

Analyzing antisemitic *Feindbilder*¹

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1. Antisemitic conspiracy theories

Soon after the end of World War II, Adorno (1963 [1959]) coined the term ‘secondary antisemitism’ to address public opinion in post-war Germany, which held that the Jews were exploiting Germany’s guilt over the Shoah. Usually, justifications and denials used in response being accused of antisemitic beliefs or utterances abound in political debates and the media, typically as elements of *blame avoidance* (Wodak 2018). *Victim–perpetrator reversals* also occur frequently, specifically when Jews are (again) instrumentalized as scapegoats for common woes. In a nutshell, as the historian Tony Judt states, ‘what is truly awful about the destruction of the Jews is not that it mattered so much, but that it mattered so little’ (2008, 14).

In other words, few lessons were learned from the past. This is why, as Fine (2009, 476) argues, it is necessary to trace and deconstruct new forms of expressing and representing antisemitic (and all other racist and xenophobic) beliefs. As the open, explicit expression of antisemitic prejudice has been tabooed in many Western European countries since the Shoah (but not in the former Eastern Bloc countries; see Wodak 2021), indirect, subtle, and coded prejudicial discourses about Jews have emerged. These have to be carefully analyzed to uncover whether this is ‘old wine in new bottles’ or, indeed, a ‘new normal’.

Consequently, antisemitism in post-war (Western) Europe, specifically in countries with a fascist and national-socialist past, must be viewed primarily in relation to the various means employed in dealing with alleged or real guilt, with alleged or actual accusations about Nazi and fascist pasts. Discursive manifestations may be found not only in the large, traditional reservoir of antisemitic prejudice and in a general discourse of collective experiences and attitudes, but in several new topoi as well. The forms of expression chosen vary significantly:

¹ This is a revised and shortened version of a chapter contributed to a *Festschrift for Andras Kovács* (CEU, in press). I also draw on Wodak (2020), a detailed analysis of the Austrian national election campaign 2019.

They may be manifest or latent, explicit or very indirect. But each one appears to be embedded in a discourse of justification (e.g., Wodak et al. 1990).

Antisemitism occurs in various contexts, e.g. in the public sphere and anonymously in online postings and other Internet genres.² Moreover, it is important to emphasize that various *antisemitisms* exist – racist, capitalist, cultural, religious or syncretic; Muslim or Christian; left- or right-wing; “old” or “new”; “traditional, structural or secondary”; hard-core or latent; explicit or coded; and soft or violent, resemiotized in physical acts of hatred.³ Fine poignantly describes the many polarized debates about occurrences of antisemitism as follows:

To deny the issue of antisemitism in Europe on the grounds that Europe has learned the lesson from the Holocaust, or to deny the issue of antisemitism on the left on the grounds that the left is inherently anti-racist, or to deny the issue of antisemitism within radical Islam on the grounds that Muslims are oppressed within Europe and have a history of tolerance, is in every case a kind of closure, a refusal to engage critically with the legacies of European, left and Muslim antisemitism. (Fine 2009, 477)

2. The “*Iudeus ex machina*-strategy”

According to Wetzel (2014, 1), antisemitic prejudices, resentments and stereotypes have proved to be very flexible throughout 2,000 years of history, accommodating ever-new socio-political developments. Zick and Küpper (2005) propose labelling all new variants of antisemitism as “*transformed*”. They argue that the concept of “*transformation*” encompasses the range of differing realisations of an inherently consistent antisemitism, according to the respective *zeitgeist*. Although racist antisemitism has become weaker and less visible, culturally racist *topoi*, such as “Jews don’t belong to ‘us’” because they “are different” and/or “strangers”, remain virulent (Wodak 2021). Hence, antisemitism is not – Wetzel (ibid.) further claims – a sub-form of racism: antisemitism imagines Jews as rich, cosmopolitan and powerful, whereas racism usually perceives ‘the other’ as uneducated, barbaric and marginalized. *Envy* specifically seems to trigger antisemitism, stigmatizing Jews

² See Melzer et al. 2016; Wodak 2011, 2018.

³ See FRA 2013, 2015; Stögner 2014, 2015; Stögner & Wodak 2014, 2015; Wodak 1989, 2011, 2018; Wodak et al. 1990.

as privileged and wealthy; thus, in respect to racism economic competition and fears about losing jobs currently seem to be the mobilizing factors for ever new ‘world conspiracies’.

Some aspects of *modern/racist antisemitism* remain virulent in the form of a closed antisemitic world view – where all problems are explained by scapegoating Jews. This is what I label “*Judeus ex machina*” (Wodak 1989) – a mechanism which allows blaming an imagined homogenous collective of Jews for whatever issue might seem opportune for political ends. This was true once again during the recent financial crisis of 2008 and during the so-called “refugee-crisis” 2015/16: Fantasies of powerful and greedy Jewish bankers, Jewish capitalism and Jewish speculation served to trigger many stereotypes of a ‘Jewish world conspiracy’.

Accordingly, Oppenheimer (2006, 271) defines the ‘Jewish world conspiracy’ as a “specific form of a negative stereotype”, whereas Volkan (2013, 216) perceives such conspiracies as “reservoirs of permanent externalization”, implying that every form of guilt or any problem could continuously be shifted/externalized towards an outsider – in our case, Jews. In the same way, Zamperini (2012, 330) maintains – while defining the functions and meanings of *Feindbilder* from a socio-psychological perspective –, that “the collective violence towards the hostile group is made possible and justified through specific psychological delegitimization processes”, i.e. through derogatory and exclusionary rhetoric, legitimized *inter alia* by appealing to the common-sense *topoi* mentioned above. In sum, the following important functions (and stages of the discursive construction) of *Feindbilder* can be distinguished (see Table 1):

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Targeting a specific minority group as enemies/outside (discursive strategies of <i>nomination</i> and <i>predication</i>; <i>Manichean division</i> of ‘us’ and ‘them’)<input type="checkbox"/> Defining ‘the enemy’ by means of <i>propaganda</i> as allegedly cohesive group via <i>metonymies</i> and <i>metaphors</i>, fallacies (<i>hasty generalizations</i>, <i>straw man</i>, <i>argumentum ad exemplum</i>, <i>singularization</i>, etc.)<input type="checkbox"/> Shifting blame by discursive strategies of <i>externalization</i>, <i>victim-perpetrator reversal</i><input type="checkbox"/> Employing means of <i>hate-incitement</i> (abuse, appeals to violence)<input type="checkbox"/> Constructing conspiracy theories (<i>ideologies/narratives</i>)<input type="checkbox"/> Institutionalizing measures of <i>identification</i>, <i>isolation</i>, <i>exclusion</i>; i.e. the <i>racialization of space</i><input type="checkbox"/> Popularizing indifference by appealing to <i>common sense (topoi)</i> and discursive strategies of <i>justification/legitimation</i> |
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Table 1: Stages, functions, and means of the discursive construction of *Feindbilder*

Both antisemitism and Islamophobia can also appear together, as public debates about banning Halal and circumcision in Austria, Denmark, Germany and France illustrate (e.g., Delahunty 2015). The merging of the century-old prejudice about the ‘world-conspiracy’ of powerful Jews, such as the Jewish US-American philanthropist of Hungarian origin, George Soros, with anti-Muslim and xenophobic stereotypes, has come to persistently dominate many debates about migration, specifically since the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015: Many far-right politicians are fallaciously claiming time and again that Soros (who metonymically represents *the* ‘Jewish world conspiracy’ in such accusations) is actively involved in moving Mexicans over the US border and refugees from Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan to Europe. This antisemitic stereotype is now also labelled ‘*anti-Sorosism*’ (see Wodak 2021)⁴. Anti-Sorosism was launched by extreme-right neo-Nazi activists and websites, and some well-known far-right caricaturists, like Ben Garrison, have been noted to support the demonization of Soros (Szombati & Szilágyi 2020). In this context, it makes sense to recall the history of the fabricated document commonly known as *The Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion*⁵. This infamous forgery, purporting to reveal a ‘Jewish plan for world domination’, became one of the most important sources of antisemitism per se, from the date of its first publication in Russian in 1905 until – as illustrated by the case study below – the date of writing this chapter.

3. Analysing antisemitic discourse

3.1. Syncretic antisemitism

It is important to emphasise that ‘antisemitic language behaviour’ may imply explicitly held and/or articulated hostility towards Jews, but it necessarily implies the presence of prejudicial assumptions about ‘the Jews’ as a group. For example, the slogan ‘Kill Jews’ painted on the Sigmund Freud monument in Vienna (1988) clearly does contain an explicit, albeit anonymous, imperative call for the most hostile of actions against Jews. On the other hand, a

⁴ Anti-Sorosism is the term used to label the global antisemitic anti-Soros campaign launched by extreme-right activists: for example, the website ‘CanSpeccy’ elaborates the contents of this characteristic ‘Jewish world conspiracy’ stereotype in detail: ‘The fraud at the bottom of the globalist scheme that George Soros promotes is thus clear. It is to destroy every race and national culture on earth for the benefit of the adherents of a religion and culture of fanatical racism.’ See <https://canspeccy.blogspot.com/2018/07/sorosism-what-is-it-about.html> (accessed January 2, 2020)

⁵ www.zeit.de/zeit-geschichte/2017/03/protokolle-weisen-zion-antisemitismus-faelschung (accessed January 15, 2020).

Jewish joke, which can have various meanings depending on the setting, the participants and the function of the utterance, also forms part of what we term ‘antisemitic language behaviour’, but only in circumstances where the joke expresses anti-Jewish prejudices (Wodak et al. 1990).

Thus, analysing the *context of an utterance* is indispensable in determining whether an utterance expresses antisemitic prejudice or not. Which antisemitic content is expressed depends, among other things, on the setting (public, private or media), the formality of the situation, the participants, the topic, and the presence or absence of Jews. Antisemitic language behaviour, moreover, covers a wide range of speech acts, ranging from explicit remarks or appeals for action to mere allusions. Antisemitic language behaviour includes all levels of language, from text or discourse to the individual word or even sounds, e.g., the Yiddish intonation of certain words or phrases, when used in derogatory ways.

3.2. Strategies of Blaming and Denying

Clearly linked to positive self-presentation and the construction of positive group and collective identities is – what Teun van Dijk (1992) famously labelled – ‘the denial of racism’. He described the strategies of denying racism in great detail and claims that

[o]ne of the crucial properties of contemporary racism is its denial, typically illustrated in such well-known disclaimers as ‘I have nothing against blacks, but...’ [. ...] The guiding idea behind this research is that ethnic and racial prejudices are prominently acquired and shared within the white dominant group through everyday conversation and institutional text and talk. Such discourse serves to express, convey, legitimate or indeed conceal or deny such negative ethnic attitudes. (ibid, 87-88)

Moreover, Van Dijk (ibid, 92) provides a useful typology of denying as part of a general defense/justification strategy when a person is accused or blamed of having uttered a racist remark or of being racist. These types are:

1. act-denial (‘I did not do/say that at all’)
2. control-denial (‘I did not do/say that on purpose’, ‘It was an accident’)
3. intention-denial (‘I did not mean that’, ‘You got me wrong’)
4. goal-denial (‘I did not do/say that, to...’)

5. mitigations, down-toning, minimizing or using euphemisms when describing one's negative actions

Apart from 'denial proper', Van Dijk claims that there are also cognitive and social strategies which can be regarded as 'stronger forms of denial': blaming the victim and victim-perpetrator-reversal (see also Hansson 2015). Moreover, he mentions the use of *disclaimers*: recall the well-known examples of justification discourses, such as 'I have nothing against..., but', 'My best friends are..., but', 'We are tolerant, but...', 'We would like to help, but the boat is full', etc.

All these discursive utterances, labelled as *disclaimers*, manifest the *denial of racism or exclusion* and emphasize *positive self-presentation*. Usually, such speakers seek to justify the practice of exclusion without employing related overt rhetoric. Overt denials of prejudice basically involve two presuppositions. First, they presuppose the existence of 'real' prejudice. In this regard, the existence of extreme, outwardly fascist groups enables defenders of mainstream racism, exclusion or discrimination to present their own rhetoric as being unprejudiced – by comparison, thus also constructing an implicit *straw man* fallacy. Second, speakers, in denying prejudice, will claim that their criticisms of minority group members are 'factual', 'objective' and 'reasonable', rather than based upon irrational feelings, and will accordingly employ a range of discursive strategies of legitimization. Speakers can, of course, use similar denials of prejudice and arguments of reasonableness when invoking different forms of discrimination, such as sexism, racism, antisemitism or religious discrimination. Additionally, each type of exclusionary practice will integrate particular themes, stereotypes and *topoi*, all contributing to the *syncretic nature of mainstream discriminatory discourse*.

4. Case Study: "Silberstein" and the "Jewish World Conspiracy"

4.1. The "Ibiza Affair"

On 17 May 2019, at precisely 6 p.m., The German weekly *Der Spiegel* and the German broadsheet *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung* as well as the Austrian weekly *Der Falter* published a seven-minute-long video showing the then leader of the far-right Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and Vice-Chancellor of the nationalist-conservative/far-right coalition government, HC Strache, and the then party chief whip of the FPÖ in the Austrian Parliament, Johannes Gudenus, in an affluent villa on Ibiza, a Spanish island well-known as holiday resort for

wealthy people, playboys and VIPs. HC Strache and Johann Gudenus can be seen sitting in a spacious living room, drinking Vodka mixed with Red Bull and talking to an unknown, attractive woman, introduced as the niece of a Russian oligarch, and the young Bosnian wife of Gudenus. The Russian niece could be heard expressing her interest in investing money (250 million Euros) in Austria. These seven minutes, we are told, were cut together from the recording of a seven-hour meeting held in the spring of 2017. The contents of this video, it soon became clear, were so scandalous that Strache was forced to resign as Vice-Chancellor of Austria and as leader of the FPÖ the very next morning at 11 a.m. (18 May 2019).⁶

In a nutshell, the video shows that Strache was prepared to literally sell out Austria: to privatize water, to curtail press freedom and thus ‘orbanize’ Austrian media, and to help the Russian investor to take over the biggest and most influential tabloid, the *Neue Kronenzeitung*, in return for the newspaper’s support during the next election: “If she takes over the Krone newspaper three weeks before election and gets us to spot No. 1, then we can talk about anything”, Strache suggests. He accompanies this statement with many gestures underlining his proposal and exclaims “Zack, zack, zack” to indicate how quick and efficient such policies would be (a figure of speech which has meanwhile been taken up in many jokes, memes, rap songs, and so forth).

But this was not the end of the story: on the day after the elections to the European Parliament (26 May 2019), the FPÖ, the SPÖ and the opposition party Jetzt (a small party that had split from the Greens) launched a no-confidence vote against Kurz’s new interim government. Four new ministers had been taken on board after 20 May – all of whom were close to the ÖVP. Jetzt and the SPÖ objected to such a purely ÖVP-dominated government and were pushing for a no-confidence vote before the European elections. Despite this huge and unprecedented scandal, the ÖVP won 34.55%, the FPÖ 17.2%, and the biggest opposition party, the SPÖ, 23.89% of the votes. Moreover, Strache received 44,751 preferential votes [sic!] guaranteeing him a seat in the European Parliament. Clearly, loyal

⁶ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibiza_affair; www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/20/austriaibiza-scandal-sting-operation-what-happened-why-does-it-matter (accessed June 15, 2019). See also Obermaier and Obermayer (2019) for more detail www.nytimes.com/2019/05/18/world/europe/austria-video-strache.html (accessed June 15, 2019); www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZDj_VLMTaU (accessed January 15, 2020).

FPÖ voters had demonstrated their unbroken trust in their former party leader. It took another 20 days for Strache (and the FPÖ) to decide that it would make no sense for Strache to accept this mandate.

The entire government had been dissolved – a first in Austria’s history since 1945. President Van der Bellen had to find a new chancellor very quickly, as demanded by the Austrian Constitution, an administrative interim government was quickly set up which was required to ‘manage the country’ but not to take any far-reaching political decisions. The date for the national election was announced for October 29, 2019 (see Wodak 2019a for an extensive summary of the ‘Ibiza-Affair’).

4.2. *The election campaign 2019*

In the following I limit myself (for reasons of space) to three central elements of the election campaign (see Wodak 2021 for more details): First, the hegemonic framing and the related and consistent discursive strategy of *victim-perpetrator-reversion*, accompanied by a plethora of *denial strategies* pursued by the ÖVP and FPÖ; second, the seemingly independent momentum of the *omnipresent allusion* to “Silberstein”⁷ and the instrumentalization of this *Feindbild* to explain unpleasant incidents; and, third, the - also consistent - attempt to categorize all accusations and criticism as unjustified “dirty campaigning”, i.e. *fallacy of shifting blame*. In conjunction, these three elements construct a story, a *conspiracy theory*, with a simple plot: innocent Austrian politicians are falsely accused by evil Others (from Austria and abroad) and in return have to defend themselves in ways that are, in any case, legitimate.

4.3. *Framing the collapse of the ÖVP-FPÖ government*

On May 18, 2019, former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) announced the end of the national-conservative coalition between his party and the junior partner FPÖ, led by the then-chairman HC Strache. In the morning, at 11 o’clock, HC Strache had resigned after the so-called “Ibiza video” had been released, as had the chairman of his party’s parliamentary club, Johann

⁷ See Tóth (2017) for a detailed account of the so-called “Silberstein” scandal of 2017.

Gudenus – who also left the FPÖ at the same time. In his resignation statement, after a short introduction that alleged a massive conspiracy abroad, Strache declared, while employing control and intention denials:

Over the last three years I have had to suffer a lot of slander and defamation, but also malice. But what was fabricated here two years ago has a completely new dimension. Here, in the manner of Silberstein, a kind of dirty campaigning and disinformation was launched that is unsurpassed in perfidy and vileness.⁸

Several terms appear here which - embedded in an unproven but declaratively formulated claim - accompany the entire election campaign. A large-scale conspiracy against Strache “in the manner of Silberstein” is alleged (a typical victim-perpetrator reversal strategy). This is precisely defined: it is perfidious, vile, an instance of dirty campaigning, which - typical of a conspiracy - is also untrue, that is, disinforming.

A similar claim is made - somewhat less drastically - by Sebastian Kurz, who on the evening of May 18, 2019, followed this characteristic choice of words and the implicit argumentation while employing act- and intention denials. This statement, for which many citizens had waited for hours gathered at Ballhausplatz, in front of the Chancellery in the center of Vienna, and which at the same time initiated the ÖVP’s election campaign, also mentioned “methods that remind one of Silberstein”:

I would also like to thank all members of the Federal Government for this work. And I say quite deliberately, no matter to which party: I was prepared to endure a lot, to accept a lot for these successes in policy. From the rat poem to the closeness to radical groups to exceptional cases that keep appearing. Even if I did not always say it publicly, you can believe me, this was often not easy for me personally.

For the sake of actual policy work, I did not terminate the cooperation at the first misconduct. But after yesterday’s video I have to say: Enough is enough. Even if the methods, which remind one of Silberstein, are contemptible: the content is what it is. What was said about me in this

⁸ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000103393515/straches-ruecktritt-im-wortlaut> (accessed on October 1, 2019)

video, insults and insinuations, is the least of my concerns in this matter. Really serious are the ideas of abuse of power and the handling of tax money and the handling of the press.”⁹

Well, one might ask, what are “Silberstein methods” or what is the “manner of Silberstein”? What are the former Vice-Chancellor and the former Chancellor alluding to here? **Who or what is “Silberstein”?**

For the uninitiated, it is certainly not clear whether “Silberstein” refers to a specific certain phenomenon (that is why I use the neuter pronoun in the title); or the name of a specific person. People who are familiar with German and Austrian history and the meaning of Jewish-sounding names might suspect that this is a reference to a specific Jew or Jewish family¹⁰ and yet not know who is meant. In any case, Strache’s statement makes it clear that it must be something evil, “vile and perfidious”, the predicated highly negatively connotated attributes are obvious and explicit.

These two attributes are often mentioned in connection with antisemitic stereotypes of the “crook, cutthroat and criminal” (Stögner & Wodak 2015). Furthermore, a reference is made to a “campaign”, which may refer to well-known stereotypes of the “Jewish world conspiracy”. It is even “dirty campaigning” - the second leitmotif of the entire election campaign (externalization and the beginning of the construction of a new narrative).

People who still remember the parliamentary election campaign of 2017 will understand the allusion¹¹ perfectly: it is about the Israeli-Jewish political advisor Tal Silberstein, who distributed an antisemitic video about the then-new ÖVP leader Sebastian Kurz (Tóth 2017). The former SPÖ chairman Christian Kern had hired Silberstein as an election campaign consultant, as a spin-doctor. Silberstein had previously worked for the liberal Neos Party, among others, and he had also been in touch with Kurz. It was “dirty campaigning”, which political advisor Yussi Pick defines as where you put things into the mouth of your political opponent that he didn’t say or put together in a shortened form and present them

⁹ <https://orf.at/stories/3123088/> (accessed on October 1, 2019)

¹⁰ See Pelinka & Wodak (2002) on the dangerous use of Jewish-sounding names.

¹¹ On the pragmatic concept of “allusion”, see Wodak & Reisigl (2002).

differently.¹² Today, one would probably call this ‘a dissemination of so-called “alternative facts”’ (Fuchs 2018; Block 2019).

In this way, Kurz succeeds in distancing himself completely from his junior partner, even though he himself had brought, indeed invited the FPÖ into the government and remained silent on most of the so-called “exceptional cases”, i.e. scandalous racist and antisemitic incidents which occurred on almost a daily basis, a merger of act- and goal denials. Strache, on the other hand, succeeds in drawing attention primarily to the producers of the video and constructing himself as the victim of illegal activity (a typical victim-perpetrator strategy). His apology is addressed, above all, to his wife; the fact that he was obviously willing to “sell” Austria is trivialized and explained away by intoxication (this might happen to anyone) and presented as a one-off mistake (this might happen to anyone).

Thus, the framing of the tragedy is successful: *the* “Silberstein” with its/his/her “dirty campaigning” is to blame!

4.4. *Iudeus ex machina*-strategy

From here on, the name “Silberstein” takes on a *metonymic character* - it stands for any “dirty campaigning” and any attack, no matter when, where or by whom; lies and deceit, defamation and *ad hominem* attacks. But it also stands for legitimate criticism. Both aspects are now identified with “Silberstein”, although of course there are many political consultants who do dirty campaigning, in many countries, for many parties. Certainly, they are not all Israelis or Jews. Moreover, criticism is an essential part of democratic discourse.

“Silberstein” becomes a surface for projection, a *Feindbild* or enemy image. One only has to mention the name – quasi as ‘placeholder or joker’ –, and insiders will know what is meant, even if they don’t know who “Silberstein” actually is. What has become part and parcel of common knowledge, of the *endoxa*, however, is that these placeholders imply “something evil related to something Jewish”. If one is asked about it, however, one can - as with every allusion - easily withdraw, for example to factual information - because the real Tal

¹² <https://www.profil.at/oesterreich/spoe-wahlkampf-dokumente-silberstein-kern-8344182> (accessed on October 1, 2019).

Silberstein has, indeed, also acted criminally in some instances (see Tóth 2017). This is not unlike the denial strategy associated with the term “East Coast”: factually, this is a geographical term, but it is used in many public spheres, since the Waldheim affair of 1986 and the “*Dreck-am-Stecken*” affair of 2001, as an allusion to supposedly powerful “Jewish lobbies and puppeteers” in New York (Wodak et al. 1990; Pelinka & Wodak 2002).

In a country like Austria with - as is well known - a long-standing antisemitic tradition, such allusions utilizing names are dangerous and develop a momentum of their own: any accusation can easily and quickly be embedded in an alleged Jewish conspiracy; and any criticism of this can itself be dismissed as exaggerated political correctness. As already in 1986, a victim-perpetrator reversal takes place: Strache now presents himself as the victim of a conspiracy, the “Silberstein manner” could easily arouse antisemitic attitudes. Sebastian Kurz also succeeds in a victim-perpetrator reversal: the Ibiza video, he alleges, reminds one of “Silberstein”, even if “the content is what it is”.

The well-known author and historian Doron Rabinovici responded publicly, immediately on May 19, 2019: according to him, “it was irresponsible to suspect someone behind it” (the Ibiza Video, RW), using a name that triggers “all kinds of associations”.¹³ Obviously, we encounter a typical case of the “*Iudeus-ex-machina*” strategy, i.e. the political instrumentalization of such allusions: whenever a scapegoat is needed and one wants to distract from other problems, the archetypal *Feindbild* of the “cosmopolitan Jew” can be used. This is easily invoked, one only has to repeat it often enough in a certain context and give it specific attributes; it becomes an antisemitic *code*. Apart from diversionary maneuvers, it also serves the purpose of trivialization (*tu quoque argument*): one reacts immediately to any criticism with “Silberstein”. Hans Rauscher, columnist of the newspaper *Der Standard*, puts this in a nutshell on July 24, 2019:

Silberstein, Silberstein, Silberstein, what would we do without you? The Turquoise Party could actually have that put to music. Might make a theme song for the election campaign. Whenever Kurz’s ÖVP does not know what to do, the Israeli dirty-campaigning expert is invoked. In his very first official statement after the Ibiza crash, then-chancellor Sebastian Kurz mentioned Silberstein as someone somehow suspected of involvement. Without any

¹³ <https://orf.at/stories/3123320/> (accessed on October 3, 2019)

evidence. Since then it has been “Silberstein, Silberstein!” whenever the ÖVP wants to cloud the issue.”¹⁴

The SPÖ, too, criticizes this defamation strategy: Florian Schütz, President of the Austrian-Israeli Society, used a press release to remind the public of the exclusionary rhetoric of Jörg Haider and links the Silberstein metonym to the antisemitic *Feindbild* of “Soros”, who Donald Trump and Fox News as well as Viktor Orbán, Johann Gudenus and Matteo Salvini (and others), allege, is behind a global conspiracy: According to this conspiracy theory, Soros is behind the refugee movements to Europe and the USA. “Soros” is thus another antisemitic code, similar in function to “Rothschild” before the Second World War. ¹⁵

4.5. *Shredded “dirt” and “little Silbersteins”*

Tal Silberstein’s methods are repeatedly mentioned in connection with dirty campaigning; this argumentation scheme (“if Silberstein is at work, then it is dirty campaigning”) has also developed its own, seemingly independent momentum since the 2017 election campaign¹⁶. Incidentally, this argumentation goes back intertextually to the Waldheim affair of 1986, in connection with the alleged conspiracy of the World Jewish Congress against Waldheim and the ÖVP. In 1986, for example, ÖVP politicians also spoke of a “slander and dirt campaign” and a “smear campaign” in connection with the revelations about Waldheim’s past (in the German Wehrmacht’s war and war crimes in Greece) (Wodak et al. 1990, 127). The “Silberstein” strategy reaches a climax in the so-called “shredder affair”¹⁷. To recapitulate¹⁸:

¹⁴ <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000106648684/silberstein> (accessed on October 2, 2019).

¹⁵ https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20190723_OTS0117/von-der-ostkueste-bis-silberstein-die-kampfbegriffe-der-rechtspopulisten (accessed on October 2, 2019). Kovács (2019) provides empirical evidence that young Hungarians frequently associate all known negative antisemitic stereotypes with the name Soros - who has been instrumentalized by Viktor Orbán in xenophobic and anti-EU campaigns as a *Feindbild* or enemy image – and they often do so without knowing that Soros is Jewish. The older generation, however, understands the “*Iudeus ex machina*” exactly.

¹⁶ <https://www.diepresse.com/5294429/tal-silberstein-und-die-wahrheit-uber-die-schmutzkubel-kampagnen-der-spo>

¹⁷ <https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/politik/oesterreich/2019920-Mitbewerber-zerschreddern-OeVP-Erklarungen.html>

¹⁸ For the details, see <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000106654313/chronologie-der-schredder-ffaere> (accessed on October 4, 2019)

On May 22, 2019, after the MPs of the “Jetzt” election platform had for the first time publicly considered a motion of no confidence against Chancellor Kurz, an employee of the Federal Chancellery called the company Reisswolf under the false name of Walter Maisinger, expressing the desire to have media data destroyed. On May 23, 2019, Maisinger had five hard drives shredded three times each and took the parts back with him. He also failed to pay the bill. The managing director of Reisswolf filed a complaint for fraud. On July 20, 2019, the newspaper *Kurier* published the story under the title Operation Shredder¹⁹. On July 23, 2019, the newspaper *Der Falter* published a surveillance video showing Maisinger during the shredding. Following this, it was investigated whether the shredding of the hard drives was connected to the Ibiza affair.

The Green Party’s leading candidate Werner Kogler, the SPÖ campaign manager Christian Deutsch and Peter Pilz, chairman of the *Jetzt* election platform, demanded a committee of inquiry be formed; the FPÖ was also outraged, as the Secretary General of the ÖVP, Karl Nehammer, said that the civil servants of the Federal Chancellery might be disloyal and might be behind this affair; they might be “little Silbersteins”, i.e. those who apparently only tried to but failed to really imitate “Silberstein”.

Meanwhile, the FPÖ was outraged about an attack on the employees in the Chancellery by the ÖVP. Nehammer had apparently unashamedly and without any evidence insinuated that they were all “little Silbersteins”, unless they could be attributed to his own party. The same criticism of the ÖVP came from the Social Democratic group in the civil servants’ union GÖD.²⁰

After all this, Armin Wolf – the star presenter of the news program ZIB2 of the state-owned TV broadcasting company ORF – in an interview with then general-secretary of the ÖVP, Karl Nehammer on July 23, 2019, addresses the shredder affair and points out that bets are already being made on the internet on how many minutes it would take Nehammer to use the name “Silberstein”:

¹⁹ <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/operation-reisswolf-kurz-mitarbeiter-liess-inkognito-daten-aus-kanzleramt-vernichten/400556558> (accessed on October 4, 2019)

²⁰ (<https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/politik/oesterreich/2019920-Mitbewerber-zerschreddern-OeVP-Erklarungen.html>) (accessed on October 2, 2019).

Herr Nehammer, es wird den ganzen Abend im Netz gewettet wann Sie #Silberstein sagen. #Welldone @ArminWolf



[K.AT](#)

24.7.2019

**Nehammers "ZIB 2"-Interview versetzt das Internet in Unglauben
Der ÖVP-Generalsekretär sprach mit Armin Wolf über die Schredder-Affäre – und Twitter bildet ein kollektives Nachdenk-Emoji. 🤔**

[#Reisswolf: So reagiert das Internet auf die Schredder-Affäre](#)

Österreichs jüngster Polit-Skandal – Reisswolf-Affäre? Schredder-Skandal? Häcksler-Causa? Oder so? – sorgt weiterhin für Aufregung, Schlagzeilen und Tweets. In einem Interview mit Armin Wolf in der "ZIB 2" wollte ÖVP-Generalsekretär Karl Nehammer jetzt die Situation erklären. Austro-Twitter saß mit einem eigens angefertigten Bullshit-Bingo bereit – und hatte leichtes Spiel.

Image 1: Tweet on Nehammer in the ZIB2 interview with Armin Wolf²¹

“Smearing”, “dirty campaigning”, and last but not least a mention of Tal Silberstein were favorites for the betting. There must have been a collective "Bingo!" shout across the country when Nehammer actually dropped the name of the Israeli political advisor after a few minutes - much to the amusement of presenter Armin Wolf, who could not help but notice that the Internet had virtually predicted this very mention. In this way, a counter-discourse was launched, full of irony and sarcasm, as also already apparent in Rauscher’s excerpt presented above.

After this interview, only part of the argument comes up frequently, namely “dirty campaigning”. The elephant in the room – that is, “Silberstein” – one can add in one’s own mind, but one doesn’t have to. The *abridged code* also works: for example, the ÖVP and former Chancellor Kurz accused Minister of Justice Clemens Jabloner of “dirty campaigning”, when the latter replied to a parliamentary request by indicating that the judiciary was

²¹ <https://k.at/entertainment/nehammers-zib-2-interview-versetzt-das-internet-in-unglauben/400559699>
(accessed on October 2, 2019)

investigating whether there was a connection between “Ibiza” and the shredder affair. The public prosecutor’s office reacted with indignation, but the ÖVP repeated its accusations that this was a concerted “dirty campaign” – with a united front of “dirty campaigners”. This anthropomorphized the abstract term – in German, “dirty campaigning” is referred to as “dirt bucket campaigning” – by referring to people using such “dirt buckets”:

But the ÖVP also reacted with familiar words on Friday: SPÖ, FPÖ, Neos and Pilz, as a coalition of “united dirty bucketers”, should finally stop the attacks on party leader Sebastian Kurz and the People’s Party.²²

5. Conclusion

Obviously, the “*Iudeus-ex-machina* strategy” enters the political stage, time and again, and is instrumentalized successfully to evoke antisemitic attitudes while drawing on traditional stereotypes and conspiracy theories. To capture, deconstruct and explain the continuous impact and influence of such antisemitic *Feindbilder*, of the many insinuations, symbols, stereotypes and tropes, a critical discourse-historical analysis suggests itself. Of course, the question remains why such virulent antisemitism has retained its manipulative force – after the *Shoah* and specifically also in countries from which hundred-thousands’ of Jews were deported to extermination camps and murdered during the Second World War. Why do such conspiracy theories and *Feindbilder* persist? Unfortunately, there exists no simple answer to this question (Richardson & Wodak, in press). *Feindbilder* obviously express the inability or unwillingness to cope with the complexity of political phenomena. As a simple narrative with a simple plot, conspiracy theories help to simplify complex issues and to provide clearly separated Manichean divisions of the ‘innocent’ and of those to ‘blame’. In doing so, they fulfill a strategic political function.

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²² (<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000107475630/justiz-wehrt-sich-gegen-anwuerfe-der-oevp>; accessed on October 2, 2019)

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