

“Fortress Europe’? A Politics of Shameless Normalization”

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OUTLINE



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- Example I: Constructing Borders “inside”
 - “Border and Body Politics”
 - Argumentation/Legitimation
- Example II: Defending the “Homeland”
 - Constructing “*Feindbilder*” – “World Conspiracy Theories”
- Conclusions, Challenges, and Perspectives

BORDERS YESTERDAY & TODAY – A TURNING POINT?

SAVING CHILDREN

**2021: 82, 4 Mill. people are refugees;
42% of refugees are less than 18 years old.**



Moria Camp Spring 2020



**In Afghanistan ca 18 million
people need assistance**



**POLISH-UKRAINIAN BORDER,
26 FEBRUARY 2022**

QUESTIONS

Why has it become “*normal*” for some EU-member states to NOT save refugees?

WHICH refugees?

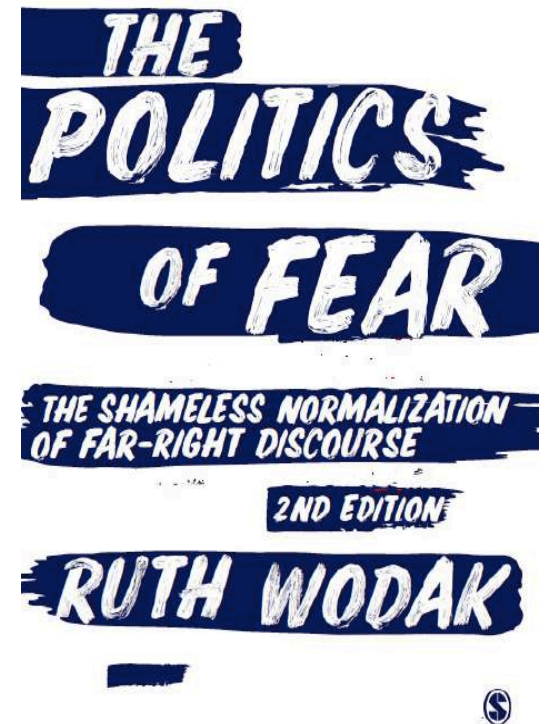
How is this decision legitimized?

Which discursive shifts/frame shifts are taking place?

NORMALIZING FAR-RIGHT AGENDA AND RHETORIC

“The Politics of Fear”

- Far-right populist parties create/instrumentalize **crises**
- They instrumentalize minorities as *scapegoat* – as a threat to ‘us’: *politics of fear*.
- They promise to ‘solve’ this ‘problem’ – *saviours* and ‘*voice*’ of the ‘people’: *hope*.
- Appeals to **common-sense**, **emotions** (pathos), and **anti-intellectualism** are perceived as “authentic”: ‘*Arrogance of ignorance*’.
- Currently, we are experiencing a *shameless* “*normalization*” of the “rhetoric of exclusion”.



THE “STRANGER” – WHICH “STRANGER”?

- **‘Modern Stranger’**: ‘The Jew’ as cultural/racialized Other (Simmel 1950; Bauman 1995; Kovács 2010) – ‘Strangers as non-members’, not ‘close’ and not ‘distant’
- **‘Postmodern Stranger’**: ‘The deprived, weak and destitute’ as social/re-negotiated Other (Bauman 1998) – Strangerhood is privatised and ubiquitous, identities unstable and blurred.
- **Two Strategies** to cope with ‘strangers’ (Bauman 1995) – ‘devouring’ or ‘vomiting’ them

Racialization refers to the process by which social space is (negatively) associated with various population groups (*Encyclopedia of Urban Studies* 2010/Vol. 2, 629)

(SHAMELESS) NORMALIZATION

The *far-right populists' agendas (and related rhetoric)* have reached the political mainstream.

The *boundaries of the 'sayable'* are being shifted..

Traditional/post-war values, norms and rules of political culture are violated by *continuous provocations*.

Such provocations are scandalized, then disseminated via the media, *supported by mainstream conservatives*, and thus normalized.

“COARSE (IN) CIVILITY”

“**Coarse civility**” [*rohe Bürgerlichkeit*]: ‘soft’ discriminatory utterances, which convey authoritarian attitudes beneath a *thin layer of civilized-polite manners*, by means of indirectness and implicitness.

This leads to the *normalization of discriminatory values* (@ Wilhelm Heitmeyer [2018])

Coarse incivility: how blatantly impolite discourses are used to shamelessly convey such values.

Example I:
CONSTRUCTING ENEMIES “INSIDE”

Normalizing Exclusion

MANIPULATIVE/ PERSUASIVE FUNCTIONS OF EXCLUSION

- Targeting group as enemies/outside (discursive strategies of *nomination* and *predication*)
- Use of *propaganda* defines the enemy as allegedly *cohesive group via metonymies* and *legitimation strategies*, fallacies (*hasty generalizations, Strawman, ...*)
- *Hate-incitement*, conspiracy theories (*ideologies/ narratives*)
- *Institutionalization of identification*, isolation, exclusion (popularizing indifference)
- *Racialization of space* (ghettoes, camps....)

CHARACTERISTICS OF DISCRIMINATORY RHETORIC

1. Positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation
2. Denial (of racism, xenophobia, sexism, antisemitism; etc.)
3. Justification and legitimation strategies
4. 'Homeland' rhetoric (salience of *deixis*)
5. Dialectic relationship between formality of context and degree of explicitness of prejudicial expressions
6. Syncretic racism/antisemitism

DIVIDING THE WORLD



LEGITIMATION/ARGUMENTATION

“[Legitimation exists if] a powerful group or institution (often the State, the government, the rulers, the elite) **seeks normative approval for its policies or actions**. It does so through **strategies that aim to show that such actions are consistent with the moral order of society**” (Rojo & Van Dijk 1997, 528).

USE OF *TOPOI*

- **Abstract structure** (*if p occurs, then q will occur/ q is undesirable/ therefore p should not occur*).
- *Topos* is a WARRANT-type structure, used as a ‘short-cut’ in argumentation, alluding to **common-sense** (‘warrant’ - a major premise of the type: if p then q, or, all p-s are q):

‘(Too many) migrants are coming to Austria/Sweden..’

‘Migrants are criminal/cost too much/exploit our system...’

‘They need to be kept outside’




‘ **Migrants are a burden/threat to our society**’

Topos	Warrant
Topos of definition	Most of the people arriving now are not in danger or being persecuted; therefore, they are not refugees but (economic, illegal) migrants
Topos of burden	Providing for so many refugees places an inordinate burden on Austrians; therefore, Austria should only accept a limited number
Topos of culture/burden	The people arriving now are mostly uneducated and/or illiterate; therefore, they are an unacceptable burden on the welfare state
Topos of culture/male nature	The people arriving now are mostly young men who cannot exercise restraint; therefore, they are a danger to Austrian women
Topos of economic resource limitation	Austria does not have the resources to provide for so many refugees; therefore, Austria should only accept a limited number
Topos of historical dissimilarity/conditionality	The Geneva Convention was designed for a different (historical) situation; therefore, Austria is not bound by it
Topos of national responsibility	If the EU does not control its external borders, Austria must take national measures
Topos of reality	The universal human right to asylum is a theoretical ideal, not a reality; therefore, granting this right is optional for Austria
Topos of (potential) threat/danger	Some of the people arriving now are/may be/ may in the future commit acts of terrorism; therefore, Austria should close its borders and police them strictly
Topos of solidarity (within the group/charity begins at home)	Homeless or poor Austrians deserve our help more than refugees; therefore, Austria should help them instead



RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF EUPHEMISMS

2018 (national/conservative + far-right coalition):

- “Arrival centres” (for refugees) renamed as “*Departure Centres*” (“Ausreisezentrum”)  “**Detention Camps**” (LTI: “Sammellager= **Concentration camps**”) (“*evacuation*” = *deportation*)

“2020 (national/conservative + green coalition):

- “Arrival Centres” renamed as “*Return Centres*” (“Rückkehrzentrum”)

(e.g., Victor Klemperer *Lingua Tertii Imperii* 1933-45).

Example II: DEFENDING THE “HOMELAND”

World-Conspiracy Theories

MORALIZATION OF BORDERS

“This exclusionary practice [closing of borders] has been **morally legitimized** over the years by an array of policy frames [...], but also by a **narrative of deservingness**, that is, by following the principle that “**some people do not deserve to be treated equally or in the way we (the ‘host’ society) treat human beings**”. (Vollmer 2016, 4)

CONSTRUCTING THE 'STRANGER'

Metaphorical Threat-scenarios – Instrumentalizing a *Politics of Fear*



- “War” - Invasion
- “Migration-physics” - Floods, Waves
- “Apocalypse” – Tsunami, Decline
- Disease – “Virus”, “Parasites”
- “Replacement” – Extinction, “Numbers-game”

INTEGRATING ANTI-MUSLIM & ANTISEMITIC STEREOTYPES



There are already symptoms of **very dangerous diseases** not seen in Europe for a long time: cholera on the Greek islands, dysentery in Vienna, some are saying there are also other, even more serious, diseases. [...] There are various **types of parasites, and protozoans**, which are not dangerous to those people's organisms, but can be **dangerous here. It is not about discriminating against anybody, but all this needs to be checked.** It needs to be checked and hence the Minister of Health should clarify how this looks at the moment, because from what we know, what our activists know [...] **it all looks very bad.**

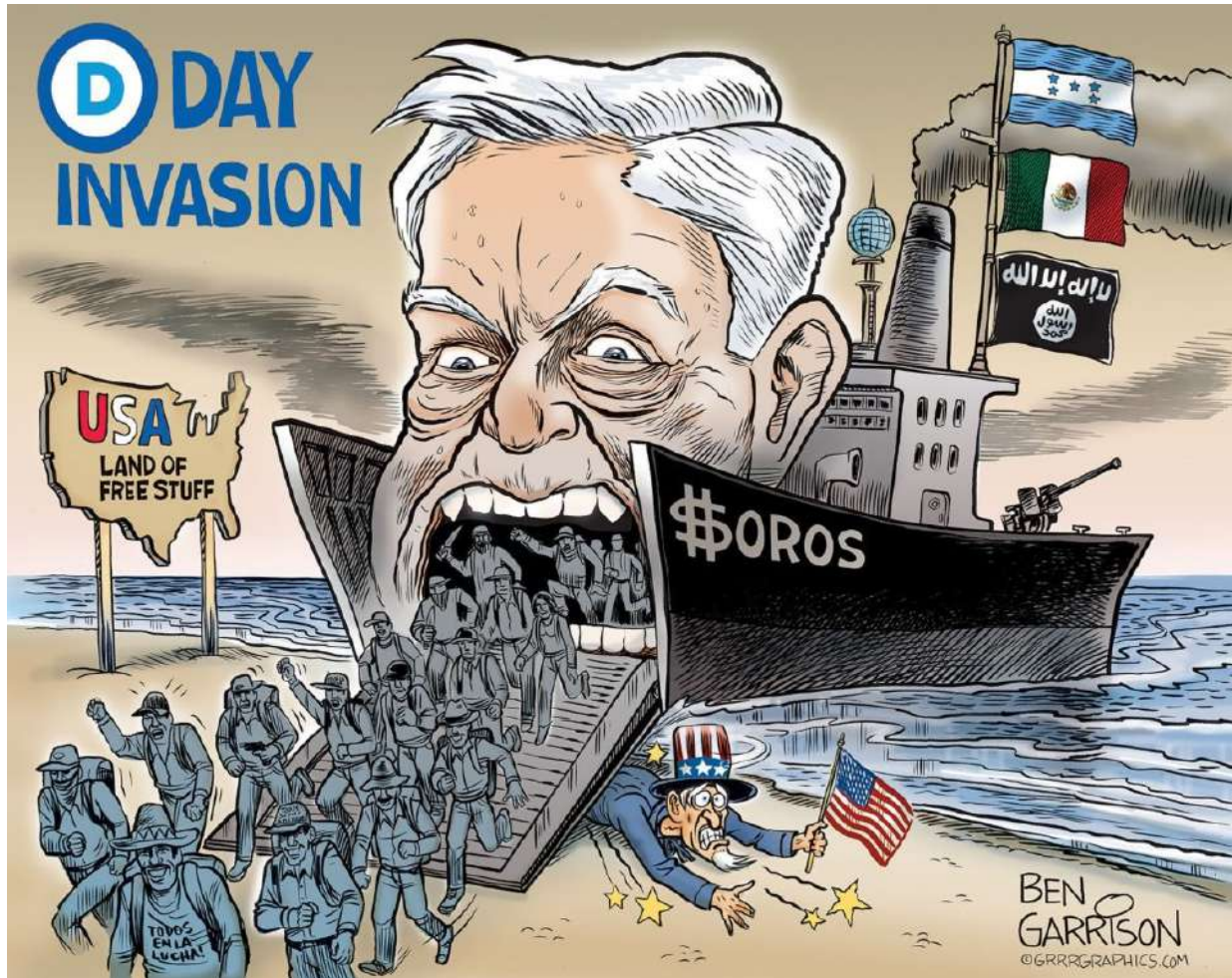
(J. Kaczyński, 2016)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aIU8D3RWE4)

(Krzyżanowski, M. (2020) *Social Semiotics* 30:4, 503-27)

"The Islamic Rape of Europe", *W Sieci*,
15/2/2016

FEINDBILD: “SOROS”: IUDEUS EX MACHINA-STRATEGY



A mechanism which allows blaming an imagined homogenous collective of Jews for whatever issue might seem opportune for political ends (Wodak 2021)

@Cartoon: Ben Garrison

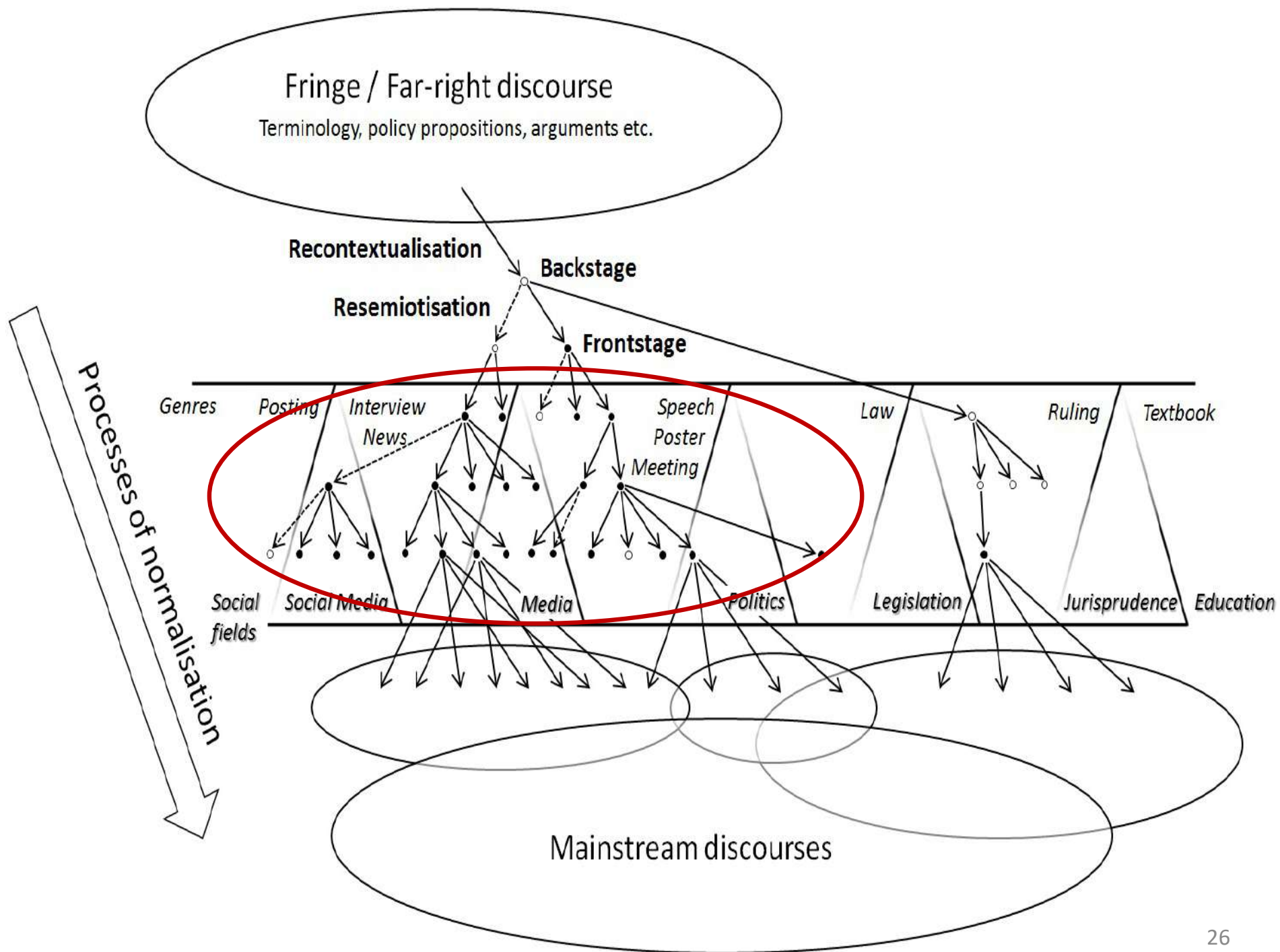
COARSE CIVILITY

“It is understandable that many politicians are afraid of ugly pictures of border security. But we cannot transfer this job to Turkey because we don't want to get our hands dirty. *It won't go without ugly pictures.*”


(Sebastian Kurz, 13.1. 2016; *Die Welt*;
<https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article150933461/Es-wird-nicht-ohne-haessliche-Bilder-gehen.html>)



CONCLUSIONS, CHALLENGES, AND PERSPECTIVES



“POST-TRUTH & POST-SHAME”

- No apologies (“impoliteness”)
 - Lying (flouting Gricean “maxim of quality”)
 - Self-presentation as victim (“turning the tables”)
 - Self-presentation as authentic (“sincerity claim”, emphasizing ethos & pathos)
 - Conspiracy of media – “fake-news” (resonates with “anger” & “deep story”)
- 
- Allows identification and bonding with “victim of the elites and of conspiracies”
 - Supports the fight against elites (“from below”) (*topos of saviour*)
 - Triggers “self-righteous anger” (*Wutbürger*) and “hope” (“populist narrative”)

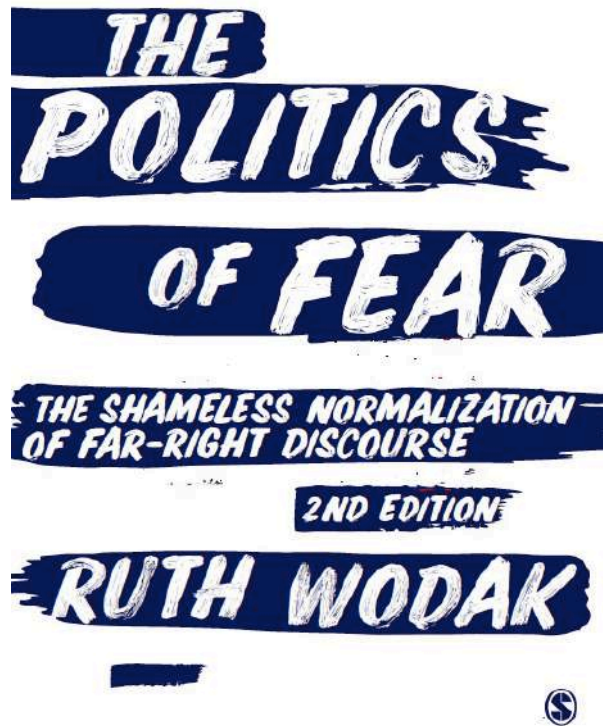


Lying causes no embarrassment but restores pride and self-confidence of targeted audience

NORMALIZATION – “DRIVING ON THE RIGHT”

- **Drawing on Collective Memories < - > Collective Amnesia**
 - **Dissatisfaction and Loss of Trust – Rise of Inequality**
 - **Moralization of Borders**
 - Economization – dehumanised refugees as commodities
 - Securitization – protection of the (female) body
 - **Culturalization of Exclusion**
 - Focus on symbolic politics
 - “Iudeus ex Machina”-Strategy
 - “Tabloid Democracy”
- Tensions between globalizing economic, social and cultural developments and exclusionary identity politics (“border protection”) lead to re/inventing nationalism and drawing on (past) nativist ideologies.**

Thank you!



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