

# The “Establishment”, the “Élites”, and the “People”: Who’s who?

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“Right-wing populism is an expression and catalyst for the transition from class politics to value politics, from party politics to symbolic politics, from ideological to identity politics, from socio-economic to cultural cleavages” (Krasteva 2017).

## 1. Losing trust and defining scapegoats<sup>1</sup>

The Eurobarometer poll conducted during the autumn of 2015 showed a significant increase of distrust towards the EU and its institutions (Standard Eurobarometer 84, 2015). Such a rise in distrust is certainly related to the major global and European crises since 2008 (such as the economic crisis, the Euro-zone crisis, the co-called refugee crisis, and ever more terrorist attacks) which brought the problems of the political systems within the European Union (EU) member states and the EU’s institutions to the surface and manifested the frustrations of the public towards it (Angouri & Wodak 2014; Hay 2007; Rizakis 2017). The enormous loss of trust implies a significant blow to the political system. Trust was and still is essential for achieving and maintaining legitimacy since it provides the moral justification for exercising power and making collectively binding decisions to the institutions and the political system (Beetham 2001:107-116).

This erosion in trust in politics is necessarily a far more serious threat than the loss of trust towards a specific political party or an individual. The loss of trust in the political system implies a search for alternatives – which is where right-wing populist and extreme right political parties enter the scene: We encounter new and self-defined saviors of ‘the people’ dominating the political stage, presenting themselves as authentic and trustworthy. They work to create an image of themselves as the ‘true representatives of the people’ in contrast to ‘the untrustworthy political classes’, perceived by them as having failed (Hochschild 2016; Krzyżanowski & Wodak 2009; Pelinka 2013; Wodak 2015). In right-wing populist parties’ efforts to substantiate their claims, their discourse becomes

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‘magically non-falsifiable, as only factual statements could be verified or falsified. Right-wing populist communication style creates its own ‘genre’ as a mix of scandal, provocation, transgression, and passion’ (Sauer, Krasteva & Saarinen 2017, in press).

In other words, they strategically create their own visions, beliefs, threat scenarios, and nationalistic/nativist identities which they actually claim to represent in a ‘post-truth’ world<sup>2</sup>.

It is thus not surprising that in 2016/2017, political rhetoric increasingly relies on the construction of a distinct dichotomy which aims dividing the people living in a country into two quasi homogenous blocs: ‘The people’ are juxtaposed with ‘the establishment’ within a specific narrative of threat and betrayal, accusing the so-called ‘establishment’ of having intentionally or subconsciously neglected the so-called ‘people’, having instead pursued only their own interests, failing to protect the people and to voice their interests, and having ignored the obvious anxieties of the people. Indeed, this narrative arbitrarily constructs two groups via text and image in manifold ways. Such a Manichean<sup>3</sup> opposition portrays these two groups as vehemently opposed to each other, two epistemic communities, one defined as powerful, the other as powerless; one described as good, innocent, and hard-working, the other as bad, corrupt, criminal, lazy and unjustly privileged, and so forth.

Accordingly, the mechanism of ‘scapegoating’ (singling out a group for negative treatment on the basis of collective responsibility) constitutes an important feature of right-wing populist parties’ discourse. Sometimes, the scapegoats are Jews, sometimes Muslims, sometimes Roma or other minorities, sometimes capitalists, socialists, career women, NGOs, the European Union (EU), the United Nations, the U.S. or Communists, the governing parties, the élites, the media, and so forth. ‘They’ are foreigners, defined by ‘race’, religion or language. ‘They’ are élites not only within the respective country but also on the European stage (‘Brussels’) or the global level (‘Financial Capital’). Important fissures and divides within a society, such as class, caste, religion, gender and so forth, may be neglected in focusing on such internal or external ‘others’, when expedient, and are interpreted as the result of ‘elitist conspiracies’.

In this paper, I discuss – after having defined the notion of right-wing populism in some detail – the above mentioned attempt by all right-wing populist parties to create, on the one hand, the ‘real’ and ‘true’ people; and on the other, the ‘élites’ or ‘the establishment’ who are excluded from the true *demos*. Such divisions, as will be elaborated below, have emerged in many societies over centuries and decades. A brief example of the arbitrary construction of opposing

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<sup>22</sup> [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/07/fact-checking-far-right-media-truth-donald-trump-terrorist?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/07/fact-checking-far-right-media-truth-donald-trump-terrorist?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘Manichean’ stems from a religious belief system of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. In this sect, every phenomenon was divided into two opposing sides: light and darkness, good and evil, and so forth. Nowadays, this term has been recontextualised to label ideologies which structure the world into dualities, without any overtones (see Klein 1991).

groups illustrates the intricacies of such populist reasoning. Furthermore, I pose the question why such divisions resonate so well in many countries? I argue that – apart from a *politics of fear* (Wodak 2015) – much *resentment* is evoked which could be viewed as both accompanying as well as a reaction to the disenchantment with politics and the growing inequalities in globalized capitalist societies.

## 2. Re/Nationalizing tendencies in Europe and beyond

In engaging with such dichotomist constructions, however, we must ask who is meant by ‘the establishment’ or ‘élite’, and who are essentially ‘the people’? As a case in point, we ask who is thus appealed to by Donald Trump in his inauguration speech on 20 January 2017, who is included and who is excluded from his reference to ‘the people’.

“Today’s ceremony however, has very special meaning, because today, we are not merely transferring power from one administration to another or from one party to another, but we are transferring power from Washington, DC. *And giving it back to you, the people.*”<sup>4</sup>

Or by the French *Front National*’s (FN) leader Marine Le Pen on February 5 2017:

“Vous avez compris, l’actualité récente en a apporté une démonstration éclatante, contre la droite du fric, la gauche du fric, *je suis la candidate de la France du peuple.*”<sup>5</sup>

Or by the German *Aktion für Deutschland*’s (AfD) leader Frauke Petry on 28 August 2014:

„Die deutsche Politik hat eine Eigenverantwortung, das *Überleben des eigenen Volkes*, der *eigenen Nation* sicherzustellen“<sup>6</sup>

Or by the *Austrian Freedom Party*’s (FPÖ) leader HC Strache on 24 October 2016:

„Denn das Recht geht vom Volk aus. Aber nur so lange, als das Volk von seinem Recht auch Gebrauch macht. Nehmen wir unsere Entscheidung selbstbestimmt in die Hand!“<sup>7</sup>

It is a defining characteristic of populists that they oppose ‘the people’ to an allegedly corrupt élite in ways similar to those quoted above. But not everyone who criticizes the powerful is necessarily a populist. What really distinguishes the populists is their claim that they and only they represent the ‘real people’ in a nativist and culturalist sense. These utterances manifest a

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.vox.com/a/president-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript-annotations>; in the following quotes, references to the people are underlined by the author.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.lepoint.fr/presidentielle/marine-le-pen-une-candidate-du-peuple-face-aux-partis-du-fric-05-02-2017-2102580\\_3121.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/presidentielle/marine-le-pen-une-candidate-du-peuple-face-aux-partis-du-fric-05-02-2017-2102580_3121.php)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.noz.de/deutschland-welt/politik/artikel/500073/afd-petry-will-volksentscheid-uber-abtreibung>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fpoe.at/artikel/hc-strache-zum-nationalfeiertag-das-recht-geht-vom-volk-aus/>

deeply authoritarian mindset in the sense of T W Adorno and his co-authors in the seminal *The Authoritarian Personality* (1967)<sup>8</sup>. All right-wing populists will attempt to unite ‘their people’ – the only really ‘authentic’ people – by continuously creating or maintaining confrontations with those who are seen as not being part of the ‘real America’, the ‘real France, the ‘real Austria’, and so forth (see Müller 2017; Wodak 2015: 88).<sup>9</sup> It is important to emphasize at this point that constructions of ‘the people’ and ‘the élites’ vary in their inclusionary and exclusionary specifics: for example, in the US, the rich are not necessarily part of the élites (since everybody could potentially become rich), but intellectuals (‘liberals’) are regarded as dangerous. In France and Germany, however, intellectuals are accepted as members of the FN and the AfD. Such homogenizing group constructions are thus revealed to be heterogeneous, and depend on the respective political culture, as succinctly argued by Kriesi (2014: 373):

“Western European parties are no longer adequately representing their constituencies, whereas Eastern European parties have not yet produced adequate representation”.

Indeed, the dichotomous view of society (a merger of anti-elitism with a nativist nationalistic anti-pluralism) is part and parcel of right-wing populist ideology, alongside other salient dimensions which I have elaborated elsewhere (see Wodak 2015: 66-67). Accordingly, protecting the fatherland (or heartland, homeland) implies belief in a common narrative of the past, where ‘we’ were either heroes or victims of evil. Revisionist histories thus blend all past woes into success stories of the *Volk* or stories of treachery and betrayal by *others*. Moreover, conspiracies are part and parcel of the discursive construction of fear which frequently draws on traditional antisemitic and anti-elitist tropes. Furthermore such parties endorse traditional, conservative values and morals (family values, traditional gender roles) and, most importantly, support common sense simplistic explanations and solutions (anti-intellectualism). Usually, a ‘saviour’ is appealed to, the (more or less) charismatic leader of the respective party who oscillates between the roles of Robin Hood and ‘strict father’. Certainly, not all right-wing populist parties endorse all the above-mentioned positions. Moreover, even if they do, the level of support for any of the typical stances depends on the specific context of a given country or even situation of speaking.

### 3. “Othering”: The establishment (élites), the strangers, and the people

Although some scholars maintain that the categories of ‘the people’ and ‘the establishment’ imply empty signifiers (in Laclau’s sense), this claim does not seem plausible. Of course, it is striking that the two opposing groups can be continuously defined and redefined in different ways rather than being static entities; anyone could potentially be included or excluded. However, the respective definition always serves specific political agenda and interests.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Stögner (2014); Author (2015: 154ff).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/24/donald-trumps-warning-sign-populism-authoritarianism-inauguration>

Interestingly, however, *two* out-groups are constructed: ‘the establishment’ is part of the respective society, but – as right-wing populist politicians argue – not part of ‘the true people’. On the other hand, another kind of danger is perceived as lurking outside the national borders, in the form of a second out-group, i.e. migrants, refugees, Muslims, Turks, and so forth. In some instances, an alliance or conspiracy between these two groups may also be implied, allegedly directed against ‘the people’ and their true representatives, i.e. the right-wing populists.

The assumption of a Manichean division in society is, of course, not new. In Marxian terms, the proletariat was contrasted to the capitalists who possessed the means of production; in the French Revolution, the ‘people’ opposed the aristocrats; in colonial societies, the imperialists oppressed the native population; in racist societies, dichotomies continue to be constructed along imagined racialized biological characteristics; and, – as Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson (2016<sup>8</sup>) were able to prove in their seminal empirical study of ‘Winston Parva’ (the pseudonym for a small community near Leicester, UK) *The Established and the Outsiders* - insiders and outsiders are frequently created due to their group’s cohesion and the duration of their residence in a specific region. The old inhabitants, having lived there for a long time, indeed for many generations, were labelled as the establishment whereas the new-comers, the authors argue, were stigmatized, on the grounds that they had little or no knowledge of the existing norms and rules, values and aspirations – although these new-comers belonged to the same ethnicity, same nation state, and spoke the same language.

Furthermore, Elias and Scotson illustrate that economic reasons (struggles for limited resources) were not the only cause for the stigmatization of the new-comers; fear of change, of losing one’s precious – established – identity were also salient factors. Instead, ‘feelings of belonging and not-belonging’, of being perceived as authentic or not, gain importance. Elias and Scotson’s argument resonates well with Hochschild’s (2016) claim about the ‘deep story’ at the heart of Trump’s victory: the feelings of non-belonging, of white male patriarchy being challenged, of having lost out to or being side-lined by ‘others’, i.e. African-Americans, Latinos, career women, etc.; in other words, strong feelings of resentment emerge (see below).

Finally, we need to ask who the *élites* are. Following C. Wright Mills (1956), an *élite* is comprised of powerful men (sic!) who commands the resources of vast bureaucratic organizations that have come to dominate industrial societies. Their power is rooted in authority, an attribute of social organizations, not of individuals, and thus constitutes not a conspiracy of evil men, but a social structure that has centralized the decision-making process. Of course, Mills’ writings were related to post-war USA. Nowadays, in the knowledge-based economy, *experts* of various kinds, journalists, and intellectuals, scholars and teachers are labelled as *élites*, governing regimes of knowledge (Jäger & Maier 2009; Wodak 2011).

Taking this line of argument further, we are now able to deconstruct the so-called ‘enemies inside and outside’ nation states, which are threatening the ‘real’ people, as claimed by right-wing populists (Bauman 2016): all new-comers, all strangers from outside, all élite institutions (national, transnational, and global), and all knowledge-related professionals. Cleavages in society have changed; negativity and anachronistic thinking prevail (Canovan 1999), frequently leading to resentment (*ressentiment*; see below). The reoccurring *leitmotifs* of right-wing populists for many years, alluding consciously or subconsciously to historical collective memories of 1989 or even fascist and national-socialist propaganda, are: ‘We are the people!’ (*Wir sind das Volk*) as well as ‘X First’, where X can be substituted by ‘Austria First’ (1992<sup>10</sup>), ‘Germany First’ (1951<sup>11</sup>, 2015<sup>12</sup>) or ‘America First’ (2017), and so forth.

#### 4. The people versus the ‘Schickeria’

On 15 May 2016, circa 432.000 viewers (i.e., ca 6.7 % of the Austrian electorate) watched with fascination and dismay an unmoderated 45-minute TV debate between the two candidates running for Austrian Presidency, the economist and former university professor Alexander van der Bellen (VdB) (Green Party), and the third president of the Austrian parliament Norbert Gerwald Hofer (NH) (Freedom Party), broadcast by the private station ATV<sup>13</sup>. Broader global and European transnational as well as national and local problems played a substantial role in this election, which has been perceived as a decisive choice between a pro-European, internationally oriented, and progressive world-view on the one hand (VdB), and a nationalistic, exclusionary, and conservative stance on the other (NH).

Indeed, VdB was unapologetic about his stance on welcoming refugees, his support of the EU and conviction that the Schengen treaty is a cornerstone of Europe’s stability. NH, meanwhile, spoke just as clearly about what he regards as the urgency to secure and protect Austria’s borders and keep the EU from encroaching too much on Austria’s sovereignty, thus emphasizing an EU-skeptical position<sup>14</sup>. In the end, VdB won the election twice: very narrowly on May 25,

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<sup>10</sup> See the petition proposed by the FPÖ 1992/3 ‘Austria First’(Reisigl & Author 2000).

<sup>11</sup> <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zuerst!>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/deutschlands-neo-nationalismus-lobo-kolumne-a-1042600.html>

<sup>13</sup> See the extensive analysis of this debate by W. Ötsch <http://www.walteroetsch.at/rechtspopulisten-zerstoeren-sachdiskurs/> and in the weekly *Der Falter* (<https://cms.falter.at/falter/bpw16/>).

<sup>14</sup> Other positions of NH include his membership of the *Marko-Germania Pinkafeld Burschenschaft* (<https://www.facebook.com/burschenschaft.markogermania/photos/a.956835317686478.1073741827.826760337360644/969262486443761/?type=3&theater>). Moreover, at his inauguration as third President of the Parliament he wore a cornflower, a symbol of the illegal Nazis before the “Anschluss” in 1938. He also declared repeatedly that May 8<sup>th</sup> (end of WWII, celebrated everywhere as victory for democracy) could not be viewed as a joyful day of liberation from totalitarianism. He supports anti-abortionist and homophobic views.

2016, and again on December 4, 2016, with more than 6% difference, after the FPÖ had appealed the first result<sup>15</sup>.

In this debate, NH vehemently attacked and provoked VdB by reframing topics, by interrupting him 10 times more frequently, by not replying to questions even when repeated many times, and by a range of *ad hominem* fallacies.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, he presented his wife and his family as victims of unjustified attacks, accused VdB's followers of damaging his campaign posters, and frequently switched to the interpersonal level instead of answering a question, e.g. claiming that VdB 'was perhaps nervous and why?' or that VdB 'seemed so aggressive?' In the course of the 45 minutes, he accused VdB of 'being part of THE system', 'being a liar', 'having been a communist', being 'utmost pedantic', 'never having really worked in business all his life', 'being supported by anti-Austrian elements', by 'retired and failed politicians' as well as by 'Brussels, i.e. Juncker', by the 'privileged class' and 'the *haute volée*', but also of 'being tired and old', 'talking (too) slowly', 'being unreliable', and of 'supporting gay marriage' and the 'use of drugs'. In this way VdB was cast as (too) old, almost senile, a liar and a leftist, part of the untrustworthy system, and – due to his profession as university professor – 'elitist'. VdB countered with irony and sarcasm but was unable to remain aloof. Exasperated, for example, after having repeated the same question 8 times, he reacted with expressions such as 'dirty trick' and a non-verbal gesture indicating that NH be a 'complete fool'.

In the following, I illustrate the eristic style of argumentation and the discursive construction of 'the people' versus the 'establishment, i.e. the so-called *Schickeria*, with an extract taken from the very end of the debate, where NH attempts summarizing 'the difference' between the two candidates:

1. NH: (interrupting) Well, the big difference between the two of us is that:
2. VdB: (simultaneous) You are always interrupting me. That's very difficult.
3. NH: The big difference is that. [...]
4. VdB: What is the big difference?

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<sup>15</sup> More information about the election itself is available at <http://www.e-ir.info/2016/06/14/green-against-blue-reflections-on-the-2016-austrian-presidential-election/>. After the FPÖ appealed to the Supreme Court that VdB's narrow victory (30000 votes more) on May 25, 2016 was not valid due to formal and technical issues, the Supreme Court decided that the second round had to be repeated (December 4, 2016). In this paper, due to space restrictions I focus primarily on referential and predicational strategies, thus on the construction of 'the people' and 'the establishment' as well as on some of the provocative and eristic strategies of the populist candidate NH.

<sup>16</sup> The media resonance to this debate was very negative. Many commentators maintained that both candidates had damaged the reputation of the Presidency and had both presented themselves as unworthy of that office. <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/tv-duell-der-praesidentschaftskandidaten-van-der-bellen-gegen-hofer-oesterreich-oberpeinlich-1.2994935-2>; <http://derstandard.at/2000037034409/Praesidentschaftsdebatte-Rhetorisches-Freistilringen-im-direkten-Hofburg-Duell>; <http://www.zeit.de/news/2016-05/16/bundespraesident-tv-duell-in-oesterreichbeide-blamiert-amt-beschaedigt-16095603>;

5. NH: That I will always be someone who looks out for Austria. And you won't be that. You will be indebted to your friends, Mister Juncker, Mister Schulz, but also to this upper class/haute monde/fashionable society (Hautevolee) of former big shots in the ÖVP, who ruined the ÖVP. That will be your network in the Hofburg then, exactly those people.
6. VdB: That's despicable, what you are doing here.
7. NH: Don't, please no swearing.
8. VdB: Three thousand supporters/
9. NH: Please!
10. VdB: Some of whom have achieved enormous things in life, others busting their back
11. NH: (interrupting) Ah, and the 1.5 million voters who voted for me, they didn't achieve anything! [...]
12. VdB: There are famous people in my supporting committee and there are not at all famous people, who are barely making a living at the office, as craftsmen somewhere, um, somehow making a living, yes, those are my supporters, but that you would talk down all those people as haute monde/fashionable society,
13. NH: Mhm
14. VdB: In plain language the "Schickeria" [in-crowd], I call that despicable.
15. NH: Yes, but you are the candidate of the Schickeria, Mister Van der Bellen, that is the big difference.
16. VdB: No one believes that.
17. NH: I am the candidate of the people. That is the very, very big difference.
18. VdB: Yesyes, my supporters are none of them people.[...] That should be fun, and you say you want to work for a united Austria, when all these people, and I say they are people, you deny that.
19. NH: Who is saying I deny that. They are people as well!
20. VdB: With me is the Schickeria, with you it's the people? [...] to have them with me as supporters, workers, craftsmen, police officers
21. NH: Mhm
22. VdB: ... people from the municipal garbage collection, I am proud of that /
23. NH (interrupting): And I will be there for the Austrians, and that is the big difference. I will be a president for the Austrians and not the president of the Schickeria.

In line 1, NH claims that there is a big difference between VdB and himself, and after several attempts he draws on the *topos of the saviour* (line 5; if elected, he will look out for the people and protect them) whereas VdB would not only be part of an upper-class network, but also depend on the EU (i.e. on the President of the European Commission, Juncker). VdB reacts angrily by exclaiming 'despicable', which NH rejects as impolite and offensive, thus turning the tables (actually having offended VdB himself; lines 6 and 7). VdB remains on the defensive and starts listing the high number of people who have signed a statement of support (3000), from all social strata ('some famous, some not'), which obviously, if one were to follow NH's argument, would all not belong to 'the people' and would wrongly be categorized as haute volée. In line 14, he translates the label 'haute volée' into the well-known Austrian-German term 'Schickeria', a term which originally denotes jet-setting yuppies. In line 15, NH repeats the term *Schickeria*, and while negatively using the address term 'Mister' and spelling out VdB's full name, declares

that VdB 'is the candidate of the *Schickeria*'. Whereas, in line 17, NH presents himself as necessarily the one and only candidate of 'the people'. In this way, '*Schickeria*' is both juxtaposed to 'the people' and excluded from 'the people'. In line 18, VdB makes this contradiction explicit and claims that NH's argument implies that his followers do not belong to the Austrian people, although NH has stated that he would unify 'the Austrian people'. At this point in the debate, NH has to concede that the *Schickeria* are also part of 'the people'. Nevertheless, and although VdB has derailed his argument, he emphatically repeats, in the very last minute of the program (leaving VdB no time to react), his claim that he, if elected, would be a president for the Austrian people, whereas VdB would only be president of the *Schickeria*.

In this brief text extract, it becomes obvious that categorizing the electorate into two allegedly homogenous groups, the real Austrians as opposed to the establishment, was considered by NH and his spin doctors to be the strategically most persuasive appeal to the electorate, even more so than evoking fear of strangers (migrants and refugees) in this TV debate. The latter out-group is only implied, both intertextually (as NH and the FPÖ have continuously proposed closing the borders) and implicitly (by constructing oneself as the protector of the real Austrian people, to which neither the *Schickeria* nor non-Austrians would belong). Having claimed that VdB does not even have a clue of what it means to be hard-working or working in business (even though VdB held a chair for economics at the University of Vienna for many years), hard-working people would also not belong to the *Schickeria*. And, finally, apart from accusing VdB of being a liar, unreliable, and untrustworthy, NH claims that VdB's pro-European stance implies that VdB would act not in the interests of 'the Austrian people' but only in the EU's – as if Austria as an EU member state since 1995 did not participate in all decision-making at EU level.

##### 5. Conclusions: The Politics of Resentment

When attempting to answer my question why such dichotomist rhetoric currently resonates so well with the electorate in so many countries, I draw on Hans-Georg Betz's approach (2017) who rightly maintains that a paradoxical mix of xenophobic and neoliberal agenda serves to attract both (male) middle-class and working class voters, young and old:

"In short, they [the right-wing populist parties] tend to combine a classic liberal position on the individual and the economy with the sociopolitical agenda of the extreme and intellectual new right, and they deliver this amalgam to those disenchanted with their individual life chances and the political system." (Betz 2017: 338-39)

Thus, Betz (ibid: 340 ff.) argues that the attractiveness of such parties seems to depend on two factors: on the one hand, they are capable of mobilizing resentment and protest as illustrated in the campaign strategy by NH above; and on the other, they promise some kind of radical

change, which would confront the challenges posed by the economic, social, and cultural transformation of the advanced Western European societies and economies.

The radical change, however, is frequently not specified; or consists in vague promises of returning to a status quo ante, of turning the clock back. Thus, I claim, *resentment is doubly mobilized*: firstly, addressed to the so-called modernization-losers while instrumentalizing racist, nationalistic, and xenophobic beliefs against migrants and refugees; secondly, to those protesting against parties who monopolize political power and allegedly suppress true democracy, thus appealing to the anger and malaise towards politics and political parties in general and to the growing crisis of political representation more specifically.

But what exactly is meant by the concept of ‘resentment’? – A mixture of emotions already detected by Elias and Scotson (2016) as elaborated above. The concept of ‘*ressentiment*’ was first used by Friedrich Nietzsche (1988 [1881], in his analysis of the problem of evil and related feelings of powerlessness and inferiority. Later on, Max Scheler used the term in order to describe feelings of anger, envy, and spite as well as the distortion of moral values:

“[...] *Ressentiment* is a self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite causes and consequences. It is a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which as such are normal components of human nature. Their repression leads to the constant tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgments. The emotions and affects primarily concerned are revenge, hatred, malice, envy, the impulse to detract, and spite.” (Scheler 1961 [1913]: 45-46).

Importantly, Scheler focuses on the necessary identification of an antagonist in a politics of resentment. When this theoretical approach is applied to NH’s case (see above), the antagonist is explicitly created *inside* the nation state, by the concept of *Schickeria*, and implicitly, as threatening ‘the people’ from *outside*. The old notion of the underprivileged versus the privileged is replaced with a new concept that maintains the element of conflict.

The disenchantment with politics and the loss of trust mentioned at the outset of this paper have provided right-wing populist parties with much opportunity to adjust their ideologies and related discourses accordingly, allowing them to gain greater electoral support: The antagonists are the very same political parties that have been unable to resolve the crises and depend, the right-wing populists argue, on the technocratic élite of Brussels. Systemically coded Manichean dichotomies and associated values are therefore the source of ‘*ressentiment*’, the sum of negative feelings associated with it.

Of course, those championing counter-discourses should beware of repeating the same labels and therefore disseminating the Manichean divisions created by populists. One should resist the right-wing populist attempt of projecting all evil onto a new *Feindbild* – an allegedly homogenous group, the ‘élites’. Mainstream parties would be well advised to address the many problems which have emerged due to recent global and local developments. Indeed, there is little doubt that the rising inequality across the globe is the primary cause of current social problems. As the historian Tony Judt rightly states, “inequality is corrosive. It rots societies from within” (2011: 6). Alternative policies and programs must be launched. If change reaches no deeper than reframing labels, right-wing ideologies will merely become softer on the surface, more implicit and possibly even more difficult to deconstruct and challenge.

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