

Niches, “gaps between the voters’ location in the political space and the perceived position of the parties (...) in the same space” (Rydgren, 2005 p.418), for instance, arose from voters’ reluctance to use socioeconomic, as opposed to sociocultural categories to make sense of their impaired situation. Chiefly, economic, cultural and political globalisation had “altered the interests of certain voter groups”, and created a situation in which these groups “perceived a threat to their identity”. This had “fuelled increased discontent with (established) politicians and parties because of the perceived inability of these actors”, who employed the economic cleavage dimension, “to solve the anomalies of the postindustrial society” (ibid., 419).

Such shift in voter attitudes and preferences was paralleled by the politicisation of alternative issues including “immigration, security and the EU” (Rydgren, 2004 p.490), by the embryonic Danish Association, which aimed to present these issues “as a crucial problem of Danish society” (ibid., p.493). Further, convergence towards the centre among the largest parties, as well as their cooperation with the Danish People’ Party benefited its visibility and legitimacy (ibid.); that is, favourable political opportunities accrued. “The Danish People’s Party was able to mine these niches by adopting a master frame combining ethnopluralist xenophobia and anti-political establishment populism” (ibid., p.474).

Rydgren (2004) and Rydgren (2005), nevertheless, fail to elucidate how such frames, aside from corresponding with opportunity structures, are linked through frame strategies to these same opportunity structures.

2.2.2 The Populist Element

Caiani and della Porta (2011) reflect upon Rydgren (2004) and Rydgren’s (2005) emphasis on political opportunity structures, by focusing instead on the anti-political establishment frame. Its relevance, link to the bespoke structures, and to the extreme right definition of ‘us’ and ‘them’, when elaborating prognoses, diagnoses and motivations to action is correspondingly assessed. To actualise such frame analysis, Caiani and della Porta (2011) executed a grammar analysis of written documents of RWP organisations from both parties, non-party and subcultural milieu in a cross-national comparison of Italy and Germany.

Their definition of political opportunity structures, further specifies that these “determine what kind of ideas become visible for the public, resonate with public opinion and are held to be ‘legitimate’ by the audience” (ibid., p.184). In Germany, as opposed to Italy, Caiani and della Porta thus expected “to find a stronger emphasis on the (radical) definition of the people”, as political opportunity structures offer “particularly favourable context for xenophobic frames, due to an ‘ethno-cultural conception of citizenship and national identity’” (ibid., p.185). Party democracy, by contrast, is argued to remain “relatively more stable and more highly trusted” (ibid., p.186). Indeed, in measuring the frequency and intensity of relevant categories, and relations among them, Caiani and della Porta (2011) found that the RWP party and non-party organization identified “the ‘pure’ people as an exclusive (in terms of ethno-national characteristics) category” (ibid., p.190); it was the third and seventh most quoted actor. ‘The people’ are “described as those who ‘want to be Germans also in the future’” (ibid., p.190). Oppositional categories encompass the political elite, and “in both countries, ethnically defined groups (...) are excluded from the ‘in-group’ of the people” (ibid., p.191). They are presented as equally naturally free as powerless and subjugated by the ‘invaders’, and as in need of being freed; briefly, ‘the people’ are the object of the action (ibid.). As RWP organisations identify with ‘the people’, actions attributed to RWP organisations are thus either “reactive defensive (against the ruling political class) or protective (for the people)” (ibid., p.192).

More specifically, the discourse attempts to “mobilize citizens’ feelings of dissatisfaction toward the national and European political class” (ibid., p.183), by criticizing the them for “their misbehavior in relation to politics” (ibid., p.193), which in case of Germany chrysalises in a reference to national history and identity. RWP organisations herein call for a society that is free from guilt because of its national socialist past. In Italy by contrast, the elite is portrayed as power, and wealth-obsessed, as well as negligent, or oppressive. Actions that connected above all RWP organisations to the political class, hence insist that it “‘should replace’ the domestic political class ‘in order to form a new political elite for the country’” (ibid., p.195). In its final instance, the extreme right marked its difference to the political class whose ideological differences are meaningless as “all parties collaborate with each other [in exploiting the people]” (ibid., p.196).

Chiefly, “corruption of the political class is the diagnosis, the prognosis is not to return the power to the people, but to advocate it to an exclusive (more or less heroic) elite” (ibid., p.197). Electoral support for RWP parties is thus considered a function of the “consistency of a frame, of its empirical credibility or cultural compatibility” (ibid., p.197).

Thereby, these RWP parties were able to actualise their “main goal of a party (...) to maximise its influence on policy outcomes (...) in accordance with the core ideas and values embedded in its party ideology” (Rydgren, 2005 p.416). Neither Rydgren (2004) nor Caiani and della Porta (2011) are capable of explaining how such ideology emerges; it is not accounted for in the notion of opportunity structures. Indeed, such gap arises from the assumption that voters, the social group represented by a party, and frame strategies deployed by their representative are formed in two separate processes; markedly, a notion rooted in the Western understanding of the individual as autonomous, and belief in objective social structures.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Discourse Theory of identity

Markedly, discourse theory argues that individuals are not autonomous subjects, but rather interpellated by discourses, and that group identities are not constituted by objective factors but likewise by discursive processes (Jørgensen & Phillips, 200). For illustration, Laclau and Mouffe view the individual, similarly to a sign, as split, because the subject only becomes an individual through acts of identification with subject positions within discourses. Subject positions are discursively designated positions for people to occupy, which function as frames of reference for action (ibid.). Hence the subject is fragmented in that it has multiple identities according to the discourses with which it identifies. Ultimately as a subject may identify differently in specific situations, such as the instance of voting, identity is contingent and changeable.

Group-, that is collective identities, are accordingly formed by excluding certain possibilities of identification or subject positions, while pronouncing others. Briefly, ‘us’ is constituted by

the exclusion of ‘the other’, or ‘them’ (ibid). The *Christian Democratic Union* (CDU) for example, must exclude other possibilities of identification that are provided by competing parties like the AfD, in order create the myth of the social group it claims to represent; that is, to mobilise electoral support. For illustration, if the CDU’s discourse prevails over other parties’ discourses in the discursive struggle, that is, the struggle over the creation of meaning (Bergström & Boréus, 2017), subjects will identify as Christian democratic in the instance of overdetermination and vote for the CDU. This is because he/she is under the impression that the CDU’s collective identity agrees with his/her own identity, wherefore the CDU is henceforth understood as an adequate parliamentary representative; to wit, the CDU is entitled to make decisions on behalf of the social group which represents. By contrast, if the CDU’s discourse does not clearly distinguish between ‘us’, and the other parties, it is more difficult for subjects to identify with the discourse and make a voting decision. The CDU is thus less likely to gain electoral support.

2.3.2 Identity and Right-Wing Populism

Mouffe (2005b) postulates, that liberal hegemony in Western democracies and the post-political consensus have “contributed to the development of right-wing populist [RWP] parties claiming to represent the people and to defend its right, which have been confiscated by political elites” (ibid., p.53); yet, one puzzle remains: what about the myth implied in liberal democratic societies, renders responses to RWP parties ineffective?

Mouffe (2005b) accordingly argues that parties advocating the consensus without exclusion end of adversarial politics, have fostered the continued thrive of RWP parties, because “the ‘them’ which is necessary to make possible the ‘us’ of the good democrats cannot be envisaged as a political adversary, and the frontier has to be drawn in the moral register” (ibid., p.57). Nowadays, such outside is designated the ‘extreme right’, which is “condemned morally, not fought politically” (ibid., p.57). Such mode of identification is not only “useless to grasp the nature and causes of the new forms of right-wing politics” (ibid., p.57), wherefore “most answers [to it], have so far been completely inadequate” (ibid., p.56), but also reinforces the populist myth of ‘us’, ‘the people’, against ‘them’, ‘the establishment’.

2.3.3 Final Argument

As illustrated in the above, previous research provides scope for qualitative, abductive enquiry into right-wing populism. While the reviewed studies put forth evidence supporting both, the significance of tracing the democratic deficit, and of investigating how other discourses relate to RWP parties, this paper attempts the latter. The AfD's identity in German online newspaper discourse is deconstructed for such conduct more clearly relates to the phenomenon in question; additionally, it facilitates an evaluation of whether 'us', in the sampled discourse is constructed as an essential identity, or form of identification. Chiefly, an indirect assessment of whether the possibility of an alternative interpretation of the AfD is denied.

Rydgren (2004) and Rydgren (2005) have ultimately illustrated the effects attributed to the democratic by Mouffe (2013), in examining political opportunity structures. Whence it follows, that focusing on the relation of 'us' to the AfD is relatively innovative.

3. Methods and Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

The research approach adopted in this qualitative study is abductive; that is, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical lens on right-wing populism, is grounded in the study of language used in newspaper articles on the AfD, to generate an empirically informed, rich account of the discursive conditions in which right-wing populism has thrived in Germany. As argued in the critique of structural and attitudinal research (Jusup et al, 2017; Oesch, 2008), the abductive approach is necessary to enquire into *how* a given interpretation of social reality emerges.

Such approach was anchored in a constructivist understanding of social reality, and interpretivist relation of the research with knowledge. The assertion that "social phenomena and categories are (...) produced through social interaction" and "in a constant state of revision" (Bryman, 2012 p.33), is the red thread that runs through this paper; it is central to Laclau and Mouffe's revision of Saussurean structural linguistics, as well as their notion of 'identity' and is ultimately reflected in this study's interest in how power acts through language. Finally, this study sides with the conviction that enquiring into the social world "requires a different logic of research procedure, [from the natural sciences], one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans against the natural order" (ibid., 2012 p.28); the implications thereof are further discussed 3.2.3.2..

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Case Study Design

The herein pursued research purpose was realised in a case study of German daily newspaper discourse in online articles on the AfD, dating from April to June 2018.

Markedly, the case study design chimed with this enquiry's social constructivist approach and with the aim to empirically inform Mouffe and Laclau's perspective on right-wing populism, because the bespoke design is "concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question" (Bryman, 2012 p.66). More specifically, Germany was selected as an exemplifying case "to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or

commonplace situation” (ibid., p.70); that is, of the “increasing success of right-wing populist parties in most European countries and their increasing popular appeal” (Mouffe, 2005b p.50).

For illustration, the AfD was established in 2013 only (bpb, 2017), yet constitutes the third largest party in parliament since the federal elections in 2017 (Zich & Cantow, 2018). The recent thrive of right-wing populism in Germany, may thus neither be “explained by specific national idiosyncrasies”, nor dismissed “as a ghost from the past soon to be brushed away” (Mouffe, 2005b p.50). Put differently, the AfD is illustrative of the novel RWP challenge to liberal societies, as described by Rydgren (2004) and Rydgren (2005).

Ultimately, the inference that identity, the central analytical concept, is the product of discursive *processes*, necessitated this case study’s longitudinal element. To grasp *how* the AfD was interpellated with meaning, and *how* its identity was fixed in newspaper discourse, “a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context” (Bryman, 2012 p.402) needed to be examined. Before delimiting the time frame from which the empirical material was to be sampled, it had to be decided whether the analysis ought to focus on the time period anterior or posterior to the federal elections in September 2017.

The posterior period was subsequently chosen, for the conflict over the creation of meaning was more evident after the elections. Chiefly, the AfD’s identity in newspaper discourse was rather crucial to its power, because, firstly, the AfD entered the parliament as the third largest party, and opposition whereby the potential of its influence as a social actor was enhanced. And secondly, the new government’s delayed inauguration in March 2018, suggests that the sedimented understanding of how the German society ought to be organized was dislocated. That is, because the two largest parties, CDU and SPD, which had reigned either with an absolute majority or in coalition since 1949 were unable to agree on the coalition contract’s conditions. Briefly, “the framework for action of the [hegemonic] discourse no longer work[ed], and subjects [had] to act under new and more open conditions” (Bergström & Boréus, 2017 p.217).

In the final instance the timeframe was delimited to span April, May and June 2018, on three grounds. Firstly, the AfD entered parliament in March 2018 only, and was excluded from the coalition negotiations, wherefore its formal power and influence on policy took effect in

March. Secondly, Germany's weekly Sunday polls have revealed a steady increase in electoral support for the AfD since then, to 17.5% by July 2018, and a more drastic decrease in support for the governing parties; the SPD, for instance held only 18% by July 2018 (Zicht & Cantow, 2018). Finally, the scope of this paper set the boundary for the latest empirical material to be included in the analysis to June 2018.

3.2.2 Empirical Material

3.2.2.1 Sampling Method

This case study utilised generic purposive sampling, to select online newspaper articles from within the case and timeframe, “by the virtue of their relevance to the research question” (Bryman, 2012 p.418). Probability sampling, by contrast, was neither feasible, since it was impossible to map the population of all articles ever written on the AfD, nor desirable, because the aim was to yield a thick description of the case, not to achieve external validity. Furthermore, the approach to purposive sampling was sequential, yet contingent on unit level. The criteria for selecting the empirical material on the level of articles, evolved during the research process, while the sampling process began with an initial sample that was gradually added to. Such conduct was necessary for the number of articles needed to fully deconstruct the AfD's identity could not be anticipated. Saturation was achieved once all tools presented in section 3.3.3.1 could be described using evidence from multiple articles on different events, without inappropriately generalising among articles.

On the level of context, newspapers were sampled. Initially, the decision to *use national daily newspapers* was made, because this category account for the largest portion of all newspaper sales in Germany; precisely, 57.9% (Pasquai, 2018). Also, 67% of national daily newspaper readers reported to be primarily interested in articles on ‘politics’, a motivation less prevalent among readers of other news media (Pasquai, 2018).

Ultimately, the BILD, ZEIT and Süddeutsche were the highest circulation national daily newspapers (Deutschland, 2018). They were ranked in the same order online; that is, considering daily sales as opposed to daily visitors (Kress, 2017). Subsequently, the decision to use *online* newspaper articles, was made for, firstly, the print version was inaccessible to the researcher, while, secondly, online newspapers, such as BILD, are more popular than the print version.

In sampling context, homogeneity was aimed for; yet, heterogeneity was also achieved. Notably, the BILD is a tabloid, while ZEIT and Süddeutsche are considered broadsheets (Deutschland, 2018). Additionally, the Süddeutsche is known for being conservative as well as for independent journalism, the ZEIT for being particularly liberal, while the BILD is described as ‘polemic’ (Deutschland, 2018). Mouffe (2013) argues that the democratic deficit is inherent to liberal democratic societies at large, while any articulation is considered political. The heterogeneity of context did hence not constitute an obstacle to this study.

On the unit level, the criterion for selecting articles evolved. To begin with, all articles on the AfD from within the fixed time frame and selected newspapers were scanned for prevalent story anchors. Throughout April, May and June 2018, an AfD demonstration in Berlin, speeches at- and course of its youth organisation’s (Junge Alternative/JA) congress in Seebach, and remarks articulated by AfD members of parliament received most attention across the newspapers. Ultimately, all articles that matched these criteria, and focused on the AfD’s role in each of these stories, needed to be included in the analysis to achieve saturation; in total, 97 articles (32 BILD, 26 ZEIT, 39 Süddeutsche).

3.2.2.2 Evaluative Criteria

Scott (Bryman, 2012) distinguishes four criteria for assessing the quality of documents as sources of empirical evidence – authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. *Authenticity* is concerned with the documents’ origin; herein, newspaper articles were sampled from the selected newspapers’ websites, each of them belongs to a major German publishing house. The documents can thus be considered authentic. *Credibility* requires that the evidence is “free from error and distortion” (ibid., p.544); since the BILD is considered a tabloid, and has been accused of fake news, every event reported on by the articles was checked against the AfD’s official press releases, which are published on the party’s official website. *Representativeness* questions the typicality of the evidence. The articles were representative of newspaper discourse on the AfD, as illustrated in section 3.3.2.1. Finally, the empirical material was “clear and comprehensible” (ibid., p.544). The fact that all articles were written in German, while quotes had to be translated into English did not pose an obstacle to this study, as the researcher is a native speaker of both.

3.2.3 Method of Analysis

Discourse analysis that abides by Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, has been selected as the method of analysis, for this study constitutes an initial attempt to empirically inform Laclau and Mouffe's otherwise highly abstract review of right-wing populism in contemporary liberal democracies. Chiefly, theoretical and methodological concordance is necessary to accurately inform the theoretical frame, and to avoid gaps. Further, the analytical tools inherent to discourse theory are intended for the in-depth examination of language as they examine how meaning is relationally constructed. Such attribute is desirable, since the aim was to empirically inform Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical scaffold, which ultimately requires a thick description of how the AfD is constructed in online newspaper discourse.

Specifically, 'identity' has herein been devised the central analytical concept, because discourse theory understands the success of right-wing populist parties in terms of an increasing number of people identifying with the subject positions in its discourse.

3.2.3.1 Discourse Analysis: Analytical Tool-Kit

Central to Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is the study of the macro-societal conflict over power on the linguistic level, which focuses on the struggle over the fixation of discourse; discourse being defined as the temporary "fixation of meaning within a particular domain" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002 p.26). Enquiry into discourse accordingly follows the logic of signs.

Signs consist of two parts: the signifier, a mere verbalisation, and the signified, which designates the meaning of the former. The bond between a signifier and that, which it signifies is unsettled, which is a consequence of how signs acquire meaning. Specifically, signs are imbued with meaning by differing, that is relating to one another (ibid.). It is because these relations are continuously remodelled in language use, that the bond between the signifier and the signified is contingent. Signs in discursive structures that designate identities are referred to as subject positions, which comprise "frameworks for human action that are (...) discursively created positions" (Bergström & Boréus, 2017 p.212). The most principal task in deconstructing the AfD's identity, was thus mapping out which subject positions are relevant to the AfD's identity in the sampled discourse.

To delimit the content that is relevant to the analysis, further differentiation between distinct variants of signs and their relations was necessary. Two basic forms of signs include elements, “signs that have multiple, potential meanings” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002 p.27), and moments, which denote instances of interim closure in the meaning of a sign. The system of difference in which these signs are organised arise from articulatory practice. Articulations are correspondingly defined as practices that establish relations between elements. Articulations, further, either modify or reproduce the meaning of an element by establishing a novel link, by deviating from an existing relation or by reinforcing an existing relation (ibid.). In case of the latter elements can be transformed into moments as the reinforcement of a sign’s relations with other signs closes its meaning. Articulations hence construct or dislocate discourse. For deconstructing the AfD’s identity it was thus central to examine *how* signs are related to each other, and to search for signs in the text, that are repeatedly placed in similar relations with one another.

Discursive structures, however, are not just evenly diffused systems of signs. Discourses, and thus identities are organised around an element in which all other signs relevant to the structure converge; to wit, a nodal point. Whence it follows that “other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002 p.26), and vice versa. In attempting to map out the subject positions that are relevant to the AfD’s identity in the sampled discourse, an initial step was to search for the nodal point that was related to most other signs. Although frequently used signifiers provided a starting point, it was ultimately *how* and *what* meaning the relations with other signs created that was decisive of designating the nodal point and moments. In a theoretical context, the significance of nodes becomes more apparent: nodal points are elements that different discourses struggle to invest with meaning due to their centrality to organising social reality; here, social groups and parliamentary representation.

Markedly, the meaning that an identity is infused with, is not self-contained in the system of subject positions. Like discourse at large, identities are constituted relationally. “Collective identities can only be established on the mode of an us/them relation” (Mouffe, 2000 p.13). The bespoke mode of identification is composed of ‘chains of equivalence’ and ‘chains of difference’, which denote the nature of the link among signs in a discourse. It may either equate signifiers or contrast them. Of particular interest in the study of the AfD’s identity was which subject positions were excluded from ‘us’ in newspaper discourse, by means of

contrast, that is chains of difference. In fact, mapping the AfD's identity is equivalent to determining whether the AfD was excluded or included in 'us' of newspaper discourse. The focus was hence not only on articulations, and the implied meaning, but also on the nature of the relations among subject positions. Thereby two relations were of particular interest. Firstly, how 'us', in the newspaper discourse, relates to the system of subject positions that constitute the AfD's identity. And, secondly, how such identity relates to the identity of right-wing populist parties in their own discourse. therein, two antagonisms were to be investigated: the political antagonism inherent to the emergence of 'us', in newspaper discourse, and using discourse theory that between the 'us/them' distinction in newspaper discourse, and 'us/them', constituting 'the people' in right-wing populist discourse. Crucial was for such purpose to determine whether the former manifested as antagonism proper or agonism. Ultimately, it was decisive whether the AfD was equated with the amalgam of groups and parties that constitute the extreme right in Germany nowadays, that is subsumed in a broad category/node resembling Mouffe's 'evil extreme right', or whether such antagonism existed between rather specific identities of 'us', and the AfD. Since all subject positions converge in the nodal point around which an identity is constructed these will later most clearly demonstrate the relation of newspaper discourse to the AfD.

3.2.3.2 Evaluation

The evaluative criteria for qualitative research as put forth by Guba and Lincoln (Bryman, 2012) comprise credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility and dependability devise criteria similar to reliability – trustworthiness. The former measure good scientific and require careful documentation of all phases of the research process. These were herein targeted by clearly delineating Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical approach, and by illustrating precisely how its analytical tools were applied in practice. The analysis, further, aligned with such conduct. Ultimately, the researcher attempted to explain each decision in the research process in as much detail as possible considering the paper's formal restrictions. Transferability describes the extent to which results are relevant without the study. As aforementioned, this study aimed yield a thick description, not to achieve generalisability. It did, however, aim to inspire further research on the role of discourses that are not RWP in the thrive of RWP parties. While this study's findings ought not to be generalised, its theoretical lens should be transferred, and its results used to further develop the perspective. "Ensuring that while recognising that complete objectivity is impossible in social research, the

researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith” (ibid., p.392) is the concern of confirmability; confirmability, was achieved via a transparent research process. With regards to the confirmability of the researcher’s interpretation of the empirical material, confirmability was achieved by conducting the analysis twice, at different points in time and comparing the results.

3.2.3.3 Alternative Theory and Analytical Method

Discursive psychology was herein considered the sole feasible alternative theoretical frame and method of analysis. Such approach generally aligns with Laclau and Mouffean discourse theory, yet reasserts agency (Bergström & Beréus, 2017) ; that is, alternate views on social phenomenon. Using discursive psychology, it could have been investigated *what* interpretive repertoires exist around the AfD, and *when* these are used by for instance politicians.

Discursive psychology was, nevertheless, rejected, because this study constitutes an initial attempt to inform Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theoretical frame to right-wing populism; theoretical and methodological concordance was hence of utter importance. Also, conversation analysis, the preferred method of discursive psychology was not feasible in this case study; there are few if any direct confrontational interactions in parliament between established parties and the AfD, which would have to be compared to other repertoires, simply because the AfD has only recently entered parliament.

4. Results & Analysis

The following analysis deconstructs the AfD's identity in the discourse of German online newspaper articles, and therein endeavours to yield an insight to the manifestation of antagonisms in contemporary liberal democracies; that is, how the right-wing populist party is approached in Germany. Specifically, the AfD's speeches at- and course of its youth organisation's (Junge Alternative/JA) congress in Seebach, an AfD demonstration in Berlin, and remarks articulated by AfD members of parliament, received most attention during the months of April, May and June 2018 across newspapers.

At large, newspaper discourse constructed 'the wicked right-wing populists' in contrast to 'the benevolent democrats'. The former conditioned the emergence of 'us', whom were identified as the latter.

To trace the mode of identification giving rise to 'the benevolent democrats' it is not sufficient to envisage 'the wicked right-wing populists' as its dialectic antithesis. In deconstructing the AfD's identity, the subsequent analysis hence proceeds through continuously reproduced moments, articulations that imbue these subject positions with meaning through chains of equivalence and stabilise them via the exclusion of particular interpretations from 'us', that are instead associated with the node of 'the wicked right-wing populists'. For such purpose, this study proceeds through each of the three newspaper headline stories.

4.1 Protest: 'Anti-AfD Demos' and the 'AfD-March'

Strikingly, in reporting on the most recent AfD demonstrations in Berlin, the moments of 'demonstrators' and 'politicians' denoted subject positions that crystallised and devised the legitimate 'anti-AfD demos'. 'Followers' and 'organisers', which were used to describe the 'AfD-March', were excluded from such definition, and subsequently from 'us'.

In effect, newspaper discourse granted 'demonstrators' the right of assembly and recognised those members of parliament (MPs) who lectured at 'anti-AfD demos' 'politicians', whereas AfD MPs who spoke in front of the party's 'followers' were referred to as 'organisers'.

Markedly, ‘followers’ were divested of their freedom to express one’s opinion and their right of assembly; that is, the AfD and its supporters were expelled from the space of democratic rule, which is occupied by ‘us’.

For illustration, the contrast of ‘anti-AfD demos’ to ‘AfD-March’, resembled a distinction between defence and despotic offense; war, was the prevailing rhetorical trope used to describe the demonstration. Articulations such as “Berlin arms for an AfD demonstration” (ZEIT, 2018b), the AfD “demonstrates in our Berlin” (BILD, 2018d), and “civil protest against AfD-March” (ibid.) provided a point of departure for the ‘demonstrators/followers’ division, and linked ‘us’, via possessive pronouns like “our Berlin” to the ‘anti-AfD demos’. War is therein effectively used to present the AfD as a societal problem.

Such rhetoric further substantiated in descriptions of how participants of the ‘anti-AfD demos’ were going to proceed:

“It is our aim to get as many people as possible onto the streets, so that there is no coming through for the AfD” (ibid.)

‘Demonstrators’ additionally planned to “stop the hate”, attached to the AfD’s ‘followers’, by “blocking the right-wing populists’ path”, “drowning out their words”, and to “ride on boats and rafts down the Spree into the government quarter” (ibid.) to prevent the AfD’s ‘followers’ from reaching their destination, the Brandenburger Tor. Simultaneously, the AfD MP’s speech was devised “the AfD-rally”, which enacted a “thrust” (BILD, 2018b) onto the German-EU relations.

The BILD’s description of party chairman Alexander Gauland’s address further illustrates the war metaphor’s surfacing in newspaper discourse:

“AfD-Gauland stares down at his famous green dog-tie. (...) Then he rolls the word-canon to the shooting hatch and fires the first broadside” (Nyary, 2018).

While the ‘anti-AfD demos’ and ‘AfD-March’ were overtly presented as hostile, with the former being peaceful and the latter rather aggressive, the relation between the ‘demonstrators’ and the ‘followers’ was established in multiple steps and more subtle. To

begin with, an article from the tabloid BILD that was entitled “13 Demos against AfD-March”, quoted a statement provided by a police spokesman:

“Anybody is entitled to the right of assembly. Anybody is allowed to demonstrate, as long as he obeys the law. However, every group has to grant such right to others, too. (...) Please do not forget: We do not protect the cause of your protest, but your right of assembly!” (BILD, 2018d)

In the following paragraph, however, it was reported that:

“Authors of a popular webpage, have recently bragged about having vandalised bureaus and residential buildings of individual AfD-leaders. In return, AfD followers have announced and called for violence against counter-demonstrators on the internet.” (BILD, 2018d)

Firstly, the term ‘in return’ indicates an interaction between the unknown authors and the AfD’s ‘followers’. Secondly, the parallelism, grammatical concurrence of the two sentences indicates that the authors’ and ‘followers’ actions were consecutive, linear. Put differently, despite the use of ‘in return’, the parallelism suggests that the ‘followers’ reaction was not directed back at the authors. Instead, ‘counter-demonstrators’ were subjected to their aggression. Further, the parallelism prompts the reader to compare vandalism and violence. Although the authors ‘bragged’ about having damaged the AfD MPs’ property, their action appears almost terse in contrast to violence against human beings, which in turn appears more severe. Taken together, the ‘followers’ call for violence is thus not only presented as unreasonable, but also as directed against innocent ‘demonstrators’, thus reinforcing ‘AfD-March’s’ hostility toward the ‘anti-AfD demo’.

In context of the police spokesperson’s statement, such construction of ‘us’, ‘demonstrators’ and ‘them’, AfD ‘followers’, suggests that the latter respect neither a citizen’s rights of assembly, nor to express one’s opinion, even in advance of the actual demonstration and ought hence to be divested of the same. Articles further questioned, “why a party needed to demonstrate on the streets of Berlin (...) instead of helping to fashion politics” (Steffen, 2018c); clearly, the AfD’s demonstration was clearly not recognised as legitimate.

Moreover, the conception of AfD supporters as ‘followers’, and their relation to the AfD’s ‘organisers’, substantiated in the conceptual metaphor of ‘the Pied Piper of Hamelin’, or ‘Rat-Catcher of Hamelin’, which was used in newspaper discourse structuring the demonstrations. The Pied Piper of Hamelin is the protagonist of a famous German legend dating back to the middle ages, who relieves the rat infested town of Hamelin from its strain and, cheated out of his pay, lures the town’s children to abduct them from their parents.

The BILD, for instance, quoted the CDU Secretary General:

“The rat-catchers from the AfD walk through our country and promising, to protect (...) lives” (BILD, 2018b).

An article from the ZEIT, pointed out that:

“the AfD received most votes of previous non-voters during the parliamentary election. It mobilises in an area of society, which had dissociated itself from the hitherto established way of doing politics” (Steffen, 2018c).

AfD politicians are herein depicted as the pied pipers of contemporary German politics, who “lure demo-participants with cash” (BILD, 2018c); the AfD “lures its followers with financial grants to travel to Berlin” (ZEIT, 2018b) out of society’s abyss. Specifically, ‘lure’ implies that AfD leaders are ‘organisers’ of ‘marches’, failed ‘politicians’, who instead of mobilising support on established political grounds, trick voters with the ‘false promises’ of their right-wing populist rhetoric into ‘following’ them.

Further, rats, the AfD’s ‘followers’, connote disgust, and revulsion; in the middle ages rats were believed to transfer diseases. The metaphor of the Pied Piper, thus reinforces the identification of ‘them’, the AfD, as a societal problem; they appear infectious, are portrayed as unpredictable and uncontrollable. Articles, for instance, emphasised that “organisers on the federal board confirmed that” the idea to “lure interested supporters with €50, had not been agreed upon in advance” (Steffen, 2018c); it was the “unapproved decision of a single individual” (ibid), which conveys instability also within the party.

In concert, the construction of ‘them’, the ‘organisers’ and ‘followers’ involved in the ‘AfD-March’, as a threat to ‘us’, and subsequent identification of the AfD as a social problem, that is hostile toward ‘innocent civilians’ and ‘out of control’, is evidently antagonistic proper and conceived of a failure of liberal democratic society. Instead of being challenged on its discursive constitution, the AfD and the implied antagonism is expelled from the symbolic space of democratic rule.

Taken together, it was communicated that, if the ‘hate’ were not stopped, the AfD might relieve democracy of its children, the ‘innocent demonstrators and democratic citizens’. The AfD and its ‘followers’ ought hence to be kept at distance, even eradicated for the wellbeing of ‘us’ all.

4.2 Politics: ‘Benevolent Democrats’ and the “Wicked Right-Wing Populists’

4.2.1 The ‘Wicked Right-Wing Populists’ and Chairman Gauland’s Address

Further subject positions in the war on the social strain ‘AfD’, were most evidently mapped on moralistic territory in newspaper discourse on the AfD’s party chairman’s speech at- and general course of the JA’s federal congress in June 2018. Specifically, reports on Gauland’s address utilised ‘mask’ as metaphor to institute a chain of equivalence with the Nazi regime, as well as to substantiate old, and to assert new antagonisms; despite apologies on part of the chairman, assuring that his words’ effect was unintended, Gauland and other party leaders were discursively tied to the national socialist regime, and presented as ‘evil’. AfD politicians became ‘heads’ of a ghost from the past, to be expelled from the ‘hall of democracy’, by “us democrats” (Marinić, 2018).

Alexander Gauland opened the JA’s annual federal congress, with the following lines:

“We have a history to be proud of, which lasted longer than 12 years and only if we profess to our past, will we have the power, to shape the future. Indeed, we recognise our responsibility for the twelve years, but dear friends, Hitler and the Nazis are merely a bird shit in our more than thousand year long history.” (Fritz, 2018)

While Gauland insisted to have merely expressed his contempt, “politicians spoke of tastelessness and disgrace”, over the fact “that men like him sat in the German Bundestag” (ZEIT online, 2018). Newspaper discourse excluded Gauland’s explanation, by means of ‘mask’ as metaphor. His attempt to align with the ‘democrats’ view on the holocaust as “unprecedented crime in world history” (Schneider, 2018b) was thereby averted. Effectively, Gauland was equated with the AfD, and his statement and protest were considered revelatory, since:

“every response can only mean the exposure of the intention behind such maliciousness” (Marinić, 2018)

“this week the mask fell off” (Marinić, 2018)

“it showed the party, which lurks behind the AfD’s civic mask” (Schneider, 2018a)

Gauland’s failed articulation, further, provided scope for newspaper discourse to assert alternative interpretations of the term ‘bird shit’ in context of his articulation, and of the intention behind the ‘mask’; these meanings were subsequently attached to the AfD. The metaphor of the ‘mask’, therein fulfilled three functions in the sampled newspaper discourse.

On the most basic level, the AfD’s ‘civic’ mask comprised a membrane parting the AfD, from the superior power of democracy; its mask enchanted, concealed and ultimately allowed the AfD to exert an influence on democratic politics. Once more, the ‘rat-catcher’ metaphor was used in newspaper discourse, to conjure up the image of the AfD ‘luring’ its ‘followers’. More importantly, however, its ‘civic’ mask was implied to have concealed the ‘maliciousness’ of the AfD’s right-wing populist narrative, described as:

“the rightest of all right-wing populist narration, that exists far off logic thinking” (Marinić, 2018)

“pure evil, disguised as argumentation (...) and the calculated utilisation of such evil for manipulation” (Marinić, 2018)

“contemptuous ideology, which is in truth hostile towards Germany” (ZEIT, 2018c)

Additionally, its ‘civic’ mask was portrayed as having permitted the AfD to enter the “high house of democracy”, whose “glass dome was built for us democrats to see when our values are under attack, and when it is time, to defend them” (Marinić, 2018); ‘glass dome’, being a reference to the Reichstag building in Berlin. The ‘pure evil’ ‘lurking’ beneath, was rendered unable of escaping “our democracy’s watchful, controlling eye” (Marinić, 2018), despite its cover. The use of ‘mask’ as a separable membrane accordingly conveyed that Gauland’s ‘evil’ articulation, was indeed revelatory, hereafter ‘us democrats’ were able to demask the AfD.

As illustrated above, the identification of ‘us’ in newspaper discourse was overtly proclaimed by the repeated adherence of ‘us’ to the term ‘democrats’, or of ‘our’ to ‘democracy’. While the possessive pronoun ‘our’ was properly applied, and constituted simply a mean to express belonging, the utilisation of the personal pronoun was remarkable; in German, as in English, ‘us’ usually replaces the noun in the sentence. Newspaper articles, however, frequently used the noun ‘democrats’, which ‘us’ is meant to replace, in conjunction. Thus, the articulation ‘us democrats’ expressly acts to identify ‘us’ as ‘democrats’.

Further, newspaper discourse attached political parties, and leaders to the group of ‘democrats’ through a chain of equivalence. Democracy’s ‘watchful eye’, namely belonged to “our chancellor” (Marinić, 2018) Angela Merkel. Multiple articles described her “silence” as particularly “valuable”, and as having shown “the right way to meet the AfD” (Marinić, 2018). Ultimately, the term “our democratic culture” (Marinić, 2018) was used to evoke the notion, that being ‘democratic’ was an inherent to being German, which further substantiates the meaning of ‘innocent’, ‘democratic citizens’ and ‘protestors’; as the AfD was correspondingly considered ‘hostile’ towards Germany (ZEIT, 2018c), ‘pure evil’ (Marinić, 2018), even ‘contemptuous’ (ZEIT, 2018c), ‘mask’ as metaphor served to sediment the antagonism between the AfD’s ‘organisers’, and the ‘democratic’ ‘politicians’. Additionally, the presentation of ‘us’, ‘democratic citizens’ as embedded in a ‘democratic culture’, excluded the AfD’s ‘followers’ whose support for the party’s “contemptuous ideology” (ZEIT, 2018c), after all, paved the way for their invasion of ‘the high house of democracy’;

thereby, the metaphor ‘mask’ reinforced the suggestion that the AfD’s followers are not true ‘democratic citizens’, but ‘rats’ ‘lured’ out of society’s abyss, and thus the suggested hostility of ‘them’ toward ‘us’, ‘innocent’ ‘democratic’ citizens’.

On a more abstract level, ‘mask’ as metaphor thus symbolised the perception of the AfD as incommensurate with the values of democracy, represented by ‘us’, and sedimented the antagonism constituting such identification via the moral condemnation of ‘them’. The attribution of ‘pure evil’, ‘contempt for human beings’ to the AfD ‘organisers’ and ‘followers’ was finalised in the identification of ‘us’, ‘democrats’ as ‘benevolent’, which was instituted through conflict with the AfD’s right-wing populist narrative, and a chain of equivalence that discursively linked the AfD to the national socialist regime.

4.2.2 The ‘Benevolent Democrats’ and the AfD’s Request to Hold a Minute’s Silence

For illustration, articles on remarks by AfD members of parliament in the Bundestag, accentuated its President’s appeal to the AfD “not to poison the political and social climate” (Schneider, 2018d), and accused an AfD politician of the “instrumentalization of crime victims” (ibid.) for polemic purposes. Markedly, an AfD MP had requested to use the time he was allotted to speak in parliament, to hold a minute’s silence in honour of a 14 year old German girl who had been killed by a refugee.

The president was subsequently identified as one of ‘us’, ‘democrats’, as his appeal was interpreted as “a sharp reprimand and warning”, “illustrative of the civilized confrontation” (ibid.) associated with democracy. By contrast, the AfD MP’s request was described as “exploitative” and “encouraging hatred, agitation, impetus for brutalization and the worst forms of violence” (ibid.). Newspaper discourse excluded the MP’s explanation, similarly to that of Gauland, by means of moral condemnation. Effectively, the Bundestag’s president who was equated to ‘democrats’, was depicted as morally superior to the AfD. Such relation between the ‘democrats’ and ‘evil right-wing populists’, was established by the repeated articulation depicting ‘us’, ‘democrats’, as benevolent. For illustration, the ‘democrats’ adhered to the rules of ‘civilized confrontation’, by “repeatedly, admonishing [the MP] in vain”, “reprimanding the AfD parliamentary party”, or “urgently wishing for the AfD not to poison the political and social climate” (ibid.). In resemblance of the ‘demonstrators’/‘followers’ confrontation, articles reported that the ‘democrats’ had in return been:

“slandered, insulted and threatened, in countless comments, e-mails and phone calls” (ibid.)

While the ‘democrats’ were depicted as benevolent, in that they advise the AfD on the rule and values of democratic practice, the AfD was once more argued to willingly violate these criteria; its behaviour was:

“incompatible with the Bundestag’s dignity as a constitutional organ” (ibid.)

In effect, the hostile relation between ‘democrats’ and the ‘wicked’ AfD was reaffirmed, and ‘us’ democrats were additionally identified as ‘benevolent’, enforcing the demand to expulse the AfD from the ‘house of democracy’.

4.3 Chains of Equivalence: Nazis, the Identarian Movement and Hooligans

Jointly, Gauland’s articulation and the AfD MP’s request to hold a minute’s silence, interpreted instead as:

the calculated utilisation of such evil for manipulation” (Marinić, 2018)

facilitate the comparison of the identified ‘evil’ to national socialism; Notably, the above cited quote, was initially articulated by a ‘democratic’ politician in relation to the NSDAP, Hitler’s party, and repeatedly used across newspaper articles without quotation marks to describe the AfD in modified form:

“for Auschwitz-survivors the cold blooded, calculated and agitation statements by Gauland are simply repulsing” (Schneider, 2018a)

Further, the AfD was discursively linked to national socialism through implied comparisons such as:

“our German history has shown how national socialism, hatred and agitation lead into society’s abyss” (ZEIT, 2018d)

“the path to crime often commences with provocation and contemptuous waffle” (Kister, 2018)

Here, ‘provocation’ devises Gauland and the MP’s articulation; in context of the ‘benevolent’/’wicked’ distinction, it was therein conveyed, that if not expelled from democracy, the social problem AfD could invest society and history would repeat itself. The chain of equivalence among individual AfD politicians, the party, and national socialism hence reinforced the perception of the AfD as ‘evil’ and ‘infectious’, as well as the antagonism between ‘benevolent democrats’ and the ‘wicked right-wing populists’.

In addition to Gauland’s address, newspaper articles on the JA’s congress in June 2018 problematised its chairman’s association with the right-wing extremist Identarian Movement (IB), and the signing of the national hymn. Predominantly moral categories structured the discussion thereof in the sampled newspaper discourse; thereby the chain of equivalence among AfD politicians, the party, and national socialism was reinforced, and extended to encompass the IB.

To exemplify, one article was entitled “AfD members bawl “Germany, Germany above everything” (Kain, 2018b); “it echoed” through their “clubhouse” (ibid.). Strikingly, newspaper discourses installs the chain of equivalence with a review of the ‘prohibited’ strophe’s historical background:

“the national socialists sang this song at their party conferences (...) and other official events” (ibid)

The article continues:

“such strophe has been disapproved of since the NS in Germany – it is thus NOT sung in Germany” (ibid.).

While evoking yet another association between the AfD, and national socialism, the newspaper article clearly categorised these as ‘wrong’. Also, ‘it is NOT sung in Germany’ suggests once more that the AfD at large, is excluded from the category ‘us’, ‘democrats’ and evidently ‘democratic citizens’. Such meaning was confirmed, in that the articles subsequently depicted the congress as a crime in itself, to be taken to court conveyed by the use of terms such as “witnesses”, “agitators”, and “suspect”, “cold blooded and calculating”, and “disgusting” “evidence” (Kain, 2018a).

Ultimately, the understanding of the AfD as ‘uncontrollable’, ‘unpredictable’ and ‘internally instable’, thus as threatening, previously conveyed by the ‘rat-catcher’ metaphor, was reinforced and linked the AfD to the IB. JA chairman Damian Lohr was reported to have evidence that “showed [Lohr] together with Hooligans and members of the (...) national right-extremist “Identarian Movement”” (ibid). Since AfD members are not allowed to support such movement, it is suggested that the party is unable to control its members, and breaks with its own principles, and above all, violates the law. In effect, the AfD is portrayed as having experienced “yet another shift to the right” (ibid.). Chiefly, newspaper discourse which also acts as a frame of reference for action, built such myth to suggest a line of action for the ‘benevolent democrats’ that would allow them to expel the AfD from ‘the house of democracy’ while maintaining their position; namely, “surveillance of the JA by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution” (ibid.). Since these are equated with individual AfD politicians, who are anyhow perceived to be ‘contemptuous’, such appeal equally applies to the party and its followers; it is not, however, political confrontation.

5. Final Discussion

In the following, the results from the previous chapter are put in context of the research question to arrive at a general impression of the relation between the sampled newspaper- and right-wing populist discourse.

As exemplified in the analysis, the sampled newspaper discourse constructed ‘us’, the ‘benevolent democrats’ by means of excluding ‘them’, ‘the wicked right-wing populists’; such mode of identification was evidently antagonistic proper. More specifically, subject positions encompassing ‘us’, like ‘demonstrators’, ‘politicians’ and ‘benevolent democrats’ were highlighted, and contrasted with, among others, ‘followers’, and ‘organisers’. Elements across news stories, and articles, were imbued with meaning in predominantly moral terms; ‘demonstrators’, for instance, were depicted as ‘innocent’, ‘democratic citizens’, AfD demonstrators, by contrast, were portrayed as ‘offensive’, and potentially violent toward ‘demonstrators’, as well as in violation of those ‘demonstrators’ rights. Thereafter the ‘followers’ were divested of their democratic rights, and through the use of war, masking, as metaphor, and reference to the Pied Piper of Hamelin ostracised from ‘our’ democratic society.

The ‘evil’ of individual ‘organisers’, and ‘followers’ was repeatedly generalised to the AfD as a whole. Further, through chains of equivalence among the AfD, the National Socialist Workers’ Party, as well as hooligans and the identitarian movement, the party was not recognised as such in newspaper discourse; instead, they elevated the antagonism between the ‘benevolent democrats’ and AfD, to the ‘wicked right-wing populists’.

Although such ‘us/them’ distinction was one between enemies, it were, above all, the ‘wicked right-wing populists’ who was portrayed as hostile towards ‘demonstrators’, ‘politicians’, and ‘democrats’, despite the ‘benevolence’ of the latter; it was precisely such construction, which ultimately imbued the AfD with ‘evil’. Strikingly, with regard to the other side of the antagonism, the sampled newspaper discourse conveyed that the ‘benevolent democrats’ could be maintained, if the ‘evil’ were overtly demasked, even surveilled by the Federal Constitutional Court; the AfD was rejected as anti-democratic. Markedly, the antagonism

from which ‘they’, the ‘wicked right-wing populists’ arose, hence indicated that ‘us’, the ‘benevolent democrats’ were constructed as an essential identity.

In reflection on the analysis, and the increasing popular support received by the AfD, it is reasonable to argue that newspaper discourse may, in case of Germany, reaffirm the AfD’s myth of society. Namely, the antagonism proper between ‘us’, ‘the people’ and ‘them’, ‘the establishment’, thereby accelerating the AfD’s thrive.

Finally, as discussed in this paper’s ‘alternative theory and method’ section, one suggestion for future research includes an investigation of the various interpretive repertoires surrounding the debate of right-wing populism. Such study could compare repertoires across countries exemplifying cases of successful / failed right-wing populist parties. Thereby it could be explored how different perceptions of the phenomenon relate to its success, and further develop the lens presented in this paper.

6. Limitations

Its critique of the Western understanding of the individual, and break with the assumption that social relations are determined by objective conditions, locates this study at the other of the extreme in comparison to the extant account of right-wing populism. By the virtue of its theoretical frame the following limitation was imposed upon this study. As the individual was considered to be *interpellated* with meaning, it was implied that discourses constitute somewhat causal structures; it has, however, been shown in previous research (Jetten & Mols, 2016), that individuals' understanding of social phenomena is equally *shaped* by the individual itself, and other social actors. At this point, it should once more be heightened, that this study aimed to accentuate the value of-, and to empirically inform Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theoretical lens, and to complement extant research on right-wing populism.

Yet, another limitation was implied in the use of Mouffe and Laclau's discourse theory. While newspaper articles constitute multimodal texts, in which images fulfil a central function, discourse theory relies solely on language use in deconstruction meaning in text. Due to the formal limitation of this study, above all time and space, multimodal discourse analysis could not be combined with Laclau and Mouffe's approach. Deeper meanings of images, and their association with discourse in text could hence not be grasped.

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