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“Fortress Europe”? A Politics of Shameless Normalization

Ruth Wodak
Lancaster University/University Vienna

Resumen:

Many context-dependent socio-political, economic, cultural, and historical factors, apart from the performance of allegedly charismatic leaders, lead to the rise of the populist far-right, supported by conservative mainstream parties and the (social) media (Bevelander & Wodak 2019). Recently, huge scandals (such as in Austria – “IbizaGate”; Wodak 2019) illustrate that formerly taboo subjects and expressions in mainstream discourse are being accepted more and more (‘normalization’) and have become part and parcel of mainstream politics. Such normalization goes hand in hand with a certain ‘shamelessness’: the limits of the sayable are shifting regarding both the frequency of lies (Block 2019) and the violating of discourse and politeness conventions – as well as regarding repeated attacks on salient democratic institutions. Discursive strategies of provocation, blame avoidance, denial, Manichean division, victim-perpetrator reversal as well as eristic argumentation and conspiracy theories dominate official communication, accompanied by ever more nativist nationalism and the racialization of space.

In this vein, I claim that such rejection of dialogue relates to a ‘post-shame era’ rather than merely to a ‘post-truth era’ (e.g., Scheff 2000; Hahl et al 2018). For example, normalizing the assessment of migrants and refugees (all labeled as “illegal migrants”) as a threat to inner security, a burden on the welfare state and education system must be perceived as an international development – generally instrumentalizing a “politics of fear” and reinforcing a “coarse civility” [rohe Bürgerlichkeit](Heitmeyer 2019; Wodak 2021).

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<https://www.socialeurope.eu/austria-strache-ibiza-gate>