Intersections and Inconsistencies

Framing gender in right-wing populist discourses in Austria

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Abstract:
The paper contributes to the discussion on (re-)framing processes of gender equality focusing in particular on right-wing populist discourses in Austria. Our frame analysis of 50 texts published by four right-wing (extremist) parties and movements reveals that traditional (family) values, women’s “free choice” and LGBT-rights play important roles in right wing populist (re-)framing processes of gender equality. Our data also shows notable inconsistencies with regard to the meanings attached to gender and gender equality within the discourses studied. For instance, right-wing populists are, on the one hand, concerned with the protection of “the traditional family” – which means being against e.g. same-sex marriage and emphasizing the decision of women to stay at home. On the other hand, these same actors argue against immigration by using gender arguments in a different and even contradictory manner, claiming that e.g. Muslim men are bound by their “culture” to discriminate women and LGBT-people. Our intersectional approach, analytically focusing on different meanings that gender equality acquires at the intersections with ethnicity, nationality, religion/culture and sexuality (Yuval-Davis, 2006), shows that within right-wing populist discourses inconsistencies in the framing of gender and gender equality arise in relation to the shifting meanings attributed to the essential dichotomy of “us” versus “them”. While the discursive construction of antagonistic positions is essential for right-wing populism, the groups/people designated to fill these “slots” might differ according to topic. We argue that “intersectionality from above” (Sauer, 2013) is one of populists’ instruments to gloss over inconsistencies and to (re-)frame gender equality in an on-going process of (re-)negotiations of meanings (see van Hulst & Yanow, 2013).
In parliamentary democracies election results are important markers of political success. During the last 20 years in Austria, the right-wing populist Freedom Party Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreich/FPÖ) more often than any other party had reason to celebrate on election day. This apparently lasting success of a modernised right-wing populist party, which is deeply rooted in traditional right-wing extremism, makes Austria an interesting field for the study of right-wing populism. Election results also offer an opportunity for a first tentative look at some important categories of intersectional analysis, i.e. relations of gender, age and education/class (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Albeit different institutes offer quite different interpretations, some general trends appear to be undisputed, including a description of the typical FPÖ-voter as male and having some but not a high formal education as well as a blue-collar occupation. Interestingly, gender differences appear to be most pronounced among young people: According to one institute only 9 % of Austrian women aged between 16 and 29 years voted for the FPÖ as opposed to 30 % of their male counterparts, while among all voters the relation was 16 % female to 28 % male voters (Zandonella & Perlot, 2013, p. 9).

While election results provide first insights into the gendered nature of right-wing populism, our own analysis rests on a broader notion of populism that encompasses informal groups and civil initiatives as well as political parties. Also, we focus on discourses rather than election results or parliamentary procedures. Following Birte Siim’s definition, we employ intersectionality as an “analytical perspective” (Siim, 2009, p. 2) with a focus on “intersectionality from above”, i.e. the instrumental use of different categories of inequality (Sauer, 2013). Therefore, our concept of intersectionality does not denote processes of subjectification, identity building or axis of social inequality, but focuses on the construction of meaning at specific intersections of gender, which fulfil a strategic function within right-wing populist discourses. As our analysis shows, populist discourses are inconsistent with respect to their framing of gender and gender equality because
gendered meanings are instrumental in populist constructions of “us” and “them”. As these binary constructions use ambivalent and even contradicting references to gender, “intersectionality from above” is one means to gloss over these inconsistencies. Hence, our starting points are the contradictions that surfaced in our empirical work.

We start this paper by exploring the notion of right-wing populism. Then we discuss the methodology of our critical frame-analysis before we present a short description of our empirical cases. The discussion of our results starts with the interpretation of Austrian right-wing populist constructions of gender and a re-reading of our material through the lens of intersectionality. This allows for an analysis of the strategic functions of the permanent re-framing of gender and gender equality in and for right-wing populist discourses.

**Populism: Framing “us” and “them”**

So far researchers have not arrived at a non-controversial definition of “populism”. In general two broad strands are discernible in the debate: The first takes populism to be a specific political style rather indifferent towards the ideologies it is applied to, the second conceives populism as an ideological enterprise (for an overview see Geden, 2006, pp. 18/19; Meijers, 2012, p. 11). We propose to follow a different perspective, which was developed by Sebastian Reinfeldt. Reinfeldt claims that right-wing populism should be understood as the organisation of a specific political strategy and dynamic that links a political formation to parts of the population (2000, p. 46). He argues that populist constructions of social and political realities can be visualised in the form of an “ideological square” that establishes specific relations between “us” (the populist we-group), “those up there/them” (the elite), “not-us” (groups constructed as “others”) and “not-them” (the addressees of populist agitation). We can therefore understand populist constructions of “us” and “them” as an on-going re-framing process.
The populist “we” is always constructed in contrast to “those (up there)” and in a contradictory relationship to “others” (“not-us”), while it appears to be a proxy for “the people” or “the small man in the street” (“not-them”). By extension an equally close connection between elites and “others” is assumed, thereby completing the construction of populism’s two-faced enemy (Reinfeldt, 2000, pp. 132-137).

In this article we use the term “right-wing populism” to denote this specifically structured political perspective, which nevertheless allows for flexibility as the positions provided by the “ideological square” can be understood as “slots” that might be filled with different images pertaining to different (groups of) people (ibid., p. 133). These shifting constructions of “us” and “them” can be grasped by an intersectional perspective on frame analysis that allows focussing on

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Figure 1: The “ideological square” of right-wing populism. Source: Reinfeldt, 2000, p. 133
the interplay of gender, ethnicity, culture and religion.

Methodology: Framing frame analysis

Our analysis is based on a critical frame analysis (Verloo & Lombardo, 2007, p. 35), i.e. we identify patterns of meaning-making embedded in the discourses of the right-wing populist organisations studied. Following the approach of a critical frame analysis, we focus on the construction of problems and solutions (explicitly proposed or implicated) as well as on the location of blame and responsibility (see also Rein & Schön 1977). Scrutinising problem construction and solutions allows us to detect populist argumentative strategies and similar patterns of meaning-making underlying the variety of statements we have been analysing. According to Rein and Schön (1977), the problem definition is a way of setting out a problem as well as “a judgement about the problematic situation”, which, however, is not only consequential for possible solutions, but also highlights certain features, ignores others, and bundles those that are deemed salient into “a pattern that is coherent and graspable” (Rein & Schön, 1977, pp. 238-239). In addition to this, right-wing populist discourses are not only concerned with how a given problem needs to be understood, but with establishing a situation as problematic in the first place. For example it is not self-evident that a trend towards non-traditional families is something to worry about or that a loss of “ethno-national identity” really takes place – let alone that someone would grieve that loss. Given this specific context and the prevalence of “strategic framing”, i.e. the “conscious and intentional selection of language and concepts to influence political debate and decision-making” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 39), we believe it is necessary to broaden our understanding of “frames” in order to make room for their multi-layered and dynamic character. More to the point, we follow Merlijn van Hulst and Dvora Yanow (2014) in their call for a conception of framing as a complex activity, which varies according to the objects it is applied to as well as according to the specific “tools” used in meaning-making. Although we cannot take into account all aspects of their broad conception of
framing in our analysis, we want to align our project with this approach. But while van Hulst and Yanow distance themselves from a perspective on frames as something that is (also) used in a strategic and instrumental fashion by political actors, we propose to understand such an instrumental use as a part of framing processes. In other words: Even though political actors do not “own” the frames they use and cannot control (all) the consequences of meaning-making processes, they still try to construct their social worlds in accordance with their political programmes, i.e. they create problems in such a way that they will fit preconceived solutions.

This complex relationship between (only partly intentional) acts of framing, specific frames and their relative importance in terms of their influence on “common sense” forms an important background to our research as static conceptions of frames do not grasp the complexity of meaning-making processes, in which we find several interpretatory schemes interwoven. Nor can such a static concept make sense of the power relations embedded in the use of certain frames. Therefore a more nuanced analysis from an intersectional perspective is called for, which has to be based on an understanding of right-wing populism that takes the strategic character of populism’s inconsistent and partly contradictory discourses into account.

**Cases and method: right-wing populist actors and their discourses**

This article builds on the analysis of texts and images produced by four right-wing populist organisations. Among them is the FPÖ, which is the most influential right-wing populist actor in Austria and which in the 1990s was one of the first European parties to develop a populist agenda resting on a nativist, “patriotic” ideology and relying on xenophobic and racist campaigns. During the 1990s, the Austrian political system transformed from a stable consensus democracy completely dominated by the *Social Democratic Party* (SPÖ), the conservative *People’s Party* (ÖVP) and their respective social partner organisations to a landscape with three major political parties. In 2000, the
FPÖ became part of the federal government, which led to internal difficulties as well as temporary losses at elections. In 2005, Heinz-Christian Strache followed Jörg Haider as party leader without changing the party’s orientation. Since then, the FPÖ has been in opposition and election results have been rising again. The party’s youth branch *Youth Freedom Ring* (Ring Freiheitlicher Jugend/RFJ) is our second case because it provides a focus on communication addressed at young people, who are one of the main target groups of the FPÖ’s campaigns. Our third case study focuses on young people, but in a different setting: The informal *Identitarian Movement Austria* (Identitäre Bewegung Österreich/IBÖ), a group founded in 2012 broadly following (new-right) ideas of the French *Bloc Identitaire*. The IBÖ marks a new development in Austrian right-wing extremism in terms of ideology as well as in terms of the communicative means used. It follows a pro-European (but anti-EU), culture and identity-oriented course instead of right-wing’s traditional focus on nationalism. Despite its ethno-identity oriented ideology, the IBÖ routinely references globalised pop-culture. Our fourth and last case study deals with a group of actors, who embody anti-Muslim racism, a dominant trend in right-wing populism all over Europe, in its most direct form. We chose a number of *civil initiatives*, which fight the building of mosques or Islamic centres in their respective neighbourhoods and their umbrella organisation *Movement Pro Austria* (Bewegung Pro Österreich/BPÖ). While the BPÖ does not publish a comprehensive political programme, their anti-Muslim racism and close personal and financial ties to the *Freedom Party* as well as the participation of visible neo-Nazis at some of the demonstrations against mosques (no-racism.net, 2007) make them an interesting case.

In total a selection of 50 texts published from 2010 onwards, and still available online in autumn 2013, has been chosen that includes diverse genres from party programmes to day-to-day political comments and Facebook-postings.
Table 1. Material

In accordance with the methodological background described above, our analysis focuses on the construction of problems and the solutions proposed or implicated as well as the location of blame and of responsibility. We especially direct our attention to the references, norms and values used to legitimise certain claims. In doing so we are able to identify common patterns of meaning-making, i.e. specific frames. This analysis of main frames provides a basis for comparison within and across cases as well as for more nuanced analyses of the strategic use of frames. Shifting notions of gender appear to be especially salient for the discursive strategies of right-wing populism and therefore provide our point of departure although other structures of difference and inequality are constructed immediately to intersect with gender.

A first analysis of main argumentative patterns shows that problem constructions by all four actors relies heavily on the blaming of political as well as economic elites and/or the ideologies ascribed to them (leftism, liberalism, multiculturalism, and globalisation) as well as on the scapegoating of immigrants, asylum seekers, Muslims and (native) LGBT-people. With regard to our topic, we identify a stance against equality for same-sex couples and the alleged failure of gender equality policies as issues explicitly taken up in problem construction with both frames connected to the construction of a demographic decline of the native population. Looking at “solutions”, the most striking trend is that anti-immigration and anti-Muslim patterns of meaning-making play an even bigger role than in problem construction, while the focus on elites is less pronounced. “Solution”-frames also reveal more striking differences between the organisations, as
e.g. the construction and strengthening of an ethnically defined identity as a solution to all kinds of economic as well as political decline is promoted by just one of the four organisations. Turning to gender relations, the “solutions” suggest that strengthening family values is the most direct response to the “threats” constructed in right-wing populist discourse.

Starting from this static and aggregated notion of frames, a closer look at our material shows that many of the problem definitions we identify as instances of an anti-immigration/anti-asylum or anti-Muslim frame also establish a specific perspective on gender. This “untidiness” of frames, which always generate more than one meaning, underlines the necessity to conceptualise frames as instances of an on-going process of framing.

**Re-framing gender equality in right-wing populist discourse**

Let us now turn to gender and gender equality-frames articulated by the organisations under study to show the inconsistent and contradictive nature of these re-framing processes. First we scrutinise the FPÖ’s and RFJ’s notion of women’s policy that addresses women mainly as mothers and constructs feminism and gender equality policies as part of “those up there”, the elite. Second, we analyse the overtly value-loaded discourses that legitimise gender hierarchies and homophobia by reference to the “nature” of men and women. Third, we turn to notions of gender that can be understood as instances of intersectionality from above, i.e. the re-framing of gender equality in discourses on those deemed “not-us”.

Talking about right-wing populists’ discourses on gender might in fact be misleading, as questions of gender equality are mostly reduced to statements about women. Exceptions are statements that directly target social constructivist notions of gender – i.e. right wing populists’ talk of the “delusion of gender” – but as these are less present in right-wing populist parties and
movements communication directed at broad audiences, we focus on more common issues. The *Freedom Party’s* discourse on gender has been analysed by Oliver Geden (2006), who concludes that during the 2000s, a rhetoric of “free choice” became the most important argumentative device in this respect, referring to the possibility for women to freely choose to dedicate their lives to their families rather than participating in the labour market. Our results confirm this earlier assessment, but additionally allow for an analysis of the function of this rhetoric device for and within right-wing populist discourses.

We will start by exploring the connotation of “free choice” as used by the FPÖ in some detail: The rationale behind the “free choice”-argument is rarely stated explicitly by the party. It starts from the assumption that women are “naturally” connected to the family, from which follows that women’s and family policy are inseparable (for an example see FPÖ Bildungsinstitut, 2013, p. 131). In effect women’s policy disappears and is replaced by a discourse on policies designed to foster (mothers in) families with children. From an analytical point of view it is not difficult to spot conservative values and a longing for traditional gender relations underlying this conception, but its presentation in political discourse stresses the opening of new possibilities for women and an end to the unequal and unfair treatment of mothers. Geden calls this an “expectation of normality” directed at women (Geden, 2006, p. 84); i.e. the expectation that if only they could, women would want to do what society needs anyway – with societal needs being defined as a need for mothers taking care of their families. With the slogan “freedom of choice instead of ideology” this position is presented as opposing ideology, while allegedly being purely pragmatic itself (ibid., p. 85). This frame can be depicted in the form of Reinfeldt’s “ideological square” (see fig. 2).
Figure 2. “Free choice” frame. Source: own illustration based on Reinfeldt, 2000 p. 133

Such framings of gender equality are rendered plausible with regard to Austria’s conservative welfare state, which has been characterised as “continental” (Gösta Esping-Andersen), as following the “male breadwinner model” (Jane Lewis and Ilona Ostner) or as a modified version of the latter in the form of “male breadwinner/female part-time-employed and homemaker” (Birgit Pfau-Effinger) (as cited in Leitner & Wroblewski, 2006, p. 300). Concluding their comparison of the effects of Nordic social-democratic and conservative welfare policies, Leitner and Wroblewski stress the underlying political convictions, i.e. attitudes towards women’s employment integration. While in the Nordic countries it is “not just seen as an accepted necessity but rather as a matter of fact and a goal that is widely welcomed”, conservative countries are characterised by ambivalence and “contradictory signals from various policy fields” (ibid., pp. 311-312). Most prominently the field of family policy still clings to a family model of male breadwinners and female caregivers,
visible i.a. with regard to taxation benefits for sole earners or the inclusion of caregivers in their spouses’ social insurance. These conservative social structures provide the background for discursive constructions of “appropriate” gender relations and family structures that are re-articulated in conservative as well as right-wing populist discourses. Taking the lack of child care facilities for children under three years into account, the discourse on “free choice” might easily be criticised as counterfactual as women are forced to choose between children or employment – “or otherwise be faced with massive disadvantages on the labour market” (ibid., p. 312). But in political discourse the free choice-frame nevertheless signifies criticism of an alleged discrimination of “whole-time mothers” and housewives. The rhetoric of “free choice” allows political actors to voice this criticism without openly formulating a conservative view on family policies.

Another interesting example of the construction of right-wing populist standpoints as “anti-ideological” and resting on “common sense” is a campaign of the FPÖ’s youth branch, RFJ that lobbied against a minor change of the text of the national anthem in order to include Austria’s “great daughters” alongside the “sons”. Despite calling the debate around the issue ridiculous, the RFJ did not only publish various statements on the topic, but also collected protest signatures. In its statements, the organisation did not overtly oppose gender equality, but declared symbolic measures a failure for not dealing with “real” women’s problems. The RFJ framed the reform as driven by feminist and left-wing (and by implication: elitist) ideologies in opposition to “common sense”. While “real women” were thereby constructed as addressees of this populist communication, elites, including feminists and the left, represented the opposing “them”. Keeping the status quo with regard to the national anthem was not justified by proposing counter-values or a (right-wing and conservative) gender ideology, but relied on arguments of “common sense”. The RFJ rhetorically constructed a broad opposition that united all “sensible” people against symbolic gender equality policies as “ridiculous” ideology-driven measures (RFJ, 2011).
In contrast to FPÖ and RFJ an overtly ideological dimension is a general feature of the *Identitarian* discourse that sets it apart from the other groups we studied. In their critique of “equality” *Identitarian* activists explicitly refer to the “nature” of gender and ethnicity. A narrow definition of “equality” in the sense of “sameness” allows the IBÖ to criticise what it deems to be “egalitarianism” while stressing the “equal value” of different human beings that would allegedly be fostered by treating them differently, i.e. by not granting equal rights (Vlog Identitätär 8, 2013).

But also the *Freedom Party* and its youth branch develop a more value-oriented approach when not dealing with gender equality in the narrow sense of the term, but with equal rights for LGBT-people (see fig. 3). In a TV-discussion, one of the FPÖ’s representatives justified her rejection of same-sex couples’ adoption of children in a way that resonates with the *Identitarian* critique outlined above: “There cannot be equal rights for unequal things” (Im Zentrum, 2013). The background for this position is again provided by “nature”, i.e. the heterosexual nuclear family as the “natural” state of affairs and same-sex parenting as an “unnatural” deviation (Krauss, 2013; Mölzer, 2013).

Comparing the position ascribed to same-sex couples to that of (native, “real”) women, it becomes obvious that LGBT-people are not invited to join the right-wing populist “we”. Quite to the contrary, strong tensions appear between a claim to respect sexual diversity in principle and the depiction of same-sex couples as unfit parents, who endanger children’s well-being through their “unnatural” relationships. Interestingly this perspective also reveals the precarious position women inhabit in these discourses, as single-parenting, which mainly relates to single-mothers, is often constructed as another – albeit less dangerous and less elaborated – threat alongside same-sex parenting (Krauss, 2013).
Figure 3. (Family) values frame. Source: own illustration based on Reinfeldt, 2000 p. 133

Focusing only on the two discursive strands discussed so far, we could conclude that the discourse on the “freedom of choice” is simply a façade concealing the “true” value-loaded ideological standpoint of right-wing populists. But this appears to be a much too simplistic explanation once we take into account the intersection of the politics of gender and sexuality with “othering”-processes tied to ethnicity of “culture”. From an intersectional perspective, it becomes obvious that gender relations among “others”, among those who are “not-us” in populism’s ideological square, play an important role. Probably the most striking examples can be found in the problematisation of an imagined aggressive Muslim masculinity and its counterpart the subdued Muslim woman. This framing follows familiar patterns of anti-Muslim racism (Fekete, 2006). While some very blatant examples of racist statements by FPÖ representatives led to a public outcry
and juridical consequences, we find similar patterns grounding right-wing populists’ everyday discourses when reading our material through the lens of intersectionality.

So far we could show that right-wing populists re-frame gender and gender equality with regard to the position of different groups in right-wing populism’s “ideological square”. Depending on the configuration of “us”, “not-them”, “those up there” and “not-us”, gender equality might be grasped as an individual choice, a question of “common sense”, of traditional (family) values or “nature”. While targeting the (Muslim) “other”, discourses on “culture” take centre stage.

**Constructing coherence through intersectionality**

Focussing our attention on the intersections of framing processes we can decipher the gendering of right-wing populist anti-immigration and anti-Islam discourses as well as the ethnicisation of discourses on gender relations, visible i.a. with regard to family benefits.

As noted above, male immigrants – and most of all Muslim men – have been depicted as dangerous by FPÖ representatives. A similar strategy is regularly applied by civil initiatives against the building of mosques. An example shows that the “threat” represented by Muslim men thrives on the smallest of signs as in this case, it rests solely on the allegation that some young Muslim men shouted “Allahu Akbar” when leaving a mosque. The civil initiative interprets this as follows:

This reaction of the Turkish youths clearly shows that […] there must have been aggressive preaching against our democratic and open society. (Schuster, 2012)

There is no further explanation as to why a public showing of religious emotions would give away the content of the ceremony held before. The argument rests on a widely shared image of aggressive, young, Muslim men. Islam itself is equated with masculinity, aggression and violence, thereby rendering any visibility of this religion a threat to democracy and civil society.
Another civil initiative went even further in treating the equation of Islam with repression, aggression and inequality as a matter of “common sense”. In an open letter to the Mayor of Vienna, the initiative stated that the acceptance of an Islamic association equalled, an acceptance of political-religious concepts and acts, which in no way confirm to our world-view and contradict the Geneva Convention on Human Rights or good morals like the definitive discrimination of women, no religious freedom, dress codes, genital mutilation of minors in unsterile surroundings, cruelty towards animals by halal slaughtering, etc. (Hrubac, 2013)

This is one of the most obvious examples of how the demonisation of Islam also creates an image of “us” and “not-them” as modern, emancipated and bound to respect human rights. Again gender plays an important role in this construction, which codes Islam as masculine with women and minors as its victims. The latter group appears to be especially interesting with regard to our analysis as it appears to be unmarked by gender and readers can only guess whether it is female genital mutilation (which is not a religious practice) the civil initiative is referring to or male circumcision (mandated by Islam and much less invasive). The quotes show how gender and age play together in creating an image of an aggressive male Muslim “other”, which is an essential part of the power dynamics that Sara Farris (2012) aptly termed “Femonationalism”.

The other side of that medal is the construction of Muslim women as victims of male dominance, visible e.g. in the election slogan “free women instead of compulsory head-scarves” used repeatedly by the FPÖ in the mid-2000s. The same idea – albeit with its sexist undertones much clearer expressed – has been taken to a visual level by Identitarian activists, who share a picture on Facebook showing a naked woman partly covered by her long blonde hair with the
slogan “too beautiful for a veil” (documented by: Die Zeit, 2013). The composition gives the impression that the veil is not criticised because of the freedom it allegedly takes from women, but because of the “loss” veiling would mean for (heterosexual) native men.

In a programmatic handbook, the Freedom Party gives a somewhat fuller account of its understanding of Islam. Under the heading “Christian and enlightened Occident” it states:

Every religious community active in Austria has to accept that in Austria women and men have equal rights. […] Forced marriages, forced genital cutting and the oppression of and violence against women are not covered by religious freedom […] The right to self-determination of women has to be accepted by all cultural groups living here. (Freiheitliches Bildungsinstitut, 2013, p. 51)

This statement covers in nuce several right-wing populist messages: First, Islam is not explicitly mentioned at the beginning of the text, but it is nevertheless absolutely clear that this is the “religious community” the authors had in mind. If anyone was still in doubt this is clarified further down where a specific school book for Islamic religious education is mentioned that allegedly calls for the death penalty for homosexuals and for violence against women. Second, the shift from “religious” to “cultural groups” is significant, as it shows that the defenders of the Occident do not aim at specific interpretations of Islam but at parts of the Austrian population, regardless of their religious practice. This is in line with theories of a “cultural racism” that substitutes “race” with “culture”, while keeping the structure and even much of the content of the original racist resentment (Mukhopadhyay & Chua, 2008, pp. 377-383). Third, the way Islam itself is constructed as the “Orient” through a specific imagination of gender relations merits attention. Given the FPÖ’s wish for traditional gender roles in the native population it seems remarkable how the “Christian and enlightened Occident” is characterised through the alleged equality of men and
women by the construction of an imagined “Orient” characterised by women’s oppression. In passing we might also note that the title suggests an unproblematic relationship between Christian religion and enlightenment as well as between Christianity and gender equality – both ideas might be called rather doubtful. Figure 4 captures the “ideological square” of this framing of gender relations.

![Figure 4. “Muslim threat” frame. Source: own illustration based on Reinfeldt, 2000, p. 133](image)

Summing up our discussion so far, we find the frame of “free choice” of women (as we have seen, a choice limited to being identified primarily as mothers) to serve a twofold purpose: It draws a line against “those (up there)” in terms of an “anti-ideological” (i.e. anti-feminist) position on the one hand side and against those that are deemed to be “not-us”, i.e. Muslim immigrants. These “others” are imagined to be bound by “their culture”, which allegedly does not tolerate choice. This
twofold boundary generates contradictory framings of gender equality as native women are encouraged to “freely chose” to be mothers, wives and housekeepers, while immigrant women’s and especially Muslim women’s choice of this lifestyle would be interpreted as coercion by “their culture”. However, these contradictions are appeased and turned to an asset rather than a flaw in right-wing populist discourse if we take debates about social benefits into account, where framings of gender and ethnicity feed into right-wing bio-politics.

In the domain of social policies – most notably: family benefits – right-wing populist actors argue for a strict adherence to nativist principles, most clearly formulated by the FPÖ in a brochure designed for the election campaign in 2013: “The FPÖ will make Austria the most family & children-friendly country in Europe for her own citizens” (FPÖ, 2013). As one of the steps to reach this goal, stopping the “export of family benefits” is mentioned. In 2010 party leader Heinz-Christian Strache used a more aggressive formulation in a Facebook-message entitled “Our families have to bleed – the money goes abroad!” and demanded the end of bilateral agreements that allow citizens of other countries, who worked in Austria for at least three months, to claim family benefits (Facebook, 2010). This stance clarifies that the conservative family values that right-wing populism argues for are to be understood within the limits imposed by an ethnicised nativism that is “[t]he key feature of the populist radical right” (Mudde, 2010, p. 1173). Again “common sense” is the basic rationale underlying the FPÖ’s construction of “us” and “them”, as the alleged antagonism between “Austrians” and “foreigners” is constructed as self-evident. We can trace this rhetoric back to the early 1990s, when “the foreigner’s question” was constructed (Zuser, 1996). A constant political discourse on this “question”, which grew to encompass all kinds of social as well as educational policies, security, infrastructure, etc. generated a stable interpretative frame that invariably positions natives and “foreigners” in an antagonistic relationship. Right-wing populists exploit that frame in all policy fields by appealing to “common sense” (see fig. 5).
Our analysis of re-framing processes in right-wing populist discourses shows that “family” became an important point of convergence relating ideas about gender to “common sense”, conservative values and nativist population politics. Rhetorically this concern is often linked to diagnoses of a demographic decline by right-wing populist actors, who reject immigration as a means of population growth (e.g. IBÖ Wien, 2013; Strache, 2013). This convergence can also be understood in terms of more traditional right-wing extremist concerns about the survival of the ethnically pure people.
Conclusion

Our analysis of different strands of right-wing populist discourses on gender and gender equality identified at least three distinct ways of framing these issues (see also figures 2 to 5). First, we detected the frame that is applied to gender relations within native, heterosexual nuclear families, which might be termed “free choice”-frame, i.e. a framing of care and child rearing as women’s choice that has been hindered by feminism and left-wing ideology for too long. Framing gender relations in this way, right-wing populist actors position themselves as “anti-ideological” and driven by concerns over women’s individual freedom. Second – and contrary to this anti-ideological stance – right-wing populist actors frame family policies as value loaded in relation to demands for equal treatment of same-sex couples who are not deemed to fit the model of the “traditional family” as they do not fit traditional gender roles. To a lesser extent this frame is also applied in relation to other non-traditional families, e.g. single-parents. This value-orientation notwithstanding right-wing populist actors make use of a third frame with regard to gender relations among immigrants and especially Muslims, which we might call “Muslim threat”-frame as it positions Muslims as pre-modern, constructing Muslim men as oppressors, who threaten Austrian society, and Muslim women as victims – both endangering the value of gender equality and female emancipation in Austria (Farris, 2012). All three discursive constructions feed into right-wing populists concerns over population politics.

Our intersectional perspective located constructions of gender and gender equality at their intersections with ethnicity, culture/religion and sexuality. Thereby it allowed us to analyse these re-framing processes with the help of the “ideological square” (Reinfeldt, 2000, p. 133), which helped us to understand the different relations established to “those up there” and to “others”, who are deemed “not-us”. Of course – albeit such an analysis is beyond the scope of this paper – this perspective also allows the questioning of the construction of the right-wing populist “we”
embedded in each of these different frames.

If these discursive strands and the respective frames are analysed separately, they appear contradictory, but within Austrian right-wing populist discourse they are constantly interwoven through on-going re-framing processes and strategic uses of intersectionality. Right-wing populists might for example position themselves in sharp contrast to left-wing ideology (“those up there”) by use of the frame of “free choice” and then move on to connect “left wing ideology” to LGBT-people (“not-us”) thereby “naturally” changing from framing gender and family in terms of “free choice” to a frame focusing on “family values” grounded in “nature”. Understanding these values as being threatened also by immigration allows for another change of frame, now focusing on the “Muslim threat” allegedly posed by oppressive Muslim men. This frame in turn provides another entry point for the rhetoric of “free choice” that addresses native women as “not-them”, i.e. as potential parts of the right-wing populist “we”. These discursive shifts do of course not erase the tensions and contradictions between the different viewpoints, but they allow for an uninterrupted argumentative flow that masks the fact that right-wing populists treat issues of gender in an instrumental manner, constantly revising their position in accordance with the construction of “others” (“those up there” or “not-us”). One especially telling point of convergence is the preoccupation with the alleged decline of the native people. The discourse of “free choice”, the quest to enable native women to dedicate themselves to mothering, is often presented as the preferred solution to the demographic problem. It can therefore also serve as a modernised and acceptable version of traditional right-wing extremist concepts of nativist bio-politics, which unfolds its significance in the interplay with the production of “others”. This might be specifically resonating in a conservative welfare state.
We started our inquiry into the intersections produced by framing processes in right-wing populist discourses with the question of whether the discourse on women’s “free choice” in relation to child-care and family work was anything more than a decoy hiding a conservative stance. Our analysis suggests a more complex purpose: We argued that this frame links different strands of right-wing populist discourse in a way that facilitates the transition between contradictory propositions that serve a strategic function. The constant re-framing of gender equality plays out most clearly at the intersections of gender, ethnicity, culture or religion, and sexuality and allows right-wing populists to address different audiences (“not-them”) and re-construct the populist “we” in an ever shifting manner.

Notes
1 Not all texts analysed feature a date of publication. Quotes have been translated by the authors.
2 The elimination of the independent women’s ministry in 2000, its inclusion into the social ministry and the establishment of a men’s section in the same ministry at the beginning of FPÖ’s participation in government might be understood as institutional consequences of this stance.
3 However, the Christian-conservative Austrian People’s Party (Österreichische Volkspartei/ÖVP) gradually changed this conservative value set during the last 10 years.
4 Maximilian Krauss (* 1993) was one of the FPÖ’s young candidates for national elections in 2013. He has been active in the party for years, becoming chairman of the local RFJ-group at age 13. Wendelin Mölzer is a member of the Austrian parliament since 2013 and chief editor of the right-wing weekly Zur Zeit.
5 It is not clear whether the authors meant the Geneva conventions (that are dealing with humanitarian issues in wartime) or rather the UN-conventions on Human Rights (which have not been signed in Geneva).
6 The FPÖ also claimed that family benefits were paid for children residing abroad, even though a bilateral agreement on this matter with Turkey had been cancelled in 1996.

References

Die Zeit (2013). “Zu schön für einen Schleier” [“Too beautiful for a veil” - documented image from the *Identitarian Movement*. Retrieved from [http://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/files/2013/02/Identit%C3%A4re-Schleier-1024x669.jpg](http://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/files/2013/02/Identit%C3%A4re-Schleier-1024x669.jpg) [23.04.2014]


process-oriented, political approach (Ms. under review)

IBÖ Wien (2013, Feb 25). Wächst unsere Bevölkerung? [Is our population growing?]


**Figures and Tables:**

Figure 1: The “ideological square” of right-wing populism
Source: Reinfeldt, 2000, p. 133

Figure 2: “Free Choice”-Frame
Source: own illustration based on Reinfeldt, 2000, p. 133

Figure 3: (Family) Values-Frame
Source: own illustration based on Reinfeldt, 2000, p. 133

Figure 4: “Muslim Threat”-Frame
Source: own illustration based on Reinfeldt, 2000, p. 133

Figure 5: Family Benefits-Frame
Source: own illustration based on Reinfeldt, 2000, p. 133

Table 1: Material