Difference as the Source of Polarization among Right-Wing Populist Parties

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Abstract

Just as difference can be a source of innovation, so it can be a source of polarization, too. And even more so when the difference is used as a tool to achieve certain goals. It is thought of the political area, specifically of the European right-wing populist parties, where the difference belongs to often raised content element. The difference is, on the one hand, viewed as the delimitation criterion in the context of the horizontal plane and, on the other hand, in the context of the vertical plane. In the first case it is about the demarcation of the party, its representatives and its voters in relation to "special" groups but within the nation, in the other case it is about their demarcation in relation to (the groups of) other nations. In this study the concentration is on the second level. As a representative example being subjected to analysis the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). However, the actors of the propagated difference are not the active politicians, but the politically engaged youth of this party. The audiovisual material that these young people published will be used as an empirical basis. The analysis is intended to show the sensitivity or perhaps the intensity with which this politically active youth reacts to this relevant topic.

Keywords: Right-Wing Populism, Cultural Differences, Polarization, Youth Organization(S) of The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)

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Introduction

The difference of something or someone in relation to another is directly related to exceptionality. It does not necessarily have to be anything excellent or worthy of recognition. Here "exceptional" is understood as unique, where its peculiarity contributes to diversity and so is enriching. It is clearly something positive when understood in this way. But difference can also be a source of disagreement, especially when it creates a feeling of insecurity, danger or fear. In that respect, it may also become the means of currying favour among "the weaker" seeking in someone protection, assistance and support.

The "difference" discussed in this paper can be seen in all the above intentions. In order not to be sidetracked into research that is currently not relevant or up to date, the primary interest specified by us is cultural differences, otherwise described as cultural diversity. For an even narrower definition, stress needs to be placed that the interpretation of cultural diversity is not from the perspective and in respect to the relationship here in Slovakia, but rather from politically engaged youth in Austria. The discussion involves the youth organisation of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), Austria's right-wing populist party, specifically the Freiheitliche Jugend Österreich (FJ), also known as the Ring Freiheitlicher Jugend Österreich (RFJ), which has branches in all of Austria's nine states. The organization in Upper Austria (Freiheitliche Jugend Oberösterreich, known by its acronym FJOÖ), is especially extremely active in media and, for this reason, it was chosen for this analysis. Although this youth organisation is characterised as a political grouping that does not solely act politically, it generally endeavours to promote the views, wishes and opinions of young people in the political sphere. Ultimately, the empirical material that is in the centre of our attention suggests the organisation orients itself toward supporting the FPÖ's political platform and activities. From its background, the cultural diversity outlined in the empirical material should head toward realising the intention expressed by the political party the group currently supports. Taking into account that the videos originated from the youth organisation and its younger generation members are going to be its primary viewers, it can also be envisaged how they share and form opinions both reflecting them and accordingly how they adequately argue the opinions they have formed.

The audiovisual material comprises large-scale videos covering various periods of time that the FJOÖ used to post on its own official website (http://www.rfj-ooe.at/) and on the FPÖ's official YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/c/fpoetv). These videos were simultaneously shared on the national youth organisation's Facebook account (https://www.facebook.com/pg/FJOesterreich/about/?ref=page_internal). These efforts enabled the videos to spread through social networks between 2013 and 2018 (following the project) and be seen by both knowledgeable viewers and visitors that had randomly discovered them. Because of limited space, only a few selected videos are given attention. They and excerpts from them were comprehensively analysed, with no particular concentration given only to a specific component such as visuals, graphics, motion, sound and non-linguistic means of expression. In the absence of illustrative material, it should be pointed out that not all of the components of the audiovisual material are able to be exemplified in the paper.

"US/OUR HOME" vs. "YOU/FOREIGNER" – cultural diversity in the eyes of right-wing populists

Respect for cultural diversity is a promise, often a strong demand, and in the educational process a long-term objective. This is because "opportunities, resources and power are not equally distributed in various countries and their societies among the diverse groups of people that live there, usually defined by their race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation and physical (or mental) disabilities" (Hirt, 2005, p. 2). Even though the need to respect cultural diversity is grounded, in principle, on uniform arguments heard everywhere, both individuals and groups of a different nature and varying reach have been found that either fail to respect such a need at all or do not respect it across its full range. For various reasons, they challenge selected groups. Thus, cultural diversity can become in instrument to manipulate popular opinion. It may encounter a number of negative reactions, and ultimately may polarise society. Such groupings also include several active political organisations. The political parties connected with the issue examined here are characterised as right-wing populist.

In recent years, right-wing populist parties have become a relatively strong force in politics and their expanded voter base has enabled them to crystallise their positions. Yet this stabilisation has to be seen in both the context and impact of socio-political events in the countries where they have become stronger, especially in the last decade. Perhaps the phenomenon most resonating among their voter base is the "migration crisis", which has turned into one of their central themes, due to the predominantly negative consequences it has brought in various areas of social life. Highlighting patriotism, one of the key elements which underlie right-wing populism, provides at least in part an understanding of the differences of opinion and often even the "callous" approach populists take toward the issue. This implies other characteristics of right-wing populism, in particular its connection to the polarisation of society at the horizontal level, expressed as "us versus them" and as "acceptance" of cultural diversity (Štefančík/Hvasta, 2019; Priester, 2019; 2017; 2012; Spier, 2006 and others).

Patriotism is a central ideological element of (right-wing) populist parties. It is also one of the most dominant aspects in terms of how frequently it has been evident in the platform, especially in the graphic elements found in campaign media. (See an analysis of campaign posters produced by the FPÖ in Demčišák, 2019.) Relying on the definition of patriotism, which characterises it as "the feeling of love, devotion and sense of attachment to a homeland and alliance with other citizens who share the same sentiment", this attachment and the need to protect the homeland's interests may combine many different feelings like historical background, culture, traditions and language (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki /Patriotism), it is clear that a broad area has actually opened up to express it, without necessarily referring to any "foreign" or "other" groups directly associated with them. Both methods can be identified in the FPÖ's election posters and each of them plays a critical role.

"Other groups" means in this context the distinct groups occupying the destination country of the countries they are transiting, whose origin, culture and religion make them different. The earlier mentioned migration crisis in Europe has turned refugees

and migrants into representatives of these groups. "Other/foreign" groups have been assigned a certain status within the country's overall socio-economic structure reflecting the consequences that have arisen from their arrival and the degree of their impact on the destination country and the countries they have transited to reach it. These consequences are seen through the eyes of "the ordinary people that have always lived here" and also through the eyes of whomever they perceive as protecting the nation, its territory, the system under which it functions and its values. Concurrently, a characteristic of right-wing populism is how it has been spawned by negative events whose participants are directly the members of the groups in question. They not only explicitly magnify these events, but also usually generalise an entire ethnic or religious group as the cause of them, which escalates the already existing polarisation of "us versus them". Their point of view emphasises the negative perception of groups ethnically, and thus also culturally and religiously different, should they endanger in any way the safety and security of the destination or transit countries, the majority nationality and their cultures. The aversive attitude taken towards these groups, at the least by advocates of right-wing populism, is amplified by the negative experience associated with them, whether on behalf of an individual or a larger group.

Cultural diversity and its themes expressed by the *Freiheitliche Jugend Oberösterreich* (FJOÖ), exemplified by its audiovisual material

This section analyses and considers videos produced by youth organisations, focusing in particular on videos which were used as campaign material during the five-year period (2013-18) mentioned in the introduction. These videos were deliberately chosen because of how the originators paid special attention to how they would be introduced to the public and subsequently shared in order for them to reach a large number of viewers and go literally viral over time. The central aspect noted here is the theme of cultural diversity. The objective is not to analyse how the videos are structured, but to make it clear that such components are not going to be avoided when examining the issues earlier mentioned in this paper.

The characteristic feature of the videos is how they combine their two main components: an image or, more commonly, a sequence of images captured in quick succession along with the sound or audio recordings. A video can be composed of still images like photographs and various graphics, or be comprised of dynamic, moving images (Burger & Luginbühl, 2014, p. 409-410). In the case of an audio recording, it could be a speech with the speaker appearing directly in the video or it may involve a different person (in the analysed videos a youth organization member, sympathiser, or just an ordinary actor may appear), or the video itself might be narrated by a "neutral" person speaking in the background. Recorded music may likewise also be heard. Some parts of the video might not show the presence of speech and is therefore supportive, while other parts may have underlying musical accompaniment, yet with the clear task of inducing from the viewer the desired emotional setting. If we capture musical elements sketching the nature of the analysed video, then attention will be drawn to them at least in the context of the issues appearing here.

Before analysing the videos themselves, it should be pointed out that the videos are nevertheless the product of a politically engaged youth organization, so it is

anticipated that specific elements were strategically applied when the video was structured. Finally, intent is indicated in the campaign platform and this plays a direct role in both the audiovisual media and other forms of campaigning. One of them characterises the campaign as "a planned series of activities intended to achieve a particular aim" (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/campaign). If the theme of the videos is cultural diversity, then consideration should be given to how information about the issue and the facts behind it can be preceded by a clearly defined goal, mainly for the video to be seen by as many viewers as possible. This might lead the producers of the video not only to think about how the content should be viewed, but also to direct these viewers' thinking in the desired direction. This paper has already touched upon the issue of interpreting these videos. Because they originate from a strategic selection of verbal and nonverbal components, viewers are given a "key" to narrow their own interpretations. The videos' persuasive nature is felt in the intentions behind such a perception of language and non-verbal means and similar both to what political parties and their similar-type activities do and what is applied audiovisually by the FPÖ's youth organizations. The following analysis provides evidence of this.

The FJOÖ organised a campaign during the summer of 2015 in the spirit of "Das Wasser steht uns bis zum Hals" (Water up to our necks). (http://www.rfj-ooe.at/kampagnen/) The negative campaigning is reflected in the slogan, notwithstanding its strategic presentation alongside an attractive young woman in a bathing suit (see Figure 1) whose image is displayed in parallel with water literally reaching up to her neck and the words of the slogan expressed in a serious tone of voice. An important element is the introduction of music heard in the background. The dynamic, largely weighty melody underscores how severe the situation is, indicated by how the video uses the idiom to illustrate it.

[Zeit: 0:03 / "Das Wasser steht uns bis zum Hals" (Water up to our necks)]



Figure 1

After the introductory "word play" and the contrasting use of various elements, a series of clips follow that depict the problems outlined in the opening idiomatic connection. The narrator, who is not any of the actors appearing in the images, explicitly mentions the problems and how they originated. Attention is drawn to the closed-ended questions the narrator "poses" to a potential viewer starting with "Wusstest du...?" (Did you know...?). A characteristic feature of these questions is they invite no discussion. Instead, they are used in the video to push facts already evident to viewers on the ground without any effort to show all sides, which also eliminates any potential threat of fact-checking. This is emphasised by questions starting with the German equivalent of "Did you know?" and in a sense also interpretable for the allegation of "If you didn't know,..." The next clips (see Figures 2-5) illustrate the negative impact of another nationality and culture arriving.

[0:07 / Narrator: "Wusstest du, dass Tausende neue Asylwerber nach Österreich kommen werden, während die Politik nur schweigend zusieht?"

(Did you know that thousands of new asylum-seekers are pouring into Austria, while the politicians are just watching it all silently?)]





Figure 2



Figure 4

Figure 5

The negative perception the organisation producing the video seeks to evoke is evident in the word "TAUSENDE" (see Figure 3). It is highlighted typographically in a contrasting colour, whose context negatively expresses a multiplying of the negative. The blue background depicts water, the symbol in the initial slogan, and this is an effort to magnify the problem. The narrator, speaking as the shot appears, points out a group of people hiding behind the word "Tausende" and completes the question by asking if the viewer knows how many asylum-seekers are pouring into Austria. The question implies someone else arriving in your country, that they will be new and there is going to be a large number of them. Interestingly enough and looking at the number of possible camera angles, the video's visualises "thousands of asylum seekers" with camera shots of an idle asylum seeker sitting on a wall (see Figure 4) and a tent camp temporarily accommodating them in the destination country (see Figure 5). The first case highlights his inactivity to shed an unfavourable light upon the entire community and the second case indicates another problem associated with asylum seekers, namely how to provide them with the necessary conditions to satisfy basic living needs, which undoubtedly includes adequate housing. Other nationalities and cultures are perceived and portrayed negatively right from the start as seeking to become part of the country's socio-economic structure with actually doing nothing.

The video campaign continues, again asking the question "Did you know...?" to viewers. This time, cultural diversity is thematically richer, particularly in how it is visually expressed through photographs and short audiovisual records incorporated into the video.

[0:15 / Narrator: "Wusstest du, dass du bald fremd im eigenen Land werden wirst?"

(Did you know that you are going to become soon a foreigner in your own country?)]



Figure 6



Figure 7

The video employs a strategy of intimidation from a foreign culture's potential domination. Figure 6 shows an image of women walking down a street in head scarves resembling burgas, a garment worn by many adherents of Islam, while the word "FREMD" ("foreign") stands out again both typographically and in a contrasting colour. The same work can be applied to the second clip, a short recording from the video, which captures Islamic worshippers in prayer. Without the narrator's accompanying comments, a viewer might think the word to refer directly to a depiction of a slice of non-linguistic reality, while spelling out the cultural differences as something foreign to his or her own culture. Looking toward the rear of the women walking eastward (and supposedly out of the country) in the clip shown as Figure 6, there is even some idea of the further direction to be taken by asylum seekers from another nation and culture. However, the narrator's question to the viewer changes the perspective of those participating in this visually and verbally rendered creative piece. The word *Fremd* (outsider in this context) is not and will not be a reference to other nationalities and cultures, but for those living in the homeland, the so-called "us", to refer to them. This multiplies the potential threat from asylum seekers in the viewer's eyes, resulting in disrespect and rejection of foreign cultures and, in specific cases, even averse or hateful attitudes.

The negative consequences of the influx of asylum seekers are further discussed below. Jobs lost because of efforts to integrate asylum seekers and to help them find employment, plus the indebtedness of "us" and "our children", reflect the social assistance provided to often passive asylum seekers and also some of the most pressing topics exploited, at the very least, to provoke outrage and fear of a possible negative scenario from the arrival of another culture. The following footage is illustrative:

[0:20 / Narrator: "Wusstest du, dass du bald arbeitslos sein könntest?"

(Did you know that you might soon be unemployed?)]

[0:25 / Narrator: "Wusstest du, dass du mit 38 Tausend Euro verschuldet bist?"

(Did you know that you're already €38,000 in debt?)]



The video campaign closes with the narrator repeating the video's introduction "Also das Wasser steht uns bis zum Hals." (So the water is up to our necks.) Now the German adverb "also" ("so" in English) has been added and it plays an important role. Instead of asking the viewer a question, the narrator concludes the video by telling how serious the situation is. The adverb "also" comments on all the facts and arguments that have been described in the video possibly having fatal consequences for society.

Like in the previous year, the 2016 summer campaign was characterised by imaginativeness, but also saw the use of provocative visual elements. Figure 21 shows

the dominant feature of the 2016 campaign, a catchy rhythmic verse of "Sommer, Sonne, Wasserball, ich werde nicht zum Einzelfall" (summer, sun and playing with a ball in the water and I'm not going to be an exception). The video shows female figures and specifically the parts normally ogled and occasionally the target of sexual assault. Even though a campaign that provides a touch of eroticism, the focus is on violent crime committed by nationalities from different cultures mainly against female victims. The images and photographs of the beautiful women contrast with the foreigner verbally and explicitly expressed as dangerous and evil. No one narrates the campaign video, but rather the images change at a fast pace in time with the dynamic popular music playing in the background. The musical accompaniment has the nature of a summer song, with a rhythmic melody that reinforces the atmosphere the video displayed and draws viewers into the story. Violent crime is verbally given a specific expression, with the video showing headlines of sexual attacks in Cologne (see Figure 13) and at a children's swimming pool in Linz (see Figure 14), of an Algerian knocking his wife unconscious (see Figure 15), of a drunk Afghan man offending a young girl in a swimming pool (see Figure 18) and sexual attacks of children and teenagers (see Figure 19). The video also indirectly underlines polarised opinions about these groups, specifically questioning whether the cases are truly exceptional ("EINZELFALL?"). Placing a question mark after the word stresses that the specified cases are not necessarily exceptional, but instead tend to be a relatively regular phenomenon. Simultaneously, the campaign calls on female viewers not to make themselves an "exception" and to take self-defence courses the youth organisation has set up (see Figure 21).

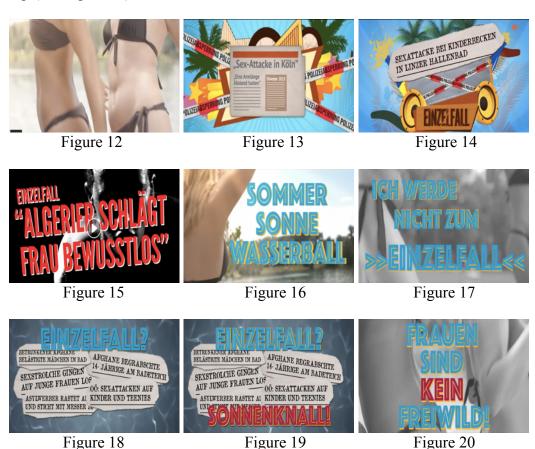






Figure 21

Figure 22

After the 2016 campaign, the focus turned toward patriotism. The theme became Echte Patrioten (True Patriots) and the organisation concentrated on direct communication locally (Hoamatlandtour 2017 – 2017 Homeland Round Trip). But in the spring of 2018, it returned to the theme of "outsiders" with Ein Land. Seine Jugend (One Country and Its Youth). The opening melody is relatively fast paced and, with the voice of the video's narrator entering in the middle of the song, it plays an activating role. The music intertwines with the voices of actors playing roles in the short video and they turn out to be protesting asylum seekers. Although the melody is playing in the background, together with the protestors' voices it shapes the perception of a shared consciousness and how serious it is. FJOÖ Regional Chairman Michael Raml narrates the first part of the video (0:00 - 0:48) and enumerates the negative consequences coming from the influx of refugees and asylum seekers, simultaneously represented by visual elements in the incorporated video and the sequence of actors appearing in it (see Figures 23-25). The litany of complaints includes pressure to apply Islamic law in schools, the spread of drugs in youth clubs, public violence and protests; but there are also portrayals of idleness, comfortable lifestyles, construction of mosques and the associated establishment of Islam as a faith among the "foreigners" in the country (see Figures 26-28). Culturally different nationalities are pictured solely against the background of negative stories. The narrator openly expresses dissatisfaction with the country's current situation and takes this attitude as the spokesperson for all real and potentially dissatisfied local citizens.

[0:02 / Narrator: "Islamische Gesetze in den Schulen, Drogen in Jugendclubs, Messerattacke auf offener Straße?"
(Islamic law in schools, drugs in youth clubs, knifing in the street?)]





Figure 23

Figure 24



Figure 25

[0:10 / Narrator: "Wenn wir uns in diesem Land umsehen, wird uns oft unwohl. Eigentlich haben wir uns das Alles ganz anders vorgestellt. " (Looking around the country, we often fee1 uncomfortable. We've actually imagined it all quite differently.)]





Figure 26

Figure 27



Figure 28

Subsequently, the narrator, the youth organisation's main representative, draws attention to the future of the homeland from his own perspective. The video characterises the polarisation of society into a division of us/our country/our youth against "them/outsiders". Patriotism steps into the forefront of the video, becoming the opposite pole of "foreigners", now refugees and asylum seekers. Patriotism's relationship to the country is shown in a bird's eye view of the landscape, followed immediately afterwards by the camera panning refugees, to leave the impression of them waiting to be expelled from the country (see Figures 29-31).

[0:25 / Narrator: "Wir fordern einen Stopp der Überfremdung und eine Umkehr der falschen Einwanderungspolitik." (We demand an end to foreign infiltration and the reversal of an immigration policy that is all wrong.)



Figure 29

0:31 / Narrator: "Wenn wir nicht Fremde im eigenen Land werden wollen." (Unless we want to become foreigners in our own country.)]





Figure 30

Figure 31

In its relationship to the nation, its members, culture and traditions, the dominant visual element of patriotism focuses on professions and traditional occupations (see Figure 32-34). But the polarisation of society is perceptible here, too, as a demand for traditional professions to be practised by skilled workers locally and not for their jobs to be done by immigrants from all over the world (see Figure 35). The choice of footage is worth remarking because local residents are captured in professional jobs looking serious and focused, while their immigrant counterparts are portrayed with smiles of their faces more reminiscent of mockery.

[0:34 / Narrator: "Wir wollen die Bauern als Ernährer und Grundpfeiler unserer Kultur erhalten und unterstützen."
(We want to keep and support our farmers as the providers and foundation of our culture.)

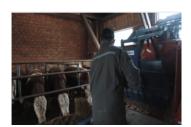


Figure 32

0:40 / Narrator: Wir wollen die handwerkliche Tradition unserer Heimat bewahren." (We want to preserve our homeland's traditions of

craftsmanship.)



Figure 33



Figure 34

0:43 / Narrator: Unsere Jugendlichen sind unsere Fachkräfte – nicht Zuwanderer aus der ganzen Welt."

(Our professionals should come from our youth, not from immigrants from around the world.)]



Figure 35

The second half of the campaign video also addresses the issue of cultural diversity. Here the narrator more broadly underscores the feeling of pride in the environment of Europe, saying "Natürlich sind wir auch stolze Europäer." (Naturally, we are also proud Europeans), "Wir treten ein für ein Europa der Vaterländer." (We stand for a Europe of fatherlands) and "Für ein Europa der regionalen Kulturen und der verschiedenen Völker" (For a Europe of regional cultures and different peoples). Nonetheless, even here the implicit boundary between us "Europeans" and them "Non-Europeans" exists.

Conclusions

This paper discusses the audiovisual resources of the *Freiheitliche Jugend Oberösterreich* (FJOÖ), the Freedom Party's youth organisation in Upper Austria. Videos covering major campaign issues in the years they were produced are the centre of attention, representing opinions and the efforts expended by the organisation in that period of time. Cultural diversity and how the creators and producers of these videos approached it were noted and discussed. Even though audiovisual media combine several components and any of them could have been separately analysed, none received any particular concentration from us, but instead our effort was to look at the issue comprehensively, which ultimately proved beneficial. Based on our analysis, the following conclusions were reached:

- The youth organization's campaigns explicitly address cultural diversity and it was the key aspect in the three campaigns that were run during the summers of 2015, 2016 and 2018;
- Cultural diversity is the predominant theme planted in relation to refugees and asylum seekers. This is evident not just in some individual components, but the videos, particularly as an integrated unit, are strongly emotive with a negative tone because they concentrate solely on the negative impact of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in the destination country or travelling through transit countries. Everyone in the group without exemption is generalised in this way. This portrayal of the refugee crisis is characteristic of right-wing populist parties including the FPÖ and so the FJOÖ, functioning as a support organisation for the party, likewise approaches the issue negatively;
- Taking into account the theme of cultural diversity as the source of the video's negative impact, the main actors therein are perceived from the video producer's point of view as neither positive nor enriching, but rather they cause problems that need to be "decoupled", so to say. This attitude evident in the videos corresponds to the frequent polarisation of society generated by the attitude of "us versus them";
- Considering the individual elements of the analysed audiovisual media, the youth organisation creating the video uses a broad range of verbal cues that include slogans in a stable phraseological unit, rhyming slogans, one-word slogans and negatively connoted vocabulary, while the visual elements are similarly characterised by imaginativeness, sometimes even to the point of becoming provocative. Again it is possible here to detect the persuasive nature of both the verbal and non-verbal elements. Even the music used in the video campaigns analysed here are strategically selected, with the clear objective of influencing the opinions of whoever views them, whether from an older age group or somebody looking for their own political orientation.

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The official website of the national youth organisation (FJOÖ): http://www.rfj-ooe.at/

Figure 1-35 - from the official website of the national youth organisation (FJOÖ): http://www.rfi-ooe.at/kampagnen/

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