

Uncivility on the web

Populism in/and the borderline discourses of exclusion

Michał Krzyżanowski and Per Ledin
University of Liverpool / Södertörn University

This paper explores the connection between the rise of new types of online uncivil discourses and the recent success of populism. While discussions on the upsurge of populism have centred on institutionalised politics and politicians, only limited attention has been paid to how the success of the former and the latter was propelled by developments outside of the political realm narrowly conceived. Our interest is therefore in the rise of uncivil society, especially on the web, and in its ‘borderline discourse’ at the verge of civil and uncivil ideas, ideologies and norms. Those discourses – showcased here on the example of the language on immigration/refugees in Austria and Sweden – have been using civil-to-uncivil shifts in the discursive representations of society and politics. They have progressively ‘normalised’ the anti-pluralist views across many European public spheres on a par with nativist and exclusionary views now widely propagated by right-wing populist politics in Europe and beyond.

Keywords: uncivil society, right-wing populism, online platforms, borderline discourses, critical discourse studies, anti-immigration rhetoric

1. Introduction

This paper explores the connection between the rise of new types of online uncivil discourses on the one hand and the political and electoral success of populism on the other. We argue that while discussions on the rise of populist politics have mainly centred on organized political parties and groups (especially in the context of right-wing populism in Europe and beyond; see e.g. Wodak 2015a), only some limited attention has been paid to how the success of the latter was fuelled by developments outside of the realm of politics and of political practice narrowly conceived (Mazzoleni 2008).

Our special interest is therefore in the rise of uncivil society, in particular on the web, and in its ‘borderline discourse’ at the border of civil and uncivil ideas, ideologies and views. However, we are not interested in the still widespread and indeed continuously expanding loci where radical-political and hence prototypically ‘uncivil’ views are nested and spread (as is the case with e.g. Nazi groups etc., cf. Mammone, Godin and Jenkins 2012; Hainsworth 2016; Rydgren 2017). We look instead at discourses which, under the guise of civility, largely express uncivil views that are in stark contrast to liberal-democratic order. These discourses, we claim, have started to emerge in recent years (especially from ca. the end of the first decade of 2000s onwards) mainly in the countries that witnessed either a rapid rise or a further institutionalisation of right-wing populist politics (of these we focus below specifically on Austria and Sweden). There, we argue, the emergence of online as well as, later on, social media has fostered the rise of various agorae of exchange of views which often escape the traditional norms of political expression by progressively ‘testing’ as well as ‘stretching’ norms of publically-acceptable language on inclusive society and politics.

As we argue, the emergence of such agorae as new ‘sites of production and reception of public discourse’ (van Dijk 1991) are particularly vital for the wider, recent success of populist politics in Europe and beyond. There, as has been widely documented, the change of widely-accepted norms of debating politics and society has been central. It has taken place and resulted in not only the transformation of acceptable language on social and political matters (e.g. widespread public expression of forceful anti-immigrant and nationalist views) but also fuelled the wider undermining of key norms and values of liberal societies including issues of gender, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity and equality. It also propelled the rebirth of nativism and nationalism (cf. e.g. Trump’s “America First”, but also earlier populist slogans such as e.g. the “Austria First” in the 1990s; Matouschek, Wodak and Januschek 1995; Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2009; Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Wodak 2003; Wodak and Richardson 2009) which re-focussed political sympathies from groups favouring liberal and open society to those proposing exclusionary isolationism, protectionism and foregrounding the rights of ‘our people’ (see Wodak 2017 in this Special Issue).

2. Populism and the online uncivil society

We perceive “uncivil society” (see below for a detailed definition) as a populist phenomenon *par excellence* for several reasons. First, it is probably one fulfilment of a conception of populism which, according to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), is driven on a peculiar duality of, on the one hand, undermining the key values

and principles of liberal democracy while, on the other, essentially willing to act within its standard processes and structures. Within this context, (online) uncivil society which we highlight below appears to be an essence of populism i.e. it is not (anymore) a set of political processes and phenomena happening especially *within* either of the polarised loci of 'politics' on the one hand, or 'people', or its representatives that is the civil society, on the other. On the contrary, the uncivil society essentially emphasises that populism is a continuum of practices which locate *between* 'politics' and the 'people' and essentially provides a strategic promulgation of views characteristic for both the former and the latter.

Indeed, the duality above, as well as the transient nature of uncivil populist practices is the key reason why we endorse here the famous conception of '*uncivil society*' as proposed by Carlo Ruzza (2009). In his seminal study on uncivil society movements and their relation to institutionalised right-wing politics in contemporary Italy, Ruzza (2009, 88) saw uncivil society as primarily "groups which have a self-professed antidemocratic and exclusionary political identity". They (a) act against – rather than for the benefit of – liberal-democratic principles of an open society and (b) are, even if unofficially, often closely linked to political parties and groups rather being voluntary bottom-up organizations and, effectively, a 'voice' of the civil society.

Ruzza also pointed to uncivil society as, essentially, driven only by the presence of representing and being close to the 'people' and perhaps largely resembling – especially in terms of their discourse – voices of the 'civil society'. But at the same time he emphasised that uncivil society is first and foremost characterised by some very close ties to (in particular populist and radical) institutionalised politics whose views it principally propagates and represents. Ruzza (2009, 91) therefore made it clear that the "non-modern or anti-modern conception of life" held by uncivil society aligns closely with different right-wing ideologies, and that the uncivil society is therefore highly dangerous to contemporary European societies in which right-wing populism has spread as a 'contagion' in recent years (Rydgren 2005; Rydgren and van der Meiden 2016).

Following the above, we approach the uncivil society platforms showcased below as a good indication that populism is now increasingly taking place – or is essentially constructed and projected – not only within the institutionalised politics but also in the spheres attached to it yet located between the political realm and its social base. This shows inasmuch some classic approaches which saw populism as, e.g., a type of opportunity for democratic empowerment (see, inter alia, Goodwyn 1976; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005) need to be taken into consideration with care nowadays i.e. when not only the actual 'loci' of populist practices (i.e. institutionalised politics and/or beyond) are central, but also when the actual character of practices and discourse come to the fore. Hence, we claim, there now

exists a growing need to re-focus both theoretical and analytical attention in populism research to what used to be defined as the key negative effects of populism on liberal democracy (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 83), and what now seems to be at the core of political and discursive strategies of populism within *and* beyond politics. In this context, the reshaping of majority-minority relations appears central. This has been evidenced especially in the accelerating discourses and practices of othering ('us' vs. 'them') and in the closely related rhetoric of anti-immigration politics ('natives'/our people' vs. 'foreigners/immigrants/refugees'). It also often becomes reality that 'populism can use the notion and praxis of majority rule to circumvent minority rights' (ibid.). This, in turn, points to the fact that "populists are always *antipluralist*" (Müller 2016, 3, orig. emphasis) and that, whether political or not, populist discourses are currently driven by both their 'exclusionary agendas' and the constant 'transgressing of norms and taboos' (Wodak 2015a, 1ff). This, to be sure, undermines the core idea of liberal democracy which "requires pluralism and the recognition that we need to find fair terms of living together as free, equal, but also irreducibly diverse citizens" (Müller 2016, 3).

3. Uncivil, 'borderline' discourses and practices

Studies on un/incivility and communication of political views have focussed extensively on *bottom-up incivility* i.e. the use of, especially, mobile technologies – but also increasingly online and social media – to enable expression of uncivil up to radical opinions and views among the public and the wider citizenry (see e.g. Groschek and Cutino 2016). Within this body of research, some scholars have clearly seen more opportunities than dangers of the wider mediatisation of society for the rise of civic norms (see esp. Papacharissi 2004), with only few studies alarming that the affordances of online mediation can effectively contribute to the social-wide spread of uncivility and of non-liberal norms (Yardi and Boyd 2010).

The latter has been, in fact, also a predominant view in several studies which looked at *un/incivility in a top-down way* and examined it in the use of social and online media in politics, online platforms and online presence of the mass media. This trend has highlighted the spread of uncivil ideas and views within and across the public spheres and examined the related – chiefly negative – dynamics of norms of political communication and political expression (see esp. Harcourt 2012; Theocharis et al. 2016; Sobieraj and Berry 2011; Santana 2014), often as part of wider trend of looking on the impact of uncivil politics on electoral choices and dynamics (Brooks and Geer 2007).

While *our focus is located in between the aforementioned bottom-up and top-down approaches* it also aims to tackle the actual *discursive construction of the*

populist borderline between civil (i.e. pro-democratic) and in/uncivil (i.e. anti-pluralist and anti-democratic) ideas and ideologies. Our work therefore dovetails with debates and linguistic struggles regarding the borderline between ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’, where, on the one hand, arenas clearly dominated by the expressions of civil views typical for the ‘mainstream society’ (e.g. large ‘quality’ newspapers, public service broadcasting, mainstream politics etc.) dominate one side of the spectrum. On the other hand, there are also arenas that appear to be emblematic sites of ‘uncivility’, such as e.g. webpages of right-wing extremists.

What appears to be located in-between – or at the *borderline* of – those two, polarised ends of the spectrum of the public sphere are the alternative and in particular right-wing populist arenas. These include e.g. webpages and online discussion platforms such as those we showcase and briefly analyse (see below). However, we show that these platforms effectively express or give voice to anti-pluralist, exclusionary and ‘unacceptable’ discourses (in most cases in relation to immigration, diversity, and multiculturalism), yet do so under the guise of – or at least while being introduced by – the seemingly politically-correct or acceptable discourse. They hence are deemed here as, in their end-effect, uncivil and as discursively constructing and propagating the uncivil ideas and norms only under the guise of a certain degree of civility. They do so while profiting from their placement in-between ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’ views and their self-proclaimed role as interlocutors of the accepted sites of debating political views (e.g. in mainstream media and politics, see Figure 1) through which they gain at least some legitimacy. They also, thereby, disseminate views of the institutionalised right-wing (populist) politics that the uncivil society is in the majority of cases attached to (see above).

The ‘alternative’ uncivil society sites often contest and challenge many norms of the public sphere including, very prominently, those of ‘political correctness’ (despite its also obvious ideological baggage; cf. Wilson 1995). They thereby contribute to the overall shift or, in fact, the profound change of norms and patterns of expression which, in turn, fuel developments such as the recent rise of ‘*post-truth politics*’ and populism (see, inter alia, Harsin 2015, Krugman 2011, see also Wodak 2017 and Lakoff 2017 in this Special Issue). They also repeatedly attempt to redefine the borders of civil language as such and thus constitute a case of the so-called ‘*normalisation to the right*’ (Wodak 2015a, 2015b; Link 2014) whereby the mainly uncivil – rather than civil – views become a ‘norm’ in contemporary societies and where the meaning of key social concepts as (e.g. ‘immigration’) receives new sets of connotations especially in the form favoured by right-wing populist views, which, though previously largely unacceptable, now become an acceptable norm (see Wodak 2015b; see also Krzyżanowski 2013a, 2016).

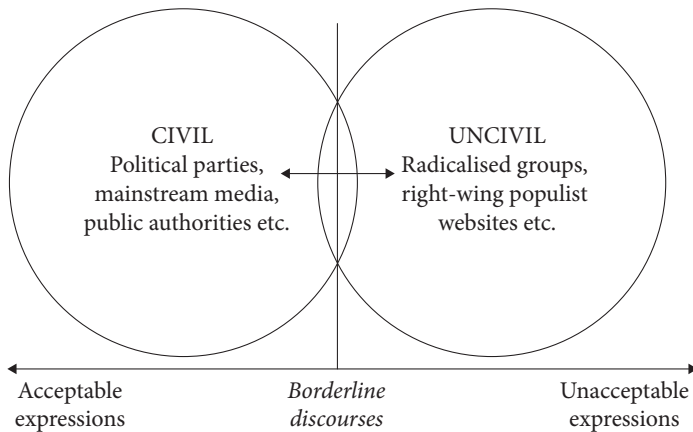


Figure 1. Borderline populist discourses between ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’ public spaces.

However, just like populism cannot be considered outside its relationships with traditional/mainstream politics or the wider structures of (liberal) democracy, such is also the case with uncivil (online) discourses which, effectively, cannot be conceived of outside of their relationship to the mainstream media (which the uncivil society also often calls the ‘old’ media).

Paradoxically, through its frequent attempts to minimise the risks and ignore the socio-political and politico-economic dangers of right-wing populism and extremism, those are the mainstream media that have fuelled the development of inter-spaces in the public spheres that eventually came to be occupied by uncivil online platforms now competitive to the traditional media organisations. Initially viewed as ‘alternative public spheres on the web’ (Dahlgren 2005) many of the online platforms have, however, proved to have negative rather than positive implications to the wider public spheres and their civil and democratic character (Alvares and Dahlgren 2016). In a structural sense, online technologies also enabled right-wing populists – as we show, those politically-institutionalised or not – to effectively circumvent traditional media channels and form new communicative spaces where civic norms are reinterpreted, tested and, effectively, undermined. This, to be sure, has taken place quite similarly to the ways in which online communication has been efficiently used by right-wing populist politics whose online self-mediation has been used widely to spread uncivil populist ideologies and views, indeed often under the guise of closeness to citizens as well as of interactivity and familiarity (Calhoun 2016; Krzyżanowski 2013a, 2018a, 2018b; Forchtner, Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2013; see also Dahlgren and Alvares 2013).

4. Uncivil society on the web: (brief) examples from Austria and Sweden

Below, we briefly showcase a set of discursive dynamics and strategies traditionally deployed in online uncivil society discourse. Our aim here is to exemplify that, while taking place in different socio-political and national contexts – in our case Austria and Sweden – uncivil society discourses are characterised by largely similar features which, as such, can also be frequently recontextualised between various countries and platforms.

Our analysis looks specifically at two online uncivil society platforms: Austrian platform *unzensuriert.at* (in English: uncensored, see <https://www.unzensuriert.at>) and Swedish *Avpixlat* (in English: pictured/depicted, see <http://avpixlat.info>). Both platforms – established in 2009 and 2011 respectively – share their political ontologies inasmuch they both have been in various ways developed and supported by current/former activists and functionaries of the key parliamentary right-wing populist parties (RWPs): the Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) in Austria, and Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*, SD) in Sweden.

The platforms, both very popular and widely used, claim to be focussed on informing citizens and share objective information and opinion as part of allegedly increasing pluralism in the media. However, in fact, with their key aim is in opposing mainstream political and mass media outlets which they traditionally link to ‘old’ politics (contrary to right-wing populism which they quite obviously see as a ‘new’). Their key foci/topics are, accordingly, issues of immigration and asylum – in most cases as part of critique of political establishment except for the RWPs – as well as ideological criticism of the wider national and international (including EU) politics and, in particular, socio-economic policies (incl. welfare, housing, labour, etc.).

We look below on two selected posts in German and Swedish which were published on the analysed platforms during the current ‘Refugee Crisis’¹ in progress from ca. 2014 until the present and culminating in ca. 2015–16 (see Triandafyllidou, Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2018). We take two items published in different phases of the ‘crisis’ – one from its beginnings in early 2014 (Austria, 367 words incl. headline) and one from its culminating phase in late 2015 (Sweden,

1. Despite its by now widespread presence in public and academic discourse, the notion of ‘Refugee Crisis’ is approached critically in this article. It is viewed as an ideologically charged notion developed in media & political discourse, also as a recontextualisation of earlier (negativised) descriptions of large-scale developments related to immigration and asylum-seeking (e.g. in the context of wars in former Yugoslavia in early 1990s, etc.). The notion is therefore used in parentheses throughout the paper.

246 words incl. headline) – and concerning the (alleged) violence among refugees/asylum seekers who are mainly constructed as Muslim (and non-Christian).

Our analytical aim is to show that despite being published on different platforms and in different national contexts, various items reveal an array of similarities thus pointing to processes of “recontextualisation” (Bernstein 1990; Krzyżanowski 2016) of, as far as these can be established, some common features of online uncivil society rhetoric. Our brief analysis relies mainly on categories of critical discourse studies of right-wing populism and anti-immigration rhetoric (Krzyżanowski 2012, 2013a; Wodak and Pelinka 2002; Wodak 2015a). In the course of our search for the ‘borderline discourse’ dynamics highlighted above, we aim to exemplify how the overall macro-level ‘civil’ framing of the news items – from the point of view of, e.g., security, concerns for public safety and the workings of public institutions – in fact allows the authors of the news items to eventually convey many ‘uncivil’ meanings. We hence point to a certain *civil-to-uncivil strategic ‘frame shift’* (Goffman 1974), which, by means of various strategies of, e.g., representing social actors (van Leeuwen 2008) but often without any specific ‘discourse markers’ (Schiffrin 1982), moves towards and thereby normalises as quasi-civil the de facto uncivil expressions, including discriminatory, xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric.²

The Austrian *unzensuriert.at* post (see Figure 2) comes from 02 April 2014 and concerns an alleged attack in which a catholic church – or as it is later claimed several churches – in Austria was/were vandalised by a Muslim asylum-seeker. The overall (civil) framing for the news item is provided by the visuals posted next to the main text and presenting an Austrian police car thus implying issues of public safety and state/public institutions. However, it is already in the subtitle of the main image reading ‘Police catches church-vandal’ (*Polizei fasst Kirchenschänder*) where the gradual shift towards the uncivil frame occurs, initially by means of refocussing the attention from public force (police) to the individualised ‘vandal’. In a similar vein, the list of keywords placed immediately under the main heading (incl. Christianity, Asylum-Seeker, Ibrahim A., Ghana, Asylum, Church, etc.) suggests that this text should not be perceived as an isolated item but that it links very closely to wider Austrian discourses esp. on immigration, religious differences etc.³

2. In a wider sense, the discursive strategy we point to here could also well be considered a case of what Engel and Wodak (2013) called ‘*calculated ambivalence*’. However, we are unable to show the strategic end-effect of establishing conceptual ambivalence in the analysed discourse due to limitations of space.

3. As such, this text also links well with the then ongoing discourse about asylum seekers in Austria especially following the so-called 2013 ‘*Votivkirchen*’ protests (see, inter alia, <http://wien.orf.at/news/stories/2572156>). In course of the latter, several asylum seekers protested against

unzensuriert.at

SAFT PARLAMENT INTERNATIONALES LOKALES GESELLSCHAFT MEDIEN INTERNET FREIZEIT MEINUNG

Neu: Neues Heute beliebt: Heute diskutiert: Zuletzt gelesen: Zuletzt kommentiert: Suche

Wieder Anschlag auf Kirche

Kriminalfall

Christentum, Asylwerber, Ibrahim A., Ghana, Asyl, Kirche, Anschlag, Kirchenerschließung, Polizei, Moscheen, Döbling, Wien, Beschäftigung, HC Strasser, Harald Vilimský, FPÖ, Heimat ohne Hass

2. April 2014 - 13:10

Viele Christen können es kaum fassen. Ein Asylwerber soll in mindestens sechs Kirchen seine Zerstörungswut ausgelebt haben. Dabei soll es sich bei dem Täter auch um jenen Ghanaer gehandelt haben, der am Wochenende von der Polizei gefasst wurde, als er in der Stephanskirche zuschlug. Der Asylwerber wurde freigelassen, danach folgte Dienstagfrüh der nächste Anschlag auf eine andere Kirche in Mariahilf. In einem Verhör zeigte sich Ibrahim A. geständig. Er meinte, Allah hätte ihn beauftragt. Und überhaupt habe der Mensch kein Recht. Heiligenbilder anzufertigen.



Polizei fest Kirchenständer
Foto: Unzensuriert.at

Figure 2. *Unzensuriert.at* Post of 02/04/2014⁴

As soon as one begins the reading of the main text of the item, it also becomes clear that the uncivil frame is the one that is, in fact, dominating throughout. We learn first about an 'asylum seeker' (*Asylwerber*) who later on, in the course of nominalisation chains, is further specified as 'Ghanian' (*Ghanaer*) and eventually proper-named as 'Ibrahim A'. We are then are provided with explanation of his alleged actions: 'He claimed that Allah gave him the task' (*Er meinte, Allah hätte ihn beauftragt*) with thus the introduction of the (here still only implied) Islam-related motives for the violence.

The highlighting of religious difference – also marked by violent/radical and active representative of Islam and passive/affected symbols of Christianity – are vital in constructing the us vs. them logic and in furthering the, effectively, strongly Islamophobic rhetoric. Already at its beginning, the text is introduced with a statement that 'Many Christians would not believe it' (*Viele Christen können es kaum fassen*) which also adds sensationalism. Interestingly, what follows throughout the text are many nominal references to Austria which seem to be very explicitly 'Christian'. Hence, we do not speak of Vienna where the act of vandalism allegedly

violation and denial of their rights by seeking shelter and undertaking subsequent hunger strikes incl. in the central-Viennese Votive-Church – a discourse about symbolic 'taking over' of churches by the allegedly Muslim asylum seekers eventually erupted and become widespread in Austrian right-wing populist politics and uncivil society discourse.

4. See: <https://www.unzensuriert.at/content/0015140-Wieder-Anschlag-auf-Kirche>

took place but about its district 'Mariahilf', and we also read that 'the damages for the diocese could be enormous' (*Der Schaden für die Diözese dürfte enorm sein*) with thereby the 'Diocese' appearing as the main recipient of the violent actions.

Interestingly, in the central part of the text, an overt relationship to the Austrian right-wing populist party FPÖ is also established by way of an (extensive) quote from H-C. Strache (FPÖ Party Leader) who allegedly commented on the issue in focus. While being quoted, Strache is claiming that if a Mosque was ever damaged in Austria, there would be a huge political outcry which, however, is not the case of the supposedly repeated acts of vandalism towards the Catholic/Christian Churches. What is thereby achieved here is not only the contrast Islam vs. Christianity but also the portrayal of Austrian main RWP as the 'defender' of Christian values and as the key articulator of anti-Muslim views (see also Krzyżanowski 2013a). Indeed, the overall cohesion is established in a rhetorical question which introduces Strache's extensive comment: "A question may be asked, why did the Asylum-seeker not let out his hate in a Mosque?" (*Da stellt sich die Frage, warum der Asylweber nicht auch in Moscheen wütete?*).

On the other hand, the Swedish post – published on *Avpixlat* on 28 November 2015 (i.e. in the course of heated debates on Swedish then rapidly changing asylum policy; see Krzyżanowski 2018b) – is also introduced in a very similar (civil) way i.e. by means of visual framing representing Swedish public institutions (see Figure 3): on the one hand the police (represented by police line and also an image of a police car) as well as, on the other, the Swedish government immigration agency (*Migrationsverket*) represented by its widely-recognisable logo.

However, already in the visual representation the conflation of police-related symbolism (providing connotations with safety, public order, etc. but also with emergency events via the presence of the police line) and of an immigration enforcement institution suggests that immigration in the item should supposedly be perceived from the point of view of law-and-order or, as it eventually turns out, its violation. The effectively uncivil frame – relating immigration and asylum-seekers closely to crime and violence – is eventually developed further once we get to the actual text of the post whose heading – rather extensive – reads "30 Men attempted to rape a woman in asylum centre, and kill her son – supposed punishment for breaking Sharia" (*30 män hotade våldta kvinna och döda hennes son på asylboende – skulle straffas för brott mot sharia*). It is already in the headline that all 'standard' elements of uncivil discourse about immigration are introduced (similarly to the above Austrian item). We hence encounter references to the alleged: migrant criminality, violation of women's rights, asylum-seeking (via reference to 'asylboende') and, last but not least, to the Islam-related motivations behind the violence (via the reference to the 'break of Sharia' or *brott mot sharia*).

Tre miljoner sidvisningar i veckan

Vill du att din produkt ska synas på dem?

Kontakta vår
annonsavdelning

[KLICKA HÄR](#)

30 män hotade våldta kvinna och döda hennes son på asylboende – skulle straffas för brott mot sharia



ASYLBRÅK En stor mobb bestående av 30 asylsökande män försökte på onsdagen våldta en kvinna på ett asylboende i Nora. De hotade även att döda kvinnans son.

Det var vid 22-tiden på onsdagskvällen som de 30 männen i samråd beslöt att våldta kvinnan och mörda sonen. Våldet kunde dock avstyras efter att kvinnan låst in sig och personalen på asylboendet larmat polis till platsen. Polisen uppger att motivet till brotten är religiösa och kulturella. Enligt de rättrogna muslimska männen hade den ensamstående kvinnan begått ett brott mot sharia-lag genom att uppehålla sig i Sverige utan en ledsagande man och skulle därför straffas med våldtäkt. Varför sonen enligt männen förtjänade att dö framgår inte.

Figure 3. Avpixlat Post of 28/11/2015⁵

The further parts of the Swedish post quite expectedly develop the outright Islamophobic ideas and views (in particular, by providing evidence to violence and disorder in asylum centres and relating it to religion of the immigrants). Here, the role of nominal references is central via establishment of links between, inter alia, “a large mob” (*En stor mobb*), “30 male asylum seekers” (*30 asylsökande män*) “the orthodox Muslim men” (*rättrogna muslimska männen*), gradually implying that rape is connected to asylum seekers in general and to Muslim immigrants in particular (note the recontextualisation of ‘rape’ topos and ‘body politics’ arguments otherwise prevalent in anti-immigration discourses cf. Wodak 2015a). Importantly, the alleged Muslim/immigrant perpetrators are not, as has been the case before, nominalised, but are instead presented in a collectivised manner i.e.

5. See: <http://avpixlat.info/2015/11/28/30-man-hotade-valdta-kvinna-och-doda-hennes-son-pa-asylboende-skulle-straffas-for-brott-mot-sharia>

as a large and well organised violent male group. Hence, in the Swedish item we do not encounter anymore the strategy of 'us' vs. 'them' representation (esp. Christian vs. Muslim, as in the Austrian case) but instead the whole focus of discursive representation is directed towards 'them' (i.e. men, immigrants, asylum-seekers, Muslims, etc.).

5. Conclusions

The two brief samples of online discourse above exemplify the strategic nature of using the ongoing civil-to-uncivil shifts in the uncivil society's discursive representations of society and politics. These have, by now, become a widespread phenomenon as well as part and parcel of (right-wing) populist politics in Europe and beyond. Spread and effectively 'normalised' by, in particular, the online uncivil society highlighted above, the anti-pluralist discourses favouring 'us' above 'them' have been propagated by populist – and esp. RWP – politics, yet have become socially-accommodated and accepted to large extent via the strategic discourse of uncivil society. The latter, under the guise of civil-like 'objective opinions' and quasi 'facts', has been spreading exclusionary views and thus fuelling uncivil social and political visions resting on discrimination and rejection of diversity.

An interesting aspect of the 'borderline' online uncivil society discourse we have showcased resides in its largely conceptual and symbolic character (Krzyżanowski 2013b, 2016, also Wodak 2015b). The latter boils down to buzzwords/keywords symptomatic of certain opinions and ideologies (esp. Islamophobia, see above) which are only (very) loosely related to occurrences and facts (which in and of themselves are also often dubious). As such, this serves sustaining ideologically-driven expression of antipluralist opinions and only uses reported (and often concocted) events to put forward claims -often in favour of 'us', almost always against 'them'- which are anyway at the core of populist and exclusionary agendas. It also changes the role of facts in current expressions of politics – and is essentially at the core of widespread '*post-truth politics*' (see above). There, ideologies and emotions abide, norms of civility are constantly tested, and facts and reality are treated as, at best, secondary.

Indeed, as we have highlighted, the uncivil populist discourses are either structurally (via the media platform organizations) or discursively (via overt/covert textual and visual references) closely related to Europe's right-wing populist politics ideologies. While pretending to represent bottom-up the wider society and citizenry, they effectively serve the top-down strategic interests of populist politics and politicians. This, as we have aimed to exemplify, is both the case in countries which have had a long-established history of right-wing populist parties

(as is the case in Austria) but is also very relevant in other national contexts (such as Sweden) where parliamentary RWPs have come to the fore only recently. In all cases, however, voices and opinions of uncivil society have been central in sustaining the enduring presence and electoral success of RWPs and hence must be treated as one of the main sites where prototypical contemporary populist discourses of exclusion are constructed and disseminated.

Acknowledgments

The work presented here has been partially funded by the Swedish Research Council (*Vetenskapsrådet*) grant “Interactive Racism in Swedish Online Media, Press and Politics: Discourses on Immigration and Refugees at Times of Crisis”. We are very grateful to Ruth Wodak (Lancaster University) and Mattias Ekman (Örebro University) for their extensive comments on the early draft of this paper. The responsibility for the final version obviously remains our own.

References

- Alvares, Claudia, and Peter Dahlgren. 2016. “Populism, extremism and media: Mapping an uncertain terrain.” *European Journal of Communication* 31(1): 46–57.
- Brooks, Deborah J. and John G. Geer. 2007. “Beyond Negativity: The Effects of Incivility on the Electorate.” *American Journal of Political Science* 51(1): 1–16.
- Calhoun, Craig. 2016. “Populism and Digital Democracy.” *Berggruen Insights* 6 (10/2016). Accessed 4 March 2017. http://insights.berggruen.org/issues/issue-6/institute_posts/156
- Dahlgren, Peter, and Claudia Alvares. 2013. “Political Participation in an age of Mediatisation.” *Javnost – The Public* 20(2): 47–65.
- Engel, Jakob, and Ruth Wodak. 2013. “‘Calculated ambivalence’ and holocaust denial in Austria.” In *Analysing Fascist Discourse* ed. by Ruth Wodak and John E. Richardson, 73–96. London: Routledge.
- Forchtner, Bernhard, Michał Krzyżanowski, and Ruth Wodak. 2013. “Mediatisation, right-wing populism and political campaigning: the case of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ).” In *Media Talk and Political Elections in Europe and America* ed. by Andrew Tolson and Mats Ekström, 205–228. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Goodwyn, Lawrence. 1976. *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Groshek, Jacob, and Chelsea Cutino. 2016. “Meaner on Mobile: Incivility and Impoliteness in Communicating Contentious Politics on Sociotechnical Networks.” *Social Media + Society*, October–December 2016: 1–10.
- Hainsworth, Paul. (ed.). 2016. *The Extreme Right in Europe and the USA*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Harcourt, Bernard E. 2012. “The Politics of Incivility.” *Arizona Law Review*, 54: 1–33.

- Harsin, Jason. 2015. "Regimes of Post-truth, Post-politics, and Attention Economies." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8: 327–333.
- Krugman, Paul. 2011. "The Post-Truth Campaign." *The New York Times* (New York Edition), 23 December 2011, 31.
- Krzyżanowski, Michał. 2013a. "From Anti-Immigration and Nationalist Revisionism to Islamophobia: Continuities and Shifts in Recent Discourses and Patterns of Political Communication of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)." In *Rightwing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse* ed. by Ruth Wodak et. al., 135–148. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Krzyżanowski, Michał. 2013b. "Discourses and concepts: Interfaces and synergies between Begriffsgeschichte and the discourse-historical approach in CDA." In *Critical Discourse Analysis* ed. by Ruth Wodak, Vol. 4, 201–214. London: Sage.
- Krzyżanowski, Michał. 2016. "Recontextualisation of neoliberalism and the increasingly conceptual nature of discourse: Challenges for critical discourse studies." *Discourse & Society* 27(3): 308–321.
- Krzyżanowski, Michał. 2018a. "Discursive Shifts in Ethno-Nationalist Politics: On Politicisation and Mediatiation of the 'Refugee Crisis' in Poland." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 16(1). In press.
- Krzyżanowski, Michał. 2018b. "'We Are a Small Country that Has Done Enormously Lot': The 'Refugee Crisis' & the Hybrid Discourse of Politicising Immigration in Sweden." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 16(1). In press.
- Krzyżanowski, Michał, and Ruth Wodak. 2009. *The Politics of Exclusion: Debating Migration in Austria*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.
- Lakoff, Robin T. 2017. "The Hollow Man." *Journal of Language & Politics* 16:4, in press
- Link, Jürgen. 2014. *Versuch über den Normalismus*. Berlin: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Mazzoleni, Gianpietro. 2008. "Populism and the Media." In *Twenty-First Century Populism* ed. by Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, 49–64. New York: Springer.
- Mammone, Andrea, Emmanuel Godin, and Brin Jenkins (eds.). 2012. *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Matouschek, Bernd, Ruth Wodak, and Franz Januschek. 1995. *Notwendige Maßnahmen gegen Fremde? Genese und Formen von rassistischen Diskursen der Differenz*. Wien: Passagen Verlag.
- Mudde, Caas, and Cristobal R. Kaltwasser. 2017. *Populism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What is Populism?* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Papacharissi, Zizi. 2004. "Democracy online: Civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups." *New Media & Society* 6: 259–283.
- Reisigl, Martin, and Ruth. Wodak. 2001. *Discourse and Discrimination*. London: Routledge.
- Ruzza, Carlo. 2009. "Populism and Euroscepticism: Towards Uncivil Society?" *Policy and Society* 28(1): 87–98.
- Rydgren, Jens. 2005. *Från skattemissnöje till etnisk nationalism*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Rydgren, Jens, and Sara van der Meiden. 2016. *Sweden, Now a Country Like All the Others? The Radical Right and the End of Swedish Exceptionalism*. Working Paper 25, Sociology Dept. / Stockholm University, <http://www.jensrydgren.com/WP25.pdf>
- Rydgren, Jens (ed.). 2017. *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Santana, Arthur D. 2014. "Virtuous or vitriolic: The effect of anonymity on civility in online newspaper reader comment boards." *Journalism Practice* 8: 18–33.
- Schiffrin, Deborah. 1982. *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sobieraj, Sarah, and Jeffrey M. Berry. 2011. "From Incivility to Outrage: Political Discourse in Blogs, Talk Radio, and Cable News." *Political Communication* 28(1): 19–41.
- Theocharis, Yiannis, Pablo Barberá, Zoltan Fazekas, Sebastian A. Popa, and Olivier Parnet. 2016. "A Bad Workman Blames His Tweets: The Consequences of Citizens' Uncivil Twitter Use When Interacting With Party Candidates." *Journal of Communication* 66(6): 1007–1031.
- Triandafyllidou, Anna, Michał Krzyżanowski and Ruth Wodak (eds.). 2018. *The Politicisation and Mediatization of the 'Refugee Crisis; in Europe*. (Special Issue of *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 16:1 & 16:2).
- van Dijk, Teun A. 1991. "The interdisciplinary study of news as discourse." In *Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Mass Communication Research* ed. by Klaus Bruhn-Jensen and Nicholas W. Jankowski, 108–120. London: Routledge.
- Wilson, John K. 1995. *The Myth of Political Correctness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Wodak, Ruth. 2003. "Populist Discourses: The Rhetoric of Exclusion in Written Genres." *Document Design* 4(2): 132–148.
- Wodak, Ruth. 2015a. *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. London: Sage.
- Wodak, Ruth. 2015b. "'Normalisierung nach rechts': Politischer Diskurs im Spannungsfeld von Neoliberalismus, Populismus und kritischer Öffentlichkeit." *Linguistik Online* 73 (4). Accessed 4 March 2017. doi: 10.13092/lo.73.2191
- Wodak, Ruth. 2017. "The 'Establishment', the 'Élites', and the 'People': Who's Who? *Journal of Language & Politics* 16:4. In press.
- Wodak, Ruth, and Anton Pelinka (eds.). 2002. *The Haider Phenomenon in Austria*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Wodak, Ruth and John E. Richardson. 2009. "On the Politics of Remembering (or Not)." *Critical Discourse Studies* 6(4): 231–235.
- Van Leeuwen, Theo. 2008. *Discourse as Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yardi, Sarita, and Danah Boyd. 2010. "Dynamic debates: An analysis of group polarization over time on Twitter." *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 30: 316–327.

Authors' addresses

Michał Krzyżanowski
Department of Communication & Media
University of Liverpool
19 Abercromby Square
Liverpool L69 3BX
UK

michal.krzyzanowski@liverpool.ac.uk

Per Ledin
Dept. of Culture & Learning
Södertörn University
Alfred Nobels Allé 15, Flemingsberg
SE-14189 Huddinge
Sweden

per.ledin@sh.se

Biographical notes

Michał Krzyżanowski holds since 2017 a Chair in Communication and Media and serves as Head of Department at the University of Liverpool, UK. He also remains affiliated to Örebro University, Sweden, where he has held a Chair in Media and Communication Studies since 2013. His interdisciplinary research focuses on the discourse of media & politics incl. in the context of right-wing populism and the politics of exclusion and anti-immigration rhetoric. He is, inter alia, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Language and Politics* and co-editor of book series Bloomsbury Advances in Critical Discourse Studies. He is the author and editor of several monographs and anthologies as well as numerous articles in critical discourse research on media, and populist political communication.

Per Ledin is Full Professor and Chair in Swedish at Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden. He has published widely in different areas of discourse studies, including writing development, multimodality and critical linguistics. His recent publications are on the assessment of writing tests, the semiotics of lists and tables, the language of New Public Management and the new and technologized writing. He is part of the editorial board of several journals, including *Visual Communication*, *Designs for Learning* and *Sakprosa*.

Publication history

Date received: 30 March 2017

Date accepted: 11 May 2017

Published online: 7 August 2017